

PRESS RELEASE

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Member of Parliament Päivi Räsänen

The Court will weigh the state of freedom of speech and religion in Finland

I am relieved that this long waited and heavy day is now over. I hope that the court will acquit both me and Juhana Pohjala from all the charges and declare us not guilty. Continuation of the trial is expected on February 14th. After that, the decision of the court comes approximately in one month. I wait for it with a calm and hopeful mind.

The decision of the court has consequences not only to Christians' freedom to express their conviction, but to everyone else's also. In the court, I appealed to the Constitution of Finland and to international conventions that guarantee freedom of speech and religion. I will not back off from my conviction based on the Bible. The case is extremely important for freedom of speech and religion.

In all the charges, I deny any wrongdoing. My writings and statements under investigation are linked to the Bible's teachings on marriage, living as a man and a woman, as well as the Apostle Paul's teaching on homosexual acts. The teachings concerning marriage and sexuality in the Bible arise from love to one's neighbor, not from hate towards a group of people.

The prosecution makes a number of false, inaccurate, even untrue allegations about my views. I categorically reject the Prosecutor's characterization of my beliefs. I stress that I have repeatedly emphasized that all human beings are created in the image of God and have equal dignity and human rights. In the passage to which the prosecutor has referred, reference was made to the biblical account of creation. Referring to it, I stated: "In the beginning, God created a man and a woman and intended marriage to be between the two. I regard homosexuals as fully equal humans and, in addition, equally worthy human beings created in the image of God."

The points of view for which I am accused do not deviate from so-called classical Christianity, nor does my view on marriage deviate from the official policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Since Christianity is the dominant state religion in Finland, it is reasonable to assume that views such as these are widely disseminated in religious communities in Finland – in social media as well as in private events. Likewise, the prosecution's interpretation would have a material impact on the narrowing of the scope of religious freedom in Finland – and is therefore highly damaging from the perspective of fundamental rights.

The possible sentence for the crime of ethnic agitation would be up to two years imprisonment or a fine. But an even more serious problem would be the resulting censorship: an order to remove social media updates or a ban on posting. The sentence would open the floodgates to a ban on similar publications and the threat of modern book burnings. It is my honor to defend freedom of speech and religion.

It is likely that the charges will be taken to higher courts, even to the European Court of Human Rights. I am ready to defend freedom of speech and religion in all necessary courts.

According to my knowledge, the court has to for the first time take a stand on whether it is legal or not to cite the Bible. The judges have to weigh the relations between the foundational rights and the criminal law and the interrelationship between different foundational laws.

I have carefully gone through all my writings and statement, that are now being scrutinized, and I stand behind these thoughts that derive from the classical Christianity. I feel it is my honor to defend freedom of speech and religion. I defend the right to confess the Christian faith and its teaching on the human being.

The main hearing of the charges brought against me by the Prosecutor General (R 21/3567) took place today on 24 January 2022 at 9.30 am at the Helsinki District Court.

The process started more than two years ago, in June 2019, when I posted a tweet addressing a question to the leadership of my church that had signed up to support Pride. The main content of my post was a screenshot of verses 24-27 from the book of Romans chapter 1 from the New Testament. The aim of my criticism was the leadership of my own church, not any minority. According to the Church Act, approved by our Parliament, "all doctrine must be examined and evaluated according to God's Holy Word".

Following a preliminary investigation launched because of a citizen's complaint, a total of five criminal complaints were filed. On 22 April 2021, the Prosecutor General brought three separate charges against me for the tweet, a pamphlet I had written in 2004, "Male and female He created them" and a humorous radio interview with Ruben Stiller, "What would Jesus think about homosexuals?".

The police did not consider any crime to have been committed in these two latter cases, but the Prosecutor General nevertheless ordered preliminary investigations to be carried out. Bishop Juhana Pohjola, the Dean of Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland, was also charged with being responsible for publishing and making available the pamphlet.

I want to warmly thank those thousands of people that have supported me during this personally trying process.

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