

Dr. Paivi Rasanen, Making the Case for Christians in the Public Square

Dr. Rasanen is scheduled to speak from 10:30-11:15 a.m. (presentation) and 2:30-2:50 p.m. (Q & A) on Saturday, June 25 at Concordia University Chicago.

(summarize her story and to state why Christians need to be engaged in the public square.)

Ladies and gentlemen, dear Christian brothers and sisters,

It is a great pleasure to be here with you today. I feel very encouraged by all the encounters and discussions I have had here with you.

"Do you love Jesus?" A five-year-old girl asked this question, on her way home from Sunday school, stopping a prison director on his bike. She continued that you cannot get to heaven if you do not believe in Jesus. The confused man contacted the girl's mother and asked her to consider taking the girl out of the Sunday school, so that she would not totally lose her mind. The mother was not startled but led the Sunday school continue. My own mother has told me this story from my childhood. We lived near a prison because my father worked there. I do not remember my harassment, but I remember all the impressive moments at the Sunday school. In the environment of the prison the concepts of sin, guilt, judgment and grace in Jesus' sacrifice were concrete and as a little girl I understood that I have the same potential to evil as the prisoners. I thought that some day I could be in jail as well. And I remember having enormous joy when praying that Jesus would forgive me my sins and keep me as his own. Jesus heard my prayer and has been faithful during these decades.

May I give a little introduction of my life. I lived my childhood during the Cold War period at a small village around the prison, just 5 miles from the Soviet Union. The border between the two countries was so hard that I never saw a person from the Soviet Union in my childhood. I remember how we went to fishing with my father onto a lake which was in half on the side of the Soviet Union.

I studied medicine at the University of Helsinki and worked as a medical doctor until 1995 when I was elected to the Parliament of Finland. During my university years, I led the missionary work among the university students, and we went every Thursday evening from door to door talking about Jesus to other students. As a physician, the ethical questions I came across, especially related to abortions, aroused my interest in politics. Defending the life of unborn children has been my top priority as an MP. It was the reason I went to politics.

I have been a Member of the Finnish Parliament for 27 years. I am the chair of the Christian Democratic Parliamentary Group. From 2004 to 2015, I was the chair of the Finnish Christian Democrats. From 2011 to 2015, I was the Minister of the Interior of Finland, and responsible also for church affairs. I am also a member of City Council and Church council.

My husband is also here in Chicago with me, and from here we will fly to Washington to attend the international religious freedom summit. He is theologian doctor and the Principal of the Finnish Lutheran Mission Bible College. We have five grown-up children and 10

grandchildren. I am extremely grateful for the steadfast support of my dear husband and family during these years.

For all my long career as an MP, I have been open and honest about my Christian faith, my conviction has not changed, but the last couple of years have been surprising. In 2021, the Prosecutor General of Finland brought three separate charges against me, and I have been in the Helsinki District court twice this year and just now I am waiting for the trial in the court of Appeal in the autumn or next year. I am accused of agitation against a minority.

The starting point of this process was a tweet that I published in June 2019. In the tweet, I questioned the Evangelical Lutheran Church's support to the Helsinki LGBT Pride 2019 event and accompanied my post with a photo of a Bible passage, from the Book of Romans, verses 1:24-27, where apostle Paul teaches about the same sex relationships. 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".

I had a deep concern about the church teaching against its own confession, and that this will undermine people's trust on God's word and lead especially young Christians astray. The question would then not be any more only about marriage, but also of salvation. A citizen made a criminal complaint against me, and the police started a criminal investigation about the tweet. When the investigation came into public, there became more criminal complaints. The second charge was about an old pamphlet I had written already in 2004 "Male and female He created them - Homosexual relationships challenge the Christian concept of humanity". It takes a stand on sexuality and marriage from a Christian perspective. Also, Bishop Pohjola was prosecuted because he is responsible for publishing the pamphlet. Earlier, the police released a decision that my pamphlet gave no cause for criminal investigation and noted: "If any of the viewpoints contained in the Bible would be considered sufficient to fulfil the criteria for the crime, then the distribution of the Bible or rendering it available would be considered a crime and thus punishable." The third charge was about my views presented in one humorous radio interview titled with: "What would Jesus think about homosexuality".

In these two latter cases, the Prosecutor General ordered the investigation against the police 's recommendation. The filing of the charges was preceded by 1,5 years of police investigation and several long police interrogations, altogether 13 hours. The situation felt absurd, even unreal. Just few years ago I was in charge of the police as a minister of interior and then I was sitting in the police station interrogated, having the Bible on the table. Surprisingly many questions were about the Bible and its interpretation. I was asked, what is the message of the book of Romans and its first chapter. What do I mean with the words "sin" and "shame"? In social media there was a joke that Päivi Räsänen is once again going to have a Bible study at the police station. The police asked if I agree to delete within two weeks my writings. I answered no, and that I stand behind these teachings of the Bible, whatever the consequences are. I will not apologize what apostle Paul has stated.

In the trial last January the prosecutor at first assured that the trial would not be an inquisition around the Bible, but then she surprisingly targeted the core doctrine of Christianity. She claimed that my views are known as "fundamentalist" doctrine, which she defined and summarized as "love the sinner, hate the sin". This doctrine she regarded as insulting and defaming, because according to her, you cannot make a distinction between

the person's identity and his or her action. If you condemn the act, you also condemn the human being and regard him or her as inferior.

This is an egregious statement. It goes against the Christian view of man and common sense. The prosecutor tries to deny the core message of the Bible: the teaching of law and gospel. God has created all human beings as His own image and we all have equal value, but we all are also sinners. No-one's human dignity decreases because of sin. Sin is a theological concept that describes the relationship between God and man and God is the one who defines what sin is.

God so loved all the people, that He gave His only Son to die on the cross to suffer the punishment that belonged to us because of our sins.

The thought that you could not make a distinction between the person's deeds and his or her identity or human dignity is unfamiliar to life and to the rule of law. I answered in the court that as I was raising my five children, I often had to blame some of them for bad behavior, but it never diminished my love or respect to any of them. And even the most notorious criminals do not lose their human rights or human dignity if they get a punishment for their deeds. Especially in court this principle should be very clear.

In court, I appealed to the Constitution of Finland and to international conventions that guarantee the freedom of speech and religion. 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.

Throughout this whole process, what has been most distressing is the prosecution's false testimony about my statements.

For example, according to the prosecutor, my view is that "homosexuals are not created by God as heterosexuals are." Furthermore, the prosecutor claims I regard homosexuals as inferior human beings. Nowhere have I said such a thing. I have repeatedly emphasized that all human beings are created in the image of God and have equal dignity and human rights.

It would be easier to defend my own opinions than to defend myself against interpretations that do not correspond to the truth, interpretations that are even contrary to my convictions. I have got comfort from Jesus' words, from Matthew 5:11: "Blessed are you when people falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."

On 30th March, the Helsinki District Court acquitted me of all the three charges. The ruling of the court was unanimous. In its ruling, the Helsinki District Court stated, with regard to several allegations "placed" into my mouth by the prosecution, that no such statements were to be found in the texts in the indictment.

This court process and the decision were historical with regard to freedom of speech and religion. The court had to for the first time to take a stand on whether it is legal or not to cite the Bible and to agree with it.

I was relieved, happy and grateful to God and to all the people and organizations that have supported me and prayed for me. The legal advice of the ADF international has been extremely valuable during this process. I have received much support also from several Members of the US Congress, who have in the spirit of Christian solidarity, offered me encouragement and prayers during this trying time. In their wonderfully written letter to me, they stated that they are aware that this process is not merely legal, but spiritual.

The ruling was what I expected – not for a second did I believe that I had committed anything illegal in my writings and statements. I had hoped that the prosecutors would have settled for this ruling, but the prosecutors very quickly announced that they will appeal to the Court of Appeal. On the very last day it was possible within the legal time frame, I was informed that the prosecutors have sent the official appeal to the court.

In its 26-page appeal, the Prosecution makes the claim that my statements must be interpreted “objectively”, that is, contrary to what I actually said. My part in this pretrial and judicial process has been going on for three years and will now continue, possibly for many more years.

The Helsinki Court of Appeals has granted the prosecutors permission to proceed in this “Bible trials” case, as media has called it in Finland. For me, the victory we achieved in the District Court would have been adequate, but the acquittals of the higher courts have a broader significance. The extension of the trial will allow the establishment of legal precedent on freedom of expression and religion from even a higher court. This would then serve as a legal guide regarding any similar charges in the future. I firmly hope no one else will be subject to similar accusations in the years to come.

The prosecution's appeal openly attacks the core teachings of the Christian faith, considering them offensive in and of themselves. The prosecution labels Christian teaching on sin as degrading and considers this teaching even more dangerous within religious communities than in the secular sphere of life. The prosecutor justifies this by saying in fact the truth: “Unworthiness before God is a greater shame than unworthiness before fellow humans.” But the prosecution does not accept the biblical view of man that the doctrine of sin does not diminish the dignity of man. Every human being is equally valuable, but also sinful and in need of Jesus' grace. The prosecutor is on a crusade against the classical teachings of the Christian faith, but at the same time this opens up an opportunity to bring the message of the Gospel into the courtroom. The solution to sin is not to deny its reality but the reception of grace on account of what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross.

I trust that the entire process is in God's hands and that this all has a purpose. I am also glad that the discussion about the Bible is still going on. And I pray, that this process would still open many chances to testify about Jesus and the message of the gospel in public. There were several live broadcasts from the courthouse and press conferences to Finnish homes and I had many chances to tell, what is the solution to the problem of sin in the word of God. I have been so glad about the thousands of messages I have received from Finland and abroad, in which people have told how God has through this case encouraged them to pray and trust God's word. Last summer over one thousand people gathered in front of our Parliament building and concretely raised up in their hands their Bibles to collectively show strong support for the freedom of God's Word. I am also happy for those – also gay people, who have told that they have found Jesus in their life through this.

For my part, I am prepared to defend freedom of expression and religion at all necessary levels of justice, even, if necessary, before the European Court of Human Rights.

The high international interest in this case rises from the concern that if this kind of questioning of free speech is possible in a country like Finland, which has a long roots in Christian culture and values and a good reputation regarding free speech internationally, the same is possible anywhere.

My beautiful country just few weeks ago ranked again as the happiest country in the world in the latest World Happiness Report, an annual survey organized by the United Nations. Finland scores very well on healthy life expectancy, clean nature, GDP per capita, social support in times of trouble, low corruption and high social trust, excellent work-life balance and free education and health care.

In the latest Rule of Law Index Finland ranked 3rd. It is alarming that in this country I have been criminally charged for voicing my deeply held beliefs that are based on classical Christianity.

Dear friends,

We are living at a time when the effect of Christian culture to the society is narrowing. The breaking of the Christian worldview is visible whether we think of the protection of life at the very beginning or at the end of life or defending marriage as a union between man and wife. The battle between values is largely fought with language, by capturing the concepts like love, freedom, equality and even rainbow into new interpretations. The attempt to break down the gender system based on two different genders hurts especially the children.

Even the churches have adopted a very liberal stance towards Christianity and uncritically endorsed LGBT activism. It is a pity that the majority Church in Finland is so silent about these issues that have so deeply to do with human sexuality and how God has created the world.

The inner experience of man has become the indicator for reality. The heart's voice would function as the indicator of right and wrong if we forgot one key fact of mankind – the Fall. We are valuable created in the image of God, but also evil and sinful. That is the biggest marketing problem of the Christian view of man.

I want to share with you a very peculiar experience of a panel discussion on prostitution many years ago. The discussion was led by a famous media-persona and the other panelists were supporters of legal prostitution. Many media representatives were present. The star of the panel was supposed to be woman of whom a book had just been written with the title "Prostitution is my calling." I understood that I was going to a tough situation and asked my friends to pray for me. The prayers were answered in a surprising way. When I entered the pub where the panel was taking place, there was confusion.

The professional in the field did not get vacation from prison on time, and she was quickly filled in by her colleague, Iiris. This lady astounded the audience and the panelists.

She did not defend the prostitutes' right to their profession, but instead told us she had quit because of finding Jesus. She told us she had from the beginning understood it as violating the will of God but said that "I could not come out of prostitution with the Law of Moses, but by the blood of Jesus."

Tears in her eyes, she summarized her message: "The only right place for sex is marriage between a man and a woman, where one goes as a virgin and where one stays faithful until death." She even added that if there was anyone who knows to have broken God's commandment, the person can show up after the event, so she can pray with Päivi for the person and the person can have sins forgiven by Jesus.

Silence came and the chairman of the panel stated that nothing else can be added to this except "amen". Spoken by Iiris, the ethics of marriage from a Christian perspective was

hundred times more convincing than coming from my mouth. She revealed the fact that in the end, each person's conscience bears witness to the Christian view of man. When we break against God's good commandments, we know deep down in our hearts the wrongfulness of our actions. But it is only because of the grace of the Cross that we have courage to face and confess our sinfulness. This message of the crucified and risen Jesus is the power that has carried Christianity through centuries, through hardships and persecutions.

I want to briefly tell you about a case that happened in 2013, when I was Finland's Interior Minister and Christian Democratic Party leader. I spoke at a Lutheran Church event argued that "certainly, all of us have come across situations in life, where we have had to consider whether we have the courage to act contrary to general public opinions or norms and sometimes even the law, if these contradict the Word of God. In the Acts, it is described how the authorities refused to allow the apostles to preach about Jesus. Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29) They continued their work despite prohibitions."

Over 40 complaints about my speech were made to the Parliamentary Ombudsman and to the Chancellor of Justice. The Parliamentary Ombudsman ruled, however, that my comments do not warrant investigation but are a matter of my religious freedom. In a democratic country, we must have the possibility to disagree about controversial issues. Otherwise, the development is towards a totalitarian system.

The rise of "cancel culture", the idea of publicly defaming and thrusting a person who holds certain beliefs out of social media or professional circles, is a threat to any free society that claims to be tolerant and equal.

Nowadays it is politically incorrect to say anything negative about for example gender ideology. If someone would have asked how many genders there exist at the time when I started my career as an MP, people would have considered the questioner quite stupid.

This process with all the investigations, interrogations and trials has in practice narrowed freedom of religion and free speech by creating self-censorship. Many young people have told me that they are afraid they are labelled as a Bible-believing Christian, and that it will hinder their career and social acceptance.

If we do not now use our right to speak freely, the space to use our rights will eventually get even smaller. We are especially called to stand firm in those parts of the Scriptures which challenge the current ethos and thinking. Christians should encourage their countries to adhere to their national and international commitments to protect the freedom of speech and be courageous in speaking according to their faith in the public.

In Romans 12:2 Apostle Paul exhorts: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." It is good to examine and be aware of which values at any given time are contrary to the Word of God, because too easily we just go with the flow. The Christian church has at all times been forced to live contrary to the spirit of the time in one way or another.

I could sense the unease of the police when they asked me several times if, based on the Act on the Openness of Government Activities, I wanted to keep in secret all those points that showed by religious conviction in the preliminary investigation report. Well, no, I did not want that. The majority of the report would then have had to be concealed. This is very telling of the incoherence of the whole situation. At the same we are trying to protect

religious conviction because it's considered a private matter, we are severely challenging this right with judicial consequences.

The Prosecutor claimed in court that Räsänen can believe certain things in her own mind, but she cannot express her faith in this way. I encountered this same kind of limited understanding of religious freedom when I was the minister responsible for church affairs and had a discussion with the Chinese minister in charge of religious matters. He said that in China you can believe in your own mind whatever, but it is necessary to restrict the freedom to express your faith if it increases tensions in the society.

In public, the prosecutor general has stated that "although Räsänen was convicted, it does not mean that the Bibles should be removed from the libraries. You can refer to the Bible, Koran or Mein Kampf, because it is not forbidden to discuss about historical texts. But what is essential is that do you agree with it."

The possible sentence for the crime of ethnic agitation would have been up to two years imprisonment or a fine. In the Finnish law it belongs to a serious category of war crimes and crimes against humanity. But an even more dangerous problem would be the resulting censorship: an order to remove social media updates or a ban on posting. That sentence would open the floodgates to a ban on similar publications and the threat of modern book burnings.

Ultimately, the question here is about the core of Christian faith; how a person gets saved into unity with God and into everlasting life through the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus.

It says in the book of Proverbs: "Buy the truth, and do not sell it!". This tells us that truth usually comes with a price. One often has to pay for following truth, confessing truth and speaking it. Instead, however, people are tempted to sell the truth, to acquire advantage for oneself by yielding to popular, false ideas and by distorting the truth. Yet the Bible exhorts: "Buy the truth, and do not sell it!"

Warning the Thessalonians about difficult times and deceivers, Apostle Paul gave them an exhortation in the same chapter (2 Thess. 2:15.): "So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter." Our time challenges us to commit to the Word of God.

A conviction based on the Christian faith is more than a superficial opinion. The early Christians did not renounce their faith in lions' caves, why should we then renounce our faith in the challenges of this time. I feel privileged to have this calling and honor to defend the foundational rights and everlasting, biblical values. I want to encourage you all to use your foundational rights and be open about your faith.

I want to express my deep gratitude for all the wonderful support and prayers I have received from so many people from the United States. I have very concretely felt the power of prayer on behalf of me and Finland during this time. As I start to prepare for the proceedings at the Court of Appeal with my legal team, I am thankful for all the people who stand with me and keep this case in prayer.

Queen Esther was encouraged to speak up and act on behalf of God's people, the Jews, with the question: "And who knows, you may have been chosen to your royal position for just such a time as this.". The same question can be asked from us today. We have not ourselves chosen the time in which we live. But exactly for such a time as this you were born to love your neighbors, to act when seeing injustice, and to hold up the Gospel.

The late President Kyösti Kallio called our whole nation to pray in Christmas 1939, during a difficult war time in the history of Finland when Soviet Union attacked violently Finland. He stated: "Our ancestors have over the centuries, in tribulations, persecutions and in the days of peace, drawn life, strength and comfort from the Bible. At the present time our nation needs the creative power of the Word of God. Let us adopt with a humble faith the blessings of it." Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

This same challenge, dear friends, is topical to us even today. I wish you all courage and wisdom to uphold the unchangeable message of Jesus Christ, who influences and changes the lives of individual persons, communities, and whole nations. Thank you so much for your attention and God bless you all!