

REVIEW
of the book under the title
“Polyefktos Finfinis,
Metropolitan of Sweden and all Scandinavia
(1969-1974)”

by Most Rev. Metropolitan Agathangelos of Phanarion
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(Stockholm, August 2025)

Your All-Holiness, our Father and Master¹,
Your Eminences, Learned and Honourable Ladies and Gentlemen,
Select and dear assembly,

It is with feelings of great emotion and spiritual joy that I find myself in your midst in this spiritual Synaxis, focusing on “Polyefktos Finfinis, Metropolitan of Sweden and all Scandinavia (1969-1974)”, a long book, by the Most Rev. Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden, co-hierarch, brother, and author of what, in many respects, is a unique treatise. I stand before you with a heightened sense of responsibility and even timidity, because speaking before the venerable Head of Orthodoxy, His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Vartholomaios, does not only constitute a supreme honour and a great blessing but burdens one with responsibility for the content and the message of one’s words on the occasion of the publication of a book.

¹ [*Translator’s note.*] Here the Greek term used literally translates as “*Despot*”, which, apart from its negative connotations that, sadly, are the only ones to have survived in the other languages, was also a Byzantine court title and is still used in Greek as an ecclesiastic form of deferential address to a Church Leader.

Introduction : The ecumenical nature of the Church of Christ

The term “ecumenicity” (i.e. ecumenical nature), popular in the modern age, finds its true expression in the Church and is founded on the statutory principle of love vis-à-vis a barren reality which, unlike universality, seems to regress to savagery, traumatises, leads to decay, and corrupts consciences, obsessed with its desire to attract mere ‘followers’, instead of full, conscious members. Since its foundation, the Church embraces everyone with no discrimination, no exclusion, with a love that knows no limits. The Holy Metropolitanates of the Ecumenical Throne, such as this one, of Sweden and all Scandinavia, embody the Lord’s command “*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations*”, offering unity in Christ through the diversity of the faithful. In the farthest parts of the European North, where Orthodoxy remains minoritarian, the Church bears witness to Divine Providence, by connecting human persons from different cultures and traditions.

The missionary fervour of the Metropolitan of Sweden

Most Rev. Metropolitan Cleopas Stronghylis of Sweden has been working with a fervour comparable to that of Early Christianity in order to convey the light of Christ to a secularised Scandinavia. He cooperates with representatives of the other Churches in an exemplary manner, thus embodying the unity that flows from love. The present volume, published by the Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, pays homage to his late predecessor, Polyefktos Finfinis, by shedding light on his five-year-long ministry during a period of political and social turmoil, when Orthodoxy was faced with challenges arising from an excess in prosperity, individualism, and distancing from spiritual values. Nevertheless, how can we gaze at faraway horizons, if we are unable to stand on our own feet first? How shall we meet with the

other person, if we do not look ourselves in the mirror? How can the Church enter, in its own dynamic, prophetic manner, into the history of the world? How will the Church articulate a discourse that will allow for some space of shadow that will provide repose and peace to the tormented hearts of human persons? Do we have the courage to talk of authentic self-consciousness? How shall we speak of a prophetic alertness and of our expectation of *“the day of the Lord”*? How shall we talk to people of their way of life when *“Christ is risen and life reigns”*? Or, to recall the words of Gheorghios Seferis, a Greek poet and Nobel prize laureate of the 20th century, *“how shall we look Western civilisation in the eye, if we do not draw strength upon our own roots, if we do not toil systematically in favour of our own tradition?”*.

Ecumenicity does not abolish the identity of each people but preserves it; mutual acquaintance does not lead to religious syncretism but to respect for a pluralism, where of course there must be a yardstick for constant benchmarking and assessment. The ecumenicity of Orthodoxy is not a territorial term but the removal of man-made barriers to the new creation of the Kingdom of God.

Archival Treasures and Spiritual Heritage

This book is the fruit of untiring research on the part of His Eminence and constitutes a piece of archival treasure, as it gathers 815 unpublished documents –statutes, pastoral encyclicals, administrative and personal correspondence– from the Archives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, of the Metropolitanate, and of the late Hierarch Polyefktos himself. The scholarly systematisation, also reflected in the contents, comprises a chronological as well as a thematic arrangement, covering the establishment of the Metropolitanate, the relations to other Patriarchates, Lutheran Archbishops, and political authorities, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic and the Swedish administration. The Appendix with photographic material adds

warmth to it, while the absence of an Epilogue, as the author explains, highlights the perennial continuity of the endeavour, which thus remains living and inspiring.

The value of the work extends beyond the remit of historians and theologians. To every believer, it is a gate to the heart of Orthodoxy, as it reveals its anxiety to put down roots in a world which distances itself from faith. In effect, in the Scandinavia of the 1970s, prosperity, individualism, and the prevalence of Lutheranism made the presence of Orthodoxy difficult, as the latter was deprived of both legal recognition and resources. When he arrived in Stockholm, aware of the unfavourable prospects, Polyefktos wrote humbly: *“I have come here not for my own person but for the sake of Mother Church”*. His deep faith in Divine Providence –as shown in passages where e.g. he notes that *“where help from human beings is absent, the Providence of God lies in wait”*– becomes a lighthouse for us all.

The Bishop's Task: Cross and Martyrdom

The missionary significance of the office of bishop abroad is highlighted through the adversities which the late Metropolitan Polyefktos also experienced. Like a bridge between different denominations from Greece, Serbia, and Finland, he worked so as to unite diverse cultures, to establish parishes, and to catechise young people, even without sufficient resources or theological support from the traditional centres such as Constantinople or Mount Athos. Initially finding temporary quarters in a hotel, borrowing money to set up the seat of the Metropolitanate, and having to write with his own hand any certificates that would be requested, he experienced the way of the Cross on an everyday basis. As he wrote, *“I sense the greatness of the path of our Lord towards the Passion”*. His life was a constant sacrifice, filled with endurance and faith. Despite a *“ruthless war”* waged against him by po-

litical and, sadly, even by ecclesiastical circles, he remained magnanimous, blessing even those who would fight him, and thus honouring his name and his office. His loneliness –“*alone, all alone amongst a thousand dangers*”, according to his own words– and the absence of a secretary or of assistants render his ministry a witness to self-sacrifice, which inspires every believer to endure hardship.

Due homage and the need for continuity with a view to unity

Above all, this book pays homage to the late Polyefktos as spiritual Father, a half-century after the completion of his ministry. Treading in his steps, Most Rev. Cleopas today ensures a way of continuity that guarantees the UNITY of the Church. It is this continuity, through fidelity to tradition and love for its people, that keeps the Church undivided, turning each difficulty into a blessing. With respect for anonymity where needed, the present publication preserves the purity of intentions by storing invaluable experiences for the generations to come. The magnanimity of Polyefktos, who would impart his blessing even to his adversaries, constitutes a model for us all, reminding that the Church prospers when the successors honour the legacy of their predecessors, by preserving unity through common faith and mission.

Conclusion : A living Witness to Faith

Enriched with an epistle by His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Vartholomaios, this work is not merely a precious record, but a living witness to faith. The voice of Polyefktos, who used to say “*with God’s succour and over time everything will come to pass*”, invites us to walk with patience and hope, in the knowledge that the Lord is the ultimate regulator of all. Along with his works on Father Eusebios Vittis and on Saint Nectarios, the present book, also by Most Rev. Metropolitan

Cleopas of Sweden and all Scandinavia, constitutes an invaluable legacy for Orthodoxy, which inspires believers and historians to continue the work of the Church with the same devotion.

Your All-Holiness,

“Orthodoxy means freedom, and free human persons press forward, without betraying their faith or their ideals. Only those who find themselves trapped inside trenches feel fear, because they do not trust in their strength”. This quotation reflects the exact orientation bequeathed by your ascetic figure. That of a dynamic Patriarch, an independent personality of deep faith, a bold defender of Orthodox unity, a conscious minister of the Gospel, and a great prophet of the unity of Christians.

Please, Your All-Holiness, pray that this book may touch the hearts of all, leading to a deeper understanding of the Christian mission and of the unity of the Church.

I thank you all for your patience and for your attention.

August 2025 / † A. of P.

