

# Resisting Empire Promoting Peace Churches Confront The Russian World Ideology



**ECUMENICAL CONFERENCE**  
**1-3 December 2025**

Hotel Arthur | Helsinki | Finland



# MONDAY, 1 DECEMBER 2025

## Arrivals in Helsinki – Hotel Arthur

15:30 - 16:00 **Opening prayer**

16:00 - 17:00 **Welcome**

**The Most Revd Dr Tapio Luoma,**

Archbishop of Turku and Finland,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

**H.B. Archbishop Elia of Helsinki and All Finland,**

Orthodox Church of Finland

**Mr Jussi Kristian Halla-aho,**

Speaker of the Parliament of Finland

**Rt Rev. Dr Dagmar Winter**

Church of England, CEC Vice-President

**Moderation:**

**Ms Katerina Pekridou,**

CEC Programme Officer for Theology & Studies

17:00 - 17:20 **Church and Empire: From domination to decolonisation, Keynote presentation**

**Prof. Regina Elsner,**

University of Münster

**Moderation:**

**Rev. Dr Ari Ojell,**

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

# PROGRAMME

# MONDAY, 1 DECEMBER 2025

- 17:20 - 18:00 Discussion in plenary
- 18:00 - 18:30 Coffee break
- 18:30 - 19:00 Bus transfer to Uspenski Cathedral
- 19:00 - 19:30 Prayer service in the Orthodox tradition
- 19:30 - 21:00 Dinner at the crypt of Uspenski Cathedral

## Welcome:

Rev. Fr. Markku Salminen

## Greeting:

**Mr Ioan Vulpescu,**

President of the General Assembly of the  
Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy

- 21:00 - 21:30 Transfer by bus from Uspenski Cathedral for  
Hotel Arthur
- 21:30 Social evening at Hotel Arthur

# PROGRAMME

# TUESDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2025

**08:30 - 09:00** Morning Prayer in the Plenary Hall

## **09:00-12:45** REMEMBERING THE PAST

**09:00 - 09:30** From Ukraine's Post-Soviet Transition to the Russian Invasion of 2022

**Prof. Dr Katharina Kunter,**  
University of Helsinki

**09:30 - 10:00** The Holy Russia Ideology in the Speeches of President Putin

**Rev. Dr Juha Meriläinen,**  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

**Moderation:**

**Prof. Dr Christine Schliesser,**  
Protestant Church in Switzerland

**10:00 - 10:40** Group discussion

**10:45 - 11:15** Coffee break

**11:15 - 11:30** Transfer on foot to the Lutheran Helsinki Cathedral

**11:30 - 12:45** Prayer for Peace at the Lutheran Helsinki Cathedral

**Welcome: Bishop Teemu Laajasalo,**  
of the Diocese of Helsinki

**12:45 - 13:00** Transfer on foot to Hotel Arthur

**13:00 - 14:30** Lunch

# PROGRAMME

# TUESDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2025

**14:30 - 15:00** **Reports from Group Discussions**  
**Moderation:**  
**Rev. Sabine Müller-Langsdorf,**  
Protestant Church in Germany,  
Pathways to Peace Steering Group

## **15:00-18:45 INTERROGATING THEOLOGY**

**15:00 - 16:00** **The concept of the Russian World  
from a theological perspective**

**H.E. Metropolitan Yevstratyy of Bila Tserkva,**  
Orthodox Church of Ukraine/Ukrainian Council of  
Churches and Religious Organisations  
**Rev. Dr Ihor Shaban,**  
Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church  
**Rev. Prof. Dmytro Tsolin,**  
German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine

**16:00 - 16:30** **Discussion in Plenary**  
**Moderation:**  
**Rt Revd Dr Dagmar Winter,**  
Church of England, CEC Vice-President

**16:30 - 17:00** **Coffee Break**

**17:00 - 17:15** **A Declaration on the Russian World Teaching**

**Dr Pantelis Kalaitzidis,**  
Volos Academy for Theological Studies

# PROGRAMME

# TUESDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2025

**17:15 - 17:30    Othering in the Russian World Ideology**

**Dr Jelisei Heikkilä,**  
Orthodox Church of Finland

**17:30 - 17:45    Theology in the service of Empire**

**Prof. Dr Volodymyr Bureha,**  
Kyiv Theological Academy,  
Ukrainian Orthodox Church

**17:45 - 18:00    The 'Russian World':  
Imperial Echoes in a Modern Ideology**

**Prof. Dr Priit Rohtmets,**  
Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe

**Moderation:**

**H.E. Metropolitan Grigorios of Peristeri,**  
Church of Greece

**18:00 - 18:45    Group discussion**

**18:45 - 19:45    Dinner at the Hotel**

**19:45 - 20:15    Bus transfer to the Catholic Saint Henrik Cathedral**

**20:15 - 21:15    Evening prayer at the Catholic Saint Henrik  
Cathedral**

**Welcome: Fr. Andrii Khomen**

**21:15    Bus transfer to Hotel Arthur**

## PROGRAMME

# WEDNESDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2025

08:30 - 09:00

**Morning Prayer**

09:00 - 09:30

**Reports from discussion groups**

**Moderation:**

**Ms Júlia Berecz,**

Reformed Church of Hungary/

Reformed Church in Transcarpathia

## 09:30-13:00 NAVIGATING POLITICS

09:30 - 11:00

**Nationalism and Empire:**

**Intersections of identity and power**

09:30 - 09:45

**Borders, Identity, and Power:**

**Rethinking Nationalism and Imperialism**

**in the Russo-Ukrainian War**

**Dr Pavlo Smytsnyuk,**

New York University,

Pathways to Peace Steering Group

09:45 - 10:00

**Establishment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate**

**Exarchate in Lithuania in 2022-2024: what do we**

**know and what do we miss?**

**Prof. Milda Ališauskienė,**

Vytautas Magnus University,

Lithuania/RELIDEM Consortium

10:00 - 10:15

**Negotiating Russianness**

**in the Finnish Orthodox Church**

10:00 - 10:15

**Dr Talvikki Ahonen,**

Åbo Akademi University,

Finland/RELIDEM Consortium

# PROGRAMME

# WEDNESDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2025

**10:15 - 10:30**    **In the Shadows of the Russian (Orthodox) World:  
Small Churches Operating Under the Radar**

**Prof. Dr Heta Hurskainen,**  
University of Eastern Finland

**10:30 - 11:00**    **Discussion**  
**Moderation:**  
**The Most Revd Urmas Viilma,**  
Archbishop of Tallinn & Primate of the Estonian  
Evangelical Lutheran Church/President of the  
Estonian Council of Churches

**11:00 - 11:30**    **Coffee break**

**11:30 - 13:00**    **Democracy in Distress? Authoritarianism, war,  
and the future of global order**

**Panel discussion with:**

**Prof. Petr Kratochvíl,**  
Institute of International Relations Prague/  
CEC Governing Board member

**Dr Marietta D.C. van der Tol,**  
University of Cambridge

**Very Rev. Prof. Cyril Hovorun,**  
Huffington Ecumenical Institute,  
Los Angeles/Sankt Ignatios Theological Academy

**12:15 - 13:00**    **Discussion**

## PROGRAMME

# WEDNESDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2025

## Moderation:

**Dr Natallia Vasilevich,**

Ecumenical Patriarchate,  
Pathways to Peace Steering Group

13:00 - 14:00

Lunch

**14:00 - 15:00**

**Reading of the Conference  
Statement & Discussion**

## Moderation:

**Rev. Dr. Jonas Adelin Jørgensen,**

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark,  
Pathways to Peace Steering Group &

**OKRn i.R. Antje Heider-Rottwilm,**

Church and Peace/  
Pathways to Peace Steering Group

**15:00 - 15:15**

**Closing of the Conference**

**Ms Riina Nguyen,**

Filantropia - Orthodox Church Aid and Mission,  
Orthodox Church of Finland

**Rev. Riikka Porkola,**

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland,  
Pathways to Peace Steering Group

**Rev. Frank-Dieter Fischbach,**

CEC General Secretary

**15:15 - 15:45**

**Concluding prayer in the Plenary Hall  
and departures**

# PROGRAMME

## Biographies of speakers in alphabetical order



**Dr Talvikki Ahonen,  
Åbo Akademi University**

Talvikki Ahonen works as a researcher and research coordinator for the HERA/Chanse project RELIDEM (Religious Realignment and Democratic Resilience – A Comparative Study of Religious Responses to (geo)political Crises) at the Åbo Akademi University, Finland. Her research interests focus primarily on Orthodox Christian churches and religion and politics. Ahonen holds a PhD in social and public policy and a second MA in Orthodox Christian theology, and has previously worked as a postdoc at the University of Eastern Finland and University of Helsinki. Currently she is conducting research on Orthodox Christian churches and war and co-editing a book on the topic.



**Prof. Dr Milda Ališauskienė,  
Vytautas Magnus University**

Milda Ališauskienė is a professor of sociology at Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania. Her research focuses on religious diversity, gender and religion, religion and politics in post-socialist societies, and non-belief. She has published over 40 scholarly articles and contributed to collective monographs on secularisation, social exclusion, and religious diversity in Lithuania and beyond. In 2023, she published the monograph *Minority Religions, Society and State in Contemporary Lithuania* (in Lithuanian). Between 2021 and 2023, she led the international Baltic research programme *Religion and Gender Equality: Baltic and Nordic Developments*. From 2021 to 2025, she served as Chair of COST Action 20107, *Connecting Theory and Practical Issues of Migration and*

Religious Diversity. She currently leads the Research Council of Lithuania-funded project Discursive Practices of Politicisation of Religion and Religionisation of Politics in Contemporary Lithuania (RELPOL) and heads the Lithuanian research team for the HERA/Chanse project RELIDEM: Religious Realignment and Democratic Resilience – A Comparative Study of Religious Responses to (Geo)Political Crises. In 2025, she was elected Vice-President of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR).



**Prof. Dr Volodymyr Bureha,  
Kyiv Theological Academy,  
Ukrainian Orthodox Church**

Volodymyr Bureha was born in Sumy, Ukraine. He graduated from the Sumy State Pedagogical University, History Department, in 1996. He then studied at the Moscow Theological Seminary (1996–2000) and the Moscow Theological Academy (2000–2004).

From 2004 to 2009, he pursued postgraduate studies in history at the Institute of Slavonic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, earning a PhD (Candidate of Science in History) in 2009 with a dissertation titled *State and the Orthodox Church in Czechoslovakia (1918–1938)*. Since 2008, Bureha has been a professor at the Kyiv Theological Academy, the main institution of higher education of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and has served as vice-rector since 2011. He lectures on the history of the Slavic Churches, as well as the history and theology of the Catholic and Protestant Churches. His research focuses on the history of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, particularly the history of theological education. He is the author of seven books and more than 200 articles in history and theology, including recent works on contemporary developments in Ukrainian Orthodoxy.



**Prof. Dr Regina Elsner,  
University of Münster**

Regina Elsner is a theologian and professor at the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Münster, where she holds the Chair for Eastern Church Studies and Ecumenical Theology. From 1998 to 2005, she studied Catholic theology in Berlin and Münster. She subsequently worked as a project coordinator for Caritas Russia in St. Petersburg until 2010. From 2010 to 2013, she served as a research associate at the Ecumenical Institute of the University of Münster within the research stream Institutions and Institutional Change in Post-Socialism. Between 2017 and 2023, she was a researcher at the Center for East European and International Studies (ZOiS) in Berlin. Her research focuses on the dynamics of Orthodox social ethics in Eastern Europe since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with particular attention to peace ethics and gender-related issues. She is co-speaker of the Religion Section of the German Association for East European Studies and a member of the PRO ORIENTE Steering Committee for the Orthodox–Catholic Dialogue.



**Rev. Frank-Dieter Fischbach,  
CEC General Secretary**

Rev. Frank-Dieter Fischbach studied Protestant theology in Heidelberg, Tübingen, and Bonn. He served as Executive Secretary and Head of the Northern and Western Europe Desk, Protestant Church in Germany (EKD), Churchwide Office, Hanover, and as a pastor with the Protestant Church of Bad Münstereifel, Protestant Church in Rhineland and Troisdorf, Evangelical Church in Rhineland, North Rhine-Westphalia, among other churches, fostering ecumenical relations. He served as CEC Executive Secretary for Employment and Social Issues, seconded by the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) work-

ing on churches' dialogue with the EU. He was Executive Secretary on European policies in the Representation of the Protestant Churches in North Rhine-Westphalia, Düsseldorf, Germany and Special Curate in the Representation of EKD to the EU. Since 1 July 2024, Rev. Fischbach has been serving as General Secretary of CEC.



## **Mr Jussi Kristian Halla-aho, Speaker of the Parliament of Finland**

Jussi Kristian Halla-aho is a Finnish politician and scholar currently serving as the Speaker of the Parliament of Finland, a position he assumed on 21 June 2023. He resides in Helsinki and represents the Electoral District of Helsinki. Halla-aho holds both a Master of Arts (2000) and a Doctor of Philosophy (2006) from the University of Helsinki, specialising in Slavic Studies. Before entering national politics, he became widely known for his blog Scripta, where he wrote critically about multiculturalism and Finland's immigration policies. He was first elected to the Helsinki City Council in 2008 and entered the Parliament of Finland in 2011. From 2014 to 2019, he served as a Member of the European Parliament. In June 2017, Halla-aho was elected leader of the Finns Party, a role he held until August 2021. Since returning to the Finnish Parliament in 2019, Halla-aho has held several key leadership roles. As Speaker of Parliament, he also chairs the Speaker's Council, the Chancellery Commission, and the Forum for International Affairs. His career combines academic achievement, influential party leadership, and significant parliamentary responsibility, establishing him as a major figure in contemporary Finnish politics.



## **Dr Jelisei Heikkilä, Orthodox Church of Finland**

Jelisei Heikkilä serves as Theological Secretary in the Office of the Archbishop of Helsinki and All Finland. He grew up in a Finnish-Ukrainian family, developing an early appreciation for cultural diversity and multilingual communication. He began his theological education with a Master of Theology from the University of Eastern Finland in 2009, followed by a Doctor of Theology from the University of Helsinki in 2015. To complement his theological foundation, he pursued fundamental studies in psychology at the University of Helsinki from 2020 to 2021. His passion for Greek culture inspired extensive Greek language studies. He received a scholarship from the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece and studied Modern Greek from 2010 to 2012 at the University of Athens, earning a B2 proficiency level. He advanced to C1 through an intensive programme at the University of Crete in 2020 and participated in the Byzantine Greek Summer Programme at Trinity College Dublin in 2017. In his current role, his responsibilities include preparing theological perspectives on ecclesiastical matters and statements, coordinating public relations, managing the Church's international and ecumenical relations, facilitating stakeholder collaborations, organising diocesan training programmes, and handling various translation assignments. He also serves on the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. A particularly significant aspect of his work is addressing Ukrainian refugee integration. Drawing on his heritage and understanding of Ukrainian culture, he coordinates the Church's efforts, in partnership with its diaconal organisation Filantropia to support Ukrainian refugees in Finland. He is dedicated to building bridges between communities, cultures, and faith traditions.

# SPEAKERS



**Prof. Dr Heta Hurskainen,  
University of Eastern Finland**

Heta Hurskainen is an associate professor of systematic theology (tenure track) at the Eastern University of Finland in Joensuu. Her research focuses on Russian and Ukrainian Orthodoxies, their relationships with politics, and ecumenical dialogue, particularly between the Lutheran and Orthodox Churches. Her publications include *Churches in Contact and Collision: Multiple Ways of Ukrainian and Russian Churches* (co-edited with Teuvo Laitila, Brill Schönningh, 2024); 'The Orthodox Church of Finland's Theological Arguments Concerning Russia's War in Ukraine' in *Fault Lines in the Orthodox World: Geopolitics, Theology and Diplomacy in Light of the War in Ukraine* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2025); and 'Fragmenting Ukrainian Orthodoxy and its Impact on Ecumenism' in *Churches in Contact and Collision* (Brill Schönningh, 2024). She has been a member of the International Lutheran–Orthodox Joint Commission since 2019 and, since 2022, serves on the Standing Committee of *Societas Oecumenica*, the European Society for Ecumenical Research.



**Rev. Prof. Dr Cyril Hovorun,  
Huffington Ecumenical Institute/  
Sankt Ignatios College**

Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun is a professor of ecclesiology, international relations, and ecumenism at Sankt Ignatios College, University College Stockholm, and Director of the Huffington Ecumenical Institute at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. A graduate of the Theological Academy in Kyiv and the National University in Athens, he completed his doctoral studies at Durham University under the supervision of Fr. Andrew Louth. He served as Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, First Deputy Chairman of the Educational Committee of the Russian Orthodox Church, and later as a research fellow at Yale and Columbia Universities. He has also been

# BIOGRAPHIES

a visiting professor at the University of Münster. He is an international fellow at the Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life at the University of Alberta, Canada, an invited professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, and a guest professor at the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies in Hong Kong. More than 500 of his research and journalistic works have been published in 30 languages. His books include *Eastern Christianity in Its Texts* (London: T&T Clark, 2022; Italian translation, 2025); *La riconciliazione delle memorie: Ricordare le separazioni tra le Chiese e la ricerca dell'unità* (Rome: San Paolo, 2021, co-authored with Lothar Vogel and Stefano Cavallotto); *Political Orthodoxies: The Unorthodoxies of the Church Coerced* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018; Ukrainian translation, 2018; Romanian translation, 2023); *Ukrainian Public Theology* (Kyiv: Dukhi Litera, 2017, in Ukrainian); *Scaffolds of the Church: Towards Poststructural Ecclesiology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017; Ukrainian translation, 2018; Russian translation, 2024); *Meta-Ecclesiology: Chronicles on Church Awareness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; Ukrainian translation, 2017); *From Antioch to Xi'an: An Evolution of 'Nestorianism'* (Hong Kong: Chinese Orthodox Press, 2014, in Chinese and English); and *Will, Action and Freedom: Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century* (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2008).



**Dr Pantelis Kalaitzidis,  
Volos Academy for Theological Studies**

Pantelis Kalaitzidis is the Director of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, a research centre addressing contemporary issues in Eastern Orthodoxy. He studied theology in Thessaloniki and philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris. His research spans the eschatological dimension of Christianity, the dialogue between Orthodoxy and modernity, theology and modern literature, religious nationalism and fundamentalism, renewal and reform in Eastern Orthodoxy, and postmodern hermeneutics of Patristics. He is editor of the theological series *Doxa & Praxis: Exploring Orthodox Theology* (WCC Publications) and *Twenty-First-Cen-*

tury Greek Theologians (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, co-edited with John Behr and Aristotle Papanikolaou). He has held research fellowships at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton University, and DePaul University. Since 2015, he has been a Research Fellow at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven. Kalaitzidis serves on the Executive Committee of the European Academy of Religion (EuARe, Bologna) and is a member of the International Association of Orthodox Dogmatic Theologians (IAODT). Together with Prof. Aristotle Papanikolaou, he chairs the Political Theology Group of the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA). He has taught systematic theology at the Hellenic Open University and at the St. Sergius Institute of Orthodox Theology in Paris, as a visiting professor. His publications include *Orthodoxy and Modernity: An Introduction* (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2007; Romanian translation, 2010), *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education* (main editor, Oxford/Geneva/Volos, 2014), and *Nel mondo ma non del mondo: Sfide e tentazioni della chiesa nel mondo contemporaneo* (Magnano, Italy: Edizioni Qiqajon, 2016).



**Prof. Dr Petr Kratochvíl,  
Institute of International Relations /  
Evangelical Church of Bohemian Brethren,  
CEC Governing Board**

Petr Kratochvíl is a professor of Global Politics and a senior researcher at the Institute of International Relations in Prague. He studied theology of Christian traditions at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, international relations at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University, and international political science at the University of Economics in Prague. He was appointed associate professor in 2011 and full professor in 2016. Between 2020 and 2024, he lectured at Sciences Po in Paris, and in 2023 he joined the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague. He has served as Chairman of the Academic Council of the Diplomatic Academy of the Minis-

try of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, as Deputy Director of the Institute of International Relations (2004–2013), and later as its Director (2013–2018). Kratochvíl collaborates with numerous international academic institutions and has given invited lectures at Sapienza University of Rome, the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, the University of Cambridge, and the University of Oxford. His research focuses on religion in world politics, particularly Christianity in global affairs, as well as on theories of international relations, populism, democracy, European politics, and Russian foreign policy. He serves as Special Representative of the Institute of International Relations in the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), as a Board Member of the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA), and as a member of the Governing Board of the Conference of European Churches.



**Prof. Dr Katharina Kunter,  
University of Helsinki**

Katharina Kunter has been a full professor of Contemporary Church History at the Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki, Finland, since 2020. She studied history and Protestant theology at the Universities of Giessen and Heidelberg in Germany and has held positions and fellowships at various German and European institutions, including an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation fellowship at the University of Aarhus, Denmark (2004–2005), a DAAD fellowship at the University of Tartu, Estonia (2012), and a fellowship at the University of Helsinki (2018). Her research focuses on the history of the long 20th century in Europe, particularly at the intersections of political history, religion, and culture. In her 2000 PhD thesis, she examined the role of churches during the détente period of the 1970s, analysing how Christian actors promoted dialogue, democracy, and human rights in a divided Europe. Her subsequent research, including her 2004 Habilitation thesis and her 2016 book *Churches and Communism*, explores Christian political opposition and Eigensinn in communist Central and Eastern Europe, with a particular focus on Protestantism in the GDR.



**The Most Reverend Dr Tapio Luoma,  
Archbishop of Turku and Finland,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland**

The Most Rev. Dr Tapio Luoma has served as Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland since 1 June 2018. Prior to his election, he worked as a pastor in several parishes in Southern Ostrobothnia for 24 years and as Bishop of Espoo from 2012 to 2018. Archbishop Luoma holds a doctorate from the University of Helsinki. His dissertation, *Incarnation and Physics: Natural Science in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance*, was published in the AAR Academy Series by Oxford University Press in 2002. As Archbishop, he chairs the Church's central bodies, including the General Synod, the National Church Council, and the Bishops' Conference. He represents the Church both nationally and internationally and is responsible for its ecumenical and external relations. Since 2022, Archbishop Luoma has been a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, and he also serves as one of the Thursdays in Black Ambassadors of the World Council of Churches.



**Rev. Dr Juha Meriläinen,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland**

Juha Meriläinen is a Lutheran pastor and theological advisor on international and ecumenical affairs to the Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. He also holds the title of docent (associate professor) in church history at the University of Helsinki. Meriläinen's academic expertise includes the history of the ecumenical movement, the relationship between religion and politics during the Cold War, religious nationalism, and immigration history. His first doctoral dissertation examined the role of Western churches in the reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War. He has also pursued doctoral studies in European and world history and is currently writing a second doctor-

al dissertation on the history of U.S. immigration. His book *Putin's Altar Boy: Patriarch Kirill and the Russian Holy War of Aggression* (in Finnish), published by Otava in 2023, received the 2024 Lauri Jäntti Prize for the best non-fiction book published in Finland in 2023. From 2020 to 2023, Meriläinen served as chair of the Finnish Society of Church History. He has represented his Church in numerous domestic and international ecumenical bodies, including the Ecumenical Council of Finland, the General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, and the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.



**Ms Riina Nguyen,  
Orthodox Church of Finland**

Riina Nguyen is the Executive Director of Filantropia, Orthodox Church Aid and Missions, Finland. Since February 2022, her work has included delivering humanitarian aid to local communities in Ukraine, and since 2024 she has coordinated a project supporting the integration of Ukrainians in Finland. She holds a Master of Theology from the University of Eastern Finland, where her thesis examined membership in the Orthodox Church of Finland between 1950 and 1989. Her main interests include the role of women in the church, human rights, Indigenous peoples, borders, and decolonisation. Nguyen currently represents the Orthodox Church of Finland in the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. Her previous experience includes serving as Project Manager at Ortaid (Orthodox Church Aid from Finland), working as a catechumen teacher in the Orthodox parish of Helsinki, and serving as a lay representative in the Synod of the Orthodox Church of Finland. She has also represented the Orthodox Church of Finland in the Ecumenical Council of Finland.



**Rev. Riikka Porkola,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland/  
Pathways to Peace Steering Group**

Riikka Porkola serves as a pastor for international work in the Helsinki Cathedral Parish and as an advisor in several working groups of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Her expertise centres on congregational work with Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking communities in Finland. Rev. Porkola holds an M.Th. and an M.A. in Russian language and literature, and she is currently studying Ukrainian. She coordinates psycho-social support and art activities for Ukrainians in Finland, with a particular focus on strengthening peace theology and fostering ecumenical relationships in Ukraine. She is a member of the Conference of European Churches' Pathways to Peace Steering Group. Prior to her church ministry, she worked in diplomacy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland.



**Prof. Dr Priit Rohtmets,  
University of Tartu /  
Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe**

Dr. Priit Rohtmets is an associate professor at the University of Tartu and professor of Church history at the Theological Institute of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church. He is a member of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) and serves as Secretary of the Commission for Theology and Education of the EELC. He is also a member of the International Lutheran–Orthodox Joint Commission on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation. His research focuses on the religious history of the Baltic and Scandinavian regions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, state–church relations, the history of Orthodox Churches in the Baltic countries and the Balkans, the relationship between nationalism and religion in Northern Europe, and the ecumenical movement in the Baltic States.

# SPEAKERS



**Rev. Dr Ihor Shaban,  
Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church**

Fr Ihor Shaban serves as Head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church's Commission for Interreligious Dialogue and Ecumenical Affairs and is a member of the Reconciliation in Europe Group. He is a scholar of public theology, specialising in church–state relations and the intersection of religion and politics. His research examines topics such as democracy, nationalism, the politicisation of the Church, and the role of religion in conflicts, including the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. He also focuses on ecumenism and the modernisation of theological education.



**Dr Pavlo Smytsnyuk,  
New York University /  
Pathways to Peace Steering Group**

Pavlo Smytsnyuk specialises in political theology, Christian social ethics, and religious nationalism. Since the onset of the Russo-Ukrainian war, his research has focused on the religious dimensions of conflict, concepts of justice, and the instrumentalisation of religion. He is currently a visiting scholar at New York University's Jordan Center. Prior to joining NYU, he held research and teaching positions at George Washington University and a postdoctoral fellowship at Princeton University. From 2019 to 2022, he served as Director of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies and Senior Lecturer at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine. He studied philosophy and theology in Rome, Athens, and St. Petersburg, and earned a doctorate in comparative theology (Orthodoxy/Hinduism) from the University of Oxford. Smytsnyuk is co-editor of *Marian Reflections on War and Peace: Trauma, Mourning, and Justice in Ukraine and Beyond* (Routledge, 2025), and has published more than two dozen peer-reviewed articles and book chapters. His most recent work examines the

# BIOGRAPHIES

Holy See's response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine through the lens of neutrality.



**Rev. Prof. Dmytro Tsolin,  
German Evangelical  
Lutheran Church of Ukraine**

Dmytro Tsolin was born in Kakhovka, Kherson Region, Ukraine. He graduated from the Faculty of Philology at Kherson State University in 1995 with a master's degree in Ukrainian Philology and earned a master's degree in theology in 2002. In 2009, he defended his doctoral dissertation at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in Saint Petersburg, Russia, on Literary Aspects of the Translational Technique of the Pentateuch in the Aramaic Targumim. He was a Rothschild Foundation Fellow conducting postdoctoral research at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2012–2013), and a fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (2018–2020), focusing on Middle Aramaic languages. From 2007 to 2021, he held various academic positions at the National University of Ostroh Academy, Ukraine. Since 2021, he has been a professor in the Department of Biblical Studies at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv. Since 2019, he has contributed to a new Ukrainian translation of the Old Testament for the International Bible Society (Biblica). Tsolin is also a pastor of the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine, caring for a small Lutheran community in Lviv, and has translated Lutheran hymns from German into Ukrainian. His theological interests include the Old Testament, public theology, and healing from war trauma. He has developed a course titled Therapeutic Reading of the Bible. He is married and has two adult daughters.



**Prof. Dr Marietta van der Tol,  
University of Cambridge**

Marietta van der Tol is a Landecker lecturer at the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, and senior postdoctoral researcher at Trinity College, Cambridge. Her research focuses on the comparative study of politics, law, and religion. Her book *Constitutional Intolerance: The Fashioning of the Other in Europe's Constitutional Repertoires* (CUP, 2025) examines the impact of right-wing movements on constitutionalism, with particular attention to the legal protection of minorities in France, the Netherlands, Hungary, and Poland. She leads the interdisciplinary networks Religion, Ethnicity, and Politics in German, Dutch, and Anglo-American Contexts: Nationalism and the Future of Democracy (DAAD-Cambridge) and the project Protestant Political Thought: Religion, State, Nation (with Dr. Sophia Johnson), which hosts the annual Political Theologies conference series. Key outputs of the project include the edited volumes *The Many Faces of Christianity: The 'Russian World' in Europe* (Brill, 2025) and *A Global Sourcebook in Protestant Political Thought, Volume I*, as well as special issues such as 'Rethinking the Sacred in Religion and Nationalism' in *Religion, State, Society and 'Old Testament Imaginaries of the Nation in German, Dutch, and Anglo-American Protestant Political Thought'* in *The Journal of the Bible and its Reception*. Her Landecker lectureship includes a five-year research project titled *Imagining Sacred Lands: the 'Russian World,' 'Hungarian World,' and 'Holy Serbia'*, which investigates the relationship between space, identity, and borders in Russia, Hungary, and Serbia, and their connections to territories no longer under their control, including Ukraine, Transylvania, and Kosovo. Through the lens of these political imaginaries, the project analyses competing conceptions of the sacred that underpin illiberal interpretations of democracy and political authority.



## **His Beatitude, Archbishop Elia (Wallgrén) of Helsinki and All Finland, Orthodox Church of Finland**

H.B. Archbishop Elia of Helsinki and All Finland was born in Kajaani, Finland. He completed his matriculation examination at Linnan Lukio, Kajaani, in 1981. From 1982 to 1984, he studied Swedish and Czech at Stockholm University and earned a primary school teacher's degree from Stockholm Teacher Training College in 1986. He worked as a primary school teacher in the Municipality of Haninge (1986–1989), and in the City of Helsinki (1989–1993), completing additional qualification studies for the Finnish primary school teacher's degree at the University of Helsinki in 1990. He served as a Swedish-language immersion teacher in Helsinki (1993–1996, 1999–2001) and as a teacher of Orthodox religion in Uusimaa (1997–1999). From 1996 to 2001, he studied Orthodox Theology at the University of Joensuu and earned a Master of Divinity from St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York in 2003. He was ordained a deacon on 29 May 2003 and a priest on 1 September 2003, serving as priest of the Orthodox parish of Jyväskylä (2003–2006) and Dean of the Orthodox parish of Vaasa (2006–2014). On 26 November 2014, he was elected Metropolitan of Oulu, tonsured a monk with the name Elia on 16 December 2014, and elevated to the rank of Archimandrite on 17 December 2014. He was consecrated bishop and installed as Metropolitan of Oulu on 11 January 2015. Archbishop Elia was awarded the Commander's Cross of the Order of the Holy Lamb by the Orthodox Church of Finland on 26 November 2023. He was elected Archbishop of Helsinki and All Finland on 28 November 2024 and enthroned at the Uspenski Cathedral on 15 December 2024. He currently serves as Chair of the Board of the Ecumenical Council of Finland (2025–2027). He is fluent in Finnish (native), Swedish, English, and Czech, and has good knowledge of German and Spanish, as well as satisfactory skills in Estonian, Polish, and Russian.



## **H.E. Metropolitan Yevstratiy (Zoria) of Bila Tserkva, Orthodox Church of Ukraine**

Metropolitan Yevstratiy of Bila Tserkva was born in Cherkasy, Ukraine. He completed his studies at the Kyiv Orthodox Theological Academy (KOTA) in 2001, where he has been a lecturer until August 2018, when he was conferred the academic title of professor. In 1998, he was tonsured a monk with the name Yevstratiy and ordained as a deacon. He was ordained as a priest in 2000 and as a bishop in 2008. In November 2002, he was appointed press secretary of the Kyiv Patriarchate and continues to serve as spokesman for the Kyiv Metropolis of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Since March 2005, he has been a member of the Secretariat of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations as a representative of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Since March 2019, he has served as Deputy Head of the Department for External Church Relations of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and as Chairman of the Synodal Theological and Liturgical Commission. In February 2023, he was elected ruling hierarch of the newly created Eparchy of Bila Tserkva in the Kyiv region and elevated to the rank of Metropolitan.

# PRAYER AND MUSIC



## **Ms Senni Valtonen, church musician and multi-instrumentalist**

Prayer and music during the Conference are organised under the leadership of Ms Senni Valtonen. Valtonen is a Finnish multi-instrumentalist, church musician (kanttori), and folk musician. She studied at the Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki, graduating with a Master's degree in music education, church music, and folk music.

After she served as the kanttori of Munkkiniemi parish in Helsinki for about ten years, she currently serves the Swedish speaking Johannes parish in Helsinki. Her musical style centers on presence and joy, and she is skilled on a wide range of instruments, including the kantele (traditional Finnish harp), piano, various wind instruments, the key fiddle (avainviulu), and organ. In addition to her church work, she performs in theatre productions. She has collaborated with the composer and musician Timo Alakotila on a project-album called Psalttamus – pelimannivirsiä, which blends hymns with folk music in rich improvisational arrangements.

## BIOGRAPHIES

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CEC wishes to express our sincere gratitude to the Pathways to Peace Steering Group members for their tireless efforts and unwavering commitment to the success of this Conference. Their guidance, dedication, and spirit of collaboration have been truly invaluable.

Special thanks are extended to the local Planning Committee for their hard work, creativity, and meticulous attention to detail throughout the planning process.

We would also like to acknowledge the invaluable support of the Stewards and the Communications Team, whose enthusiasm, professionalism, and joyful cooperation greatly enriched the preparations of this gathering.

**photo credits:**

**Kimmo Brandt/Compic/Eduskunta** (Jussi Kristian Halla-aho's photo)

**Mediapankki** (photo of Juha Merilainen)

**Jani Laukkanen** (Senni Valtonen's photo)

**Nikos Kosmidis** (Pantelis Kalaitzidis's photo)

**Cover page artwork:** Andrej Strocaŭ

**Graphics & design:** Torsten Creative

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATIONS

