

## Focus on Religious Freedom

### Christian Values on Trial in Finland Will Affect Religious Freedom in Europe and the World

"Part of the scary thing about what's happening in Finland is that it could happen anywhere else," said human rights lawyer Paul Coleman. <sup>(1)</sup> Coleman cautioned that the Finnish cases are the "canary in the coalmine" for freedom of speech and freedom of religion in the Western world.

If the court finds them guilty, two Christians in Finland face fines or up to two years in prison and thus would set the precedent of making quoting the Bible a criminal offense in Western countries. Dr. Paivi Rasanen, member of Parliament (2011-2015), physician and mother of five and Bishop Juhana Pohjola of the Lutheran Mission Diocese in Finland, were charged with incitement against a minority group for publishing a pamphlet, "Male and Female He Created Them," that states the theological and scientific truth that men and women are different. Bishop Pohjola warned that "the Gospel of Christ is at stake" as Western governments liken the Bible's teachings about marriage and sexuality to "hate speech." <sup>(2)</sup>

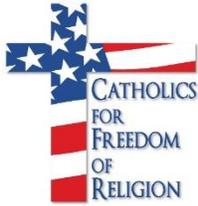
"The Prosecutors main idea seems to be that the Bible should not be taught in its own right in public, and that freedom of religion does not allow permission to speak out loud if what is said is considered to discriminate against a minority group," said Bishop Pohjola. "In this view, biblical teachings on marriage, sexuality, sin, and mercy could not be proclaimed publicly. This is an attack on religious freedom." <sup>(3)</sup>

"Although (the Prosecutor) stated this was not about the Bible or about freedom of religion or opinions, she went quite deeply into theological issues," said Bishop Pohjola. <sup>(4)</sup> Throughout her argumentation and questioning, the Prosecutor returned repeatedly to discussions of the nature of scripture, the defendant's interpretation of texts, and the Christian understanding of sin.

The defendants rejected all charges against them as false, arguing that the pamphlet in question and Christian teaching does not consider (minority groups) different before God. "All (people) are of equal worth, and all are under sin, and all are under grace," explained Bishop Pohjola. "We all have the same position before God ...(all) are welcome in our churches, to live in contact with Christ, and to find their identity - just as each of us should find our identity - as the creation of God, redeemed by Jesus Christ." <sup>(5)</sup>

"It is incredible this trial is happening in a modern European country and not in a religious theocracy," said Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) International. <sup>(6)</sup> The court will announce its verdict on March 30, 2022.  
(thefederalist.com, 1/24/22(1); nregister.com, 2/16/22(2)(6); lic-online.org, 2/14/22(3)(4)(5);  
christianpost.com, 11/11/21; citizengo.org, 2/8/22)

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