

How Did the Church Respond to a Transgender Winning the Song Contest?

A spokesman for the Russian Orthodox Church strongly denounced the Eurovision Song Contest's selection of a drag queen as its winner, saying it was a sign of the world's moral decline and part of an effort to "reinforce new cultural norms."

Conchita Wurst, the stage name of a former band singer from Austria named Tom Neuwirth, won the 59th installment of the competition, held this year in Copenhagen, with a song titled "Rise Like a Phoenix," which he performed early Sunday as a bearded woman in a form-fitting gold dress.

The Eurovision contest draws well over 100 million viewers annually, and the contest has become a point of national pride in Russia, which began competing in the 1990s.

"The process of the legalization of that to which the Bible refers to as nothing less than an abomination is already long not news in the contemporary world," Vladimir Legoyda, chairman of the church's information department, told the Interfax news agency. "Unfortunately, the legal and cultural spheres are moving in a parallel direction, to which the results of this competition bear witness."

Legoyda said the result of the competition was "yet one more step in the rejection of the Christian identity of European culture."

On Monday, Vitaly Milonov, a municipal legislator in St. Petersburg known for his anti-gay activism, appealed to Russia's culture ministry to ban any future performances in Russia by Wurst.

Other Russian commentators pointed out that Russia's pop-music scene is known for flamboyant performers who bend gender lines.

Both the Kremlin and the Moscow Patriarchate have been positioning Russia as a moral bastion in contrast to Europe and the United States.

The Moscow Patriarchate has condemned the legalization of same-sex marriage in European countries and defended anti-gay legislation in Russia, saying it is meant to protect minors.

Last June, speaking at a monastery atop Mount Athos in Greece, Patriarch Kirill I, the primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, warned that moral relativity is "that ground on which only the Antichrist can come" and singled out sexual morality as a sign of relativism.

"We see what is happening today," he said. "Same-sex marriages, euthanasia, abortion—that which was always regarded as evil from the point of view of divine truth is no longer considered evil."

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Russian church's Department of External Church Relations, said at a conference in Moscow in December that the West was destroying marriage as "the God-created union of man and woman" and warned that countries that are drawn into Europe's orbit would be forced to accept alien values, in a clear reference to Ukraine.

In April, a controversial group of Russian Orthodox youth activists raided the screening of a documentary film about LGBT teenagers, who are often driven to suicide by their sense of isolation in Russia.

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