Abused Kids Fight Back
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ISSUES

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Dallas law firm that w o n millions from Catholic Church now sets sites on ISKCON

Windle Turley addressed the the Texas jury solemnly in his closing argument. "This case is about children, their innocence, their vulnerability, their love so generously given. I know it may not come easy for some of you to realize the importance and the consequence of the task you have undertaken. But your decisions will reach far beyond this room and this city. It is true, please believe me, that today you will begin to speak to the world about children."

And speak the jury did, awarding us$120 million to 11 victims of Father Rudy Kos, priest of the Catholic Diocese of Dallas. The church appealed the civil suit, and settled in 1998. It included $23.4 million to the plaintiffs (mostly paid by the Church); a promise to change the handling of priests with known pedophile tendencies--Kos had been reported to Church authorities years before anything was done to stop him; and an abject apology from the Bishop. In 1997, Kos faced additional criminal charges of sexual assault and indecency with a child.

The Kos case was just one of hundreds since 1984 involving the Catholic Church worldwide resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars being paid out to victims of priests. It is part of a global movement in which children are demanding their rights to not be hit or molested, just as adults fought for and won those same rights long ago. Be it a march by grade schoolers on #10 Downing Street in England [Hinduism Today, July/August, 2000], revelations of childhood sexual abuse by parents, teachers or others, or protests over corporal punishment in home or school, children today are standing up and saying, "Enough!" They've gotten priests brought up on criminal charges, including Catholic Father James Porter [at right] who pleaded guilty in 1994 to over 40 counts of sexual abuse that occurred in the 1960s in Massachusetts and was charged with further crimes in other states.

Now more than three dozen former students of Hare Krishna boarding schools want their day in court. Windle Turley filed a us$400 million lawsuit against leaders of the religious community on June 12, 2000, alleging years of sexual, physical and emotional torture. The 44 plaintiffs in the suit

allege child abuse over two decades at boarding schools in the United States and India. The federal lawsuit names the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) as lead defendant, 15 ISKCON-related corporations, 17 members of the group's governing board of top leaders and the estate of the movement's founder, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

Turley called it a case of "the most unthinkable abuse of little children we have seen. It includes rape, sexual abuse, physical torture and emotional terror of children as young as three years of age." He claims ISKCON knowingly allowed suspected sex offenders to work in its boarding schools.

A Hare Krishna spokesman in Washington, Anuttama, said in response to the suit that Krishna leaders have

acknowledged abuse in the boarding schools and worked to provide counseling and financial support to victims. "It's disappointing that it had to go to a court situation,'' he said. "We will try to do anything we can to address their needs.''

ISKCON's Child Protection Task Force, formed in 1998--complaints first surfaced in 1975--has compiled the names of 200 people who allegedly inflicted abuse in the 1970s and 1980s, said director Dhira Govinda. The office has finished investigating more than 60 cases, he said. "There is no doubt many children did suffer...while under the care of the organization," Govinda said. He said Krishna leaders have pledged $250,000 a year to investigate past child abuse and to aid survivors.

Turley said the abuse started in 1972 at ISKCON's first school in Dallas, and continued in six other US schools and two in India. He said he believes more than half of the children in the schools were victimized. "We believe the facts as they are developed will reveal more than 1,000 child victims, many of whom have already taken their own lives or are today emotionally and socially dysfunctional,'' said Turley.

In a statement faxed to The Associated Press, Vinod Patel, president of the Dallas Krishna Temple, said the temple is a "different corporation with different by-laws, management and staff from the organization that ran the school during the 1970s.'' "Not a single person involved with this temple since 1980 had anything to do with the Krishna boarding school

named in the lawsuit,'' he said. There are four defendants listed with the same address as the Dallas Krishna Temple: Damodar Title Holding Corporation of Dallas, ISKCON Krishnafest USA, Inc., Texas Krishnas and Thomas Hertzog (aka Tamal Krishna Goswami).

The lawsuit claims that children were forced to sleep in unheated rooms and walk great distances in bitter cold without coats or shoes, were deprived of medical care for malaria, hepatitis and broken bones; scrubbed with steel wool until their skin bled, and moved about without their parents' consent. Plaintiff Greg Luczyk, 30, said he was beaten four times a day with a two-by-four board while in a Krishna school in India in the 1980s. He said his mother sent him return plane tickets, but teachers would tear up the

tickets at school assemblies. "Parents tried to get us out, but the molesters had tight control,'' said Luczyk.

The Hare Krishna spiritual community flowered in the 1960s when A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada came to the US. Soon, thousands of Westerners were wearing saris and pajama-like dhotis, living in Hare Krishna temple compounds, and chanting the mantra they believed would lead to a greater awareness of God, known as Krishna. Prabhupada disavowed any connection of his movement to Hinduism, stating in his book, Science of Self Realization, "There is a misconception that the Krishna consciousness movement represents the Hindu religion. Sometimes Indians both inside and outside of India think that we are preaching the Hindu religion, but

actually we are not.... The Krishna consciousness movement has nothing to do with the Hindu religion." [see Hinduism Today, October, 1998.] Prabhupada's policy is reflected in the fact that of 17 defendants in the case, all major leaders of ISKCON, only one, Gopal Khanna, has a legal Hindu name. The others are Charles Bacis, William Berke, Robert Corens, Faramarz Attar, William Ehrlichman, John Favors, Steven Goreyno, Michael Grant, Keith Ham, Theodore Harris, Thomas Hertzog, Jeffrey Hickey, Hans Kary, William Ogle, Howard Resnick and Bruce Sharf.

Prabhupada said children should be sent to boarding schools at age five so they could learn to be pure devotees. Subsequent leaders saw the advantage of freeing parents to sell devotional books

and do other jobs. By the end of the 1970s, eleven schools, known as gurukulas, or houses of the guru, were operating in North America with several more around the world. In 1998, ISKCON Communications Journal published a study by sociologist E. Burke Rochford commissioned by ISKCON (www.iskcon.com/ICJ/ 6_1/6_1rochford.htm). Rochford names the Dallas, Seattle and India schools as experiencing "relatively high levels of child abuse," with "as many as 75% of the boys enrolled at the Vrindaban, India, gurukula having been sexually molested during the late 1970s and early 1980s."

The suit has been anticipated for years as Turley's firm located abused children and tried to

identify responsible parties in the labyrinthine ISKCON worldwide network of corporations. Those sued include past and present members of the international Governing Board Commission (GBC), the executors of Prabhupada's will, other individuals and corporations. The full suit can be found at www.wturley.com/PDF/complaint0606.pdf. Unless a group defense is organized, each defendant will be faced with hiring his own lawyer. Both personal assets and temples could be lost if the judgment--not expected for years--is unfavorable. The Dallas firm has requested others who suffered abuse to come

forward

With reports from the Associated Press

Windle Turley: 6440 North Central Expressway, Dallas, Texas 75206 USA. www.wturley.com. ISKCON response: www.iskcon.com/release.htm. Related documents at: www.islandnet.com/krsna/lawsuit/. accounts of Abuse in

ISKCON at chakra.org/mainpages/childabuse/. accounts of Abuse in the Catholic Church at: www.thelinkup.com/.