

## Top U.S. Intellectuals, Jurists Call for Commission on Int'l Religious Freedom to Intervene for Finland's MP Räsänen

Ten among the top U.S. intellectuals and jurists penned an [open letter](#) in late May to the [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom](#) (USCIRF), calling for its intervention in support of Finland's MP and former interior minister Päivi Räsänen, M.D., who will have to stand trial for quoting the Bible. Rev. Dr. Juhana Pohjola of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland will also have to stand trial for a booklet on the sinfulness of homosexual activity according to the Bible, a booklet authored by the former interior minister and published by the Luther Foundation.

The ten petitioners, who include personalities of the caliber of [Mary Ann Glendon](#) of Harvard and [Robert P. George](#) of Princeton, point out that "these prosecutions constitute serious human rights abuses" and "straightforward acts of oppression." Therefore, the signatories go on, "the United States must now respond to the abuses in Finland as it has recently responded to other violations of religious liberty in non-western nations."

Dr. Räsänen started to be investigated more than a year ago, as [reported](#) by Catholic News Agency, for a social media post that included a quotation from the Bible, until the Prosecutor General decided to charge her with incitement against a minority group, arguing that her statements were "likely to cause intolerance, contempt, and hatred towards homosexuals."

As a matter of fact, Räsänen, former president of the Christian Democratic Party from 2004 to 2015 and minister of the interior from 2011 to 2015, is risking a two-year prison sentence for having publicly taken a stand against homosexual unions, which she considers sinful. Moreover, she could face additional convictions if found guilty of two other alleged offenses: the content of a pamphlet she authored in 2004 and her comments in a 2018 television program.

### Origins of the Controversy

As an active member of the Finnish Lutheran Church, she questioned her church's sponsorship of an LGBT pride event on June 17, 2019, when she [asked in a Twitter post](#) how such sponsorship was compatible with the Bible, linking to a photograph of a Biblical passage, Romans 1:24-27, on Instagram and also posting the text and image on Facebook.

[#kirkko](#) on ilmoittanut olevansa [#seta](#) n [#Pride2019](#) virallinen partneri. Miten kirkon oppiperusta, [#raamattu](#) sopii yhteen sen kanssa, että häpeä ja synti nostetaan ylpeyden aiheeksi? [pic.twitter.com/cnjAQCrOc2](https://pic.twitter.com/cnjAQCrOc2)

— Päivi Räsänen (@PaiviRasanen) [June 17, 2019](#)

“I will defend my right to confess my faith, so that no one else would be deprived of their right to freedom of religion and speech,” an embattled Räsänen commented. “I will not back down from my views. I will not be intimidated into hiding my faith. The more Christians keep silent on controversial themes, the narrower the space for freedom of speech gets.”

She amply elaborated on her ordeal in an interview granted to Studio Krypta and conducted by the young pastor Eero Pihlava of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in August last year (available in Finnish [here](#)). This interview took place just after her last interrogation at a police station in Helsinki, she pointed out, despite the fact that in her previous interrogations it was ascertained by the police that no crime had been committed. Nevertheless, the judicial authority still decided to proceed with further investigations.

The first interrogation was conducted at the end of June 2019, when on the occasion of the LGBT pride in Finland's capital she quoted St. Paul's Letter to the Romans on Twitter. “I especially turned to the leadership of the (Lutheran) Church,” who were supporting the initiative. “How can you be in favor of something that is considered sin or shame in the Bible?” she observed.

The whole process began with this polite question, which does not entail any feeling of hatred or incitement to violence.

But the most incomprehensible thing, she continued, is that “despite being unjustly accused of having said things that I have never said in the TV debates in which I participated, the judicial authority still decided to proceed against me.”

Equally unreal and absurd, she stressed, is the fact that this is happening in Finland, that she has been obliged to stay for hours at the police station to answer questions about issues that are basic tenets of Christianity such as sin, man's relationship with God, and that today it is considered a virtual (if not actual) crime simply to quote the Bible regarding the unnatural and sinful nature of homosexual practices. As Dr. Räsänen stated, “it is a shame, and not a pride,” according to Biblical teaching, contrary to what the term ‘gay pride’ implies.

There is no longer an awareness of what creation, sin, etc. mean, so much so that today speaking of sin would be perceived as an offense to the dignity of the person. She maintains that she has always reiterated during interrogations and also during TV debates that we are all sinners before God, without discriminating against one group of people over another by

judging them worse.

Unfortunately, today we live in times when understanding these concepts is increasingly difficult, she complains, because Finland, like so many other formerly Christian countries, is swept up by the impetuous wind of gender ideology, and this makes it offensive for people to be judged negatively on the basis of their sexual identity, whatever that is.

But she wonders why all this is happening in Finland. Even the international jurists who are legally assisting persecuted Christians consider it a very strange case, because a similar case could occur in countries like Pakistan. If this situation leads to some kind of condemnation, it would be a very disturbing precedent, opening a sort of Pandora's box and setting the stage for similar proceedings in other countries. It should not be forgotten that behind these organizations there is a powerful network of support that promotes LGBT issues.

The more we examine ourselves in the light of God's word and His holy commandments, Räsänen has observed, the more we realize how sinful we are and therefore we feel offended. She repeated to the police several times that her purpose was to promote the message of the Gospel, precisely because we are all sinners in need of the mercy and forgiveness of Christ, Who died on the Cross to redeem us all. She fervently hopes that people of these or other groups who have broken the sixth or other commandments will discover the Gospel message.

## **On a Mission to Defend Biblical Morality**

Asked how she is enduring and coping, especially in light of the enormous pressure resulting from massive negative publicity, she is not particularly worried. This situation has not been sought by her and she sees it as a task that has been entrusted to her. It is an important task to defend religious freedom in times when it is increasingly threatened. The most dangerous thing is to remain silent. The more we keep quiet about these difficult Bible topics, she argues, the narrower the space will become for all of us. That is why it is important to speak, even if it can be painful and conflicts arise.

Dr. Räsänen is convinced that this is now her mission, and she does not hide the fact that she is proud of what has been done so far, in her triple capacity as a long-time parliamentarian, medical doctor, and former minister of the interior. She says she is grateful to have served and continues to serve her country with the utmost dedication and determination. As a civil servant, she recalls, she was able to put to good use all her experience as a veteran parliamentarian, dealing at full speed with the reorganization of the bureaucracy, police and borders, immigration and rescue structures, as well as issues

concerning the (Lutheran state) church, which were part of her responsibilities. As interior minister, she was among the keynote speakers at the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Finland, which took place in Rome on June 16, 2012 in the splendid setting of *Villa Lante al Gianicolo*, which, in addition to being the seat of the *Institutum Romanum Finlandiae*, houses the Finnish Embassy to the Vatican.

"I don't know if it is pride, but the thing I care most from the beginning," she revealed, "is to burn with combative zeal for Christian values, values that are both for individual and society, as a solid and robust foundation for our life. These foundations are what make it possible to withstand storms. And that's what I want to commit myself for."

It is for this reason that she wants to continue this activity. From the very beginning, when she was working as a doctor, the question of abortion was of primary importance for her—an issue that is very close to her heart because, unfortunately, there is also a law in Finland that allows for abortion. It is a very grave crime in the eyes of God, she complains, because every year nearly ten thousand children are killed, mainly for social reasons, despite Finland being a materially prosperous nation and one suffering from a very low birth rate (approx. 1.37 children per woman, according to [official 2020 statistics](#)).

And abortion is precisely the theme of one of the three publications she has written, along with euthanasia and human sexuality, all burning topics of bioethics. These are clear, concise essays that provide guidelines from a medical and religious point of view, based on the same arguments also present in the Bible, which help Christians, even non-experts, to engage in a debate.

## Christians Must Speak Out

According to her, too many Christians remain silent in the face of increasingly vociferous activists who defend abortion as a humanitarian and women's right—a voice that intimidates those who think differently and would like to defend the child's right to life, she stresses, because this is also a human right.

In one of her interrogations, she was also challenged for the essay on sexual morality written in 2004. "If they had banned this pamphlet with biblical references, then they should have banned the Bible itself as well," noted the parliamentarian.

But the most interesting aspect, she revealed, was her initiative to distribute a copy of these studies to all parliamentarians. A full-fledged lobbying action, then, but with the difference (at least according to the experience of the author of this piece) that generally in this type of

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ideological action, the legislators limit themselves to distributing works written by others, while in this case she did everything personally.

And she felt particularly satisfied when, after distributing the booklet on euthanasia, some parliamentarians came to tell her that they had changed their mind after reading it, just at the time when a popular initiative was pressing for a euthanasia bill to be voted and approved by parliament.

Unlike same-sex "marriage," which at the time was also approved on a popular initiative, this time her booklet hit the target, in the sense that, contrary to all expectations and opinion polls which took its approval for granted, the euthanasia bill it did not pass. "It was a small miracle, so our doctors won't be forced to kill patients."