

Original Research Article

Views of Parents and Guardians on Orthodox Christian Education in Greek Schools

ABSTRACT

In a period of intense theological ferment, where social and political changes have shaped a transitional period for the teaching of the RE in the Greek school, the present study, part of which is republished here with a focus on the levels of secularization of Greek parents, is part of my doctoral thesis, which is yet unpublished. It seeks to shed light on, the unknown, until recently, attitudes and positions of parents on Religious Education. The sample of the study consisted of parents and guardians of children of any age (N = 1032). According to the results of the selected analyzes presented here, Religious Education and the Orthodox Christian religion appear without losing its cultural and social value. We therefore conclude that secularization has not eroded the cohesive social fabric of modern Greek society, which continues to be a collective culture.

SAMPLE ABSTRACT:

Aims: The main aim of this article is to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of parents and guardians about the teaching of religious education of their children. In this article are presented specific variables from my doctoral dissertation related to secularization levels of the sample of the research.

Study design: The design of the research was based on the assumption that parents and guardians have a special interest in the Religious Education of their children, which is shaped by a variety of factors.

Place and Duration of Study: The sample of the research were parents from various regions of Greece. The specific administrations were selected based on "convenience sample". The final application of the research was introduced by distributing printed questionnaires during the period 29/03/2017- 14/12/2017, where 453 questionnaires were completed. During the same period, the questionnaire was formed and sent in electronic form via google forms, from where 578 completed questionnaires were collected. For this purpose, an e-mail was sent to the country's primary and secondary schools, requesting that it be forwarded to the parents and guardians of the pupils.

Methodology: The sample consisted of 1032 parents and guardians of children in any age; about 85% of the subjects of the survey have children at school age (5-18 y); 15% of survey subjects stated that their children are either adults or children in pre-school. Not any statistically significant difference was found between parents with children of different age. All parents/ guardians were selected in a statistically random way. Regarding the research methodology, the research instrument used was a structured questionnaire.

Results: The analysis of the research variables showed that parents and guardians as to their interest and attitude to the Religious Education (hereinafter the RE): they consider important the right to decide on the RE (67%), have a personal interest in the RE (69%), are aware of the parental right to choose their children's RE (74%). and they claim that one's attitude to the RE may be influenced by their parents' attitude towards the Orthodox Christian faith (86%).

As to the character of the RE: They do not reject the purely Orthodox lesson (51% positive and 14% neutral, that means 65% do not reject it). They are not negative in the teaching of other religions, but this is being done distinctly, in separate sections (65%). They agree that Orthodox pupils are treated unequally when they are not taught their faith compared to other religions' pupils who are taught their faith (65%).

As to the value of the RE: They are in favour of the view that the RE in the Greek school is

beneficial (82%) and that it is beneficial because it teaches to the student the message of life of Orthodox Christianity (78%). and that it is important to bring together the student with the parish life of the Church (70%). They are positive supported by the statement that the teaching of Orthodox Christian tradition affects the formation of the child's personality (77%).

Conclusion: Secularism has not eroded the cohesive social fabric of modern Greek society and still dominates a collective culture with fairly solid levels of religiosity. However, it is notable to see cultural variation, as a specific analysis has shown that residents from "Rural Area (up to 2,000 inhabitants)" seem less secular, closer to traditional cultural elements.

Keywords: Religious Education, secularization, parents

1. INTRODUCTION

As Secularization it has been established to be called the orientation of human life and culture away from religious faith and religious institutions, far from any acceptance of meta-physical reference. But the perception that has prevailed in general is that secularism is linked to state institutions and especially to church-state segregation. There is, however, a distinction in the concept of secularism, which is shaped by the sector concerned and the way it is manifested. If the area identified is social institutions and culture, then we are talking about 'objective secularisation'. But if we focus on individual consciousness then we are talking about "subjective secularism". The existence, for example, of an objective secularization of the State does not imply secularization of society or individuals. On the contrary, subjective secularism, while it is not necessary to create a treaty for the secularization of the state, is capable of causing it, as in a secularized society it would have no reason to exist or even more could not ensure its survival such a state.

Sociologists investigated the limits and characteristics of the concept of secularism. This effort includes the finding of Jose Casanova (Casanova, 2006) [1], who with his work "Rethinking secularization" stressed that while the entrenched Christian religion seems to be weakening authoritatively in Europe, its population, while moving away from the traditional religious practice, still maintains relatively high levels of individual religiosity. Other sociologists also mentioned a change in the shape of religion (Luhmann 2002) [2] or the "return and renewal of religions" (Riesebrodt 2000) [3] or for a post-secular society (Habermas 2001) [4], where religious communities continue to exist in an ever-secular reality.

In the debate on secularism there were intellectuals who also supported the opposite trend of modern societies, dubbed "anti-secularism- desecularization". The "anti-secularization" campaigns were interpreted: a. as evidence of the continued importance of religion in the modern world (Berger, 1999) or b. as a reference to cases where religion actively reverts after a period of secularism (Karpov, 2010) [5]. The "return of religion", even in the case of anti-secularism, is characterized as a concept and a subjective concept of religion. A religion dominated by "believing without belonging" or as it was otherwise called the religious phenomenon as "vicarious religion" (Davie 2002) [6].

Jean-Claude Monod connects Christianity with Western secularization. He distinguishes "secularization-clearing", defined as "the process of de-theologicalization" of forms of political legitimacy, the decomposition of the rules of knowledge, power and issues vis-à-vis the dominant religion or religions" (Monod, 2007) [7] from the "secularization-transfer", where secularization is considered as a process of transferring sanctity from the religious sphere to other areas of activity, which have become autonomous, in particular policies. In one case, the secularization that ended will dissolve all forms of sanctity and even secular beliefs, while in the second case, alternative forms of sanctity will remain at the heart of modernising alternative forms of sanctity.

In the face of such a transformation of modern communities with elements of secularism and anti-secularism in parallel, a dialogue is being raised about RE to find its compass orienta-

tion, in front of a map of a complex world. Parents, now, as partners of RE officially provided to the Greek school, participate in this dialogue of redefining RE, as they have the legal right and duty to choose the RE of their child. The imprinting of their attitudes, choices and perceptions of the form, character and content of the Lesson of Religion in the modern world, also reflects their attitude towards religious faith, religious institutions. This is because of the special relationship that has been preserved over time for the orthodox nature of RE in the Greek education system. At the same time, it demonstrates both the individual level of secularization of Greeks and - with a general application of the results - the levels of secularization of modern Greek society. It is about the profiling of subjective secularism, that has scope and influence in the objective secularization of Greek society, since it highlights the value of RE as a school social institution and as the legacy of the Greek culture.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS / EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS / METHODOLOGY

The research has been carried out in the context of my PhD studies and is the central core of my Doctoral thesis, which has been successfully supported. The main objective of empirical research is to capture the attitudes and perceptions of parents about the RE in the Greek school. The pilot application of the questionnaire began in spring 2016 and was completed at the end of the same year. The pilot questionnaire was applied in print to chosen people and was framed by interviews. A total of 58 people participated and then the questionnaire was corrected in points, simplified expressively, the survey data were recorded in the SPSS 32 statistical package, checked, analyzed and the relation of variables was made. A second pilot survey was carried out following the improvements before the questionnaire was given in the final application. The main survey began at the start of 2017 and the data collection lasted about a year, with a final number of participants (N=1032).

2.1 Frequency analysis-User Profiles

The analyses show that the profile of the subjects of the investigation is as followed: 65.6% of the subjects of the survey belong to the female sex, while to the male 34.4%. The data show that the majority of the survey subjects of respondents (42%) are 46-55 years old, followed by 36% of those aged 36-45, then equal sesame 26-35 and 56-65, followed by 2% of those aged 18-25 and finally with 1% those over 66 years old. The data show that an overwhelming majority of survey subjects of respondents of the survey's subjects (99%) were of Greek origin. The data show that the majority of the survey subjects (52%) live in a large urban center. There is, however, a large proportion of about 48% living in an urban-semi-urban area and about 13% living in a rural area. The data show that the large majority of survey subjects (68%) have stated having higher education (postgraduate- doctorate). The vast majority of survey subjects of respondents of the survey's subjects (90%) are married and have children. The data show that a majority of survey subjects (47%) have two kids. These are followed by those who have 1 child (26%), after those with 3 children (15%), those with 4 children (8%), those who have 5 children (2.4%), those with 6 children (0.7%), those with 8 children (0.4%) and those with 7 children (0.3%). The data show that children of the large majority of survey subjects (79 %) attend public school. A number of (15%) stated that their children do not go to school.

Table 1. Demographics

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Sex		Frequency	Percent %
	Male	354	34,3
	Female	676	65,5
	Total	1030	99,8
	System	2	,2
Total/Valid		1032	100,0
Nationality		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	Greek	1013	98,2
	Albanian	7	,7
	Russian	2	,2
	Romanian	1	,1
	Total	1023	99,1
Missing	System	9	,9
Total		1032	100,0
Age		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	18-25	21	2,0
	26-35	98	9,5
	36-45	372	36,0
	46-55	432	41,9
	56-65	98	9,5
	>66	10	1,0
	Total	1031	99,9
Missing	System	1	,1
Total		1032	100,0
Place of residence		Frequency	Percent %
	Rural area (up to 2000 inhabitants)	132	12,8
	Urban-semi-urban area (10.000-50.000 inhabitants)	363	35,2
	Large urban center (up to 50000 inhabitants)	534	51,7
	Total	1029	99,7
Missing	System	3	,3
Total		1032	100,0
Maximum level of education		Frequency	Percent %
	Primary school	29	2,8
	High school	35	3,4
	Senior High school	166	16,1
	Educational training institute	101	9,8
	Higher Education Institution postgraduate	432	41,9
	Phd	211	20,4
	Phd	56	5,4
	Total	1030	99,8
Missing	System	2	,2
Total		1032	100,0

Marital status		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	Married with children	912	88,4
	Divorced with children	58	5,6
	Single parent family	31	3,0
	Unmarried with children	8	,8
	Minor guardian	5	,5
	Total	1014	98,3
Missing	System	18	1,7
Total		1032	100,0
Number of children		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	1	261	25,3
	2	477	46,2

	3	152	14,7
	4	78	7,6
	5	24	2,3
	6	7	,7
	8	4	,4
	Total	1006	97,5
Attendace of children		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	Public School	812	78,7
	Private School	60	5,8
	Do not go to school	154	14,9
	Total	1026	99,4
Missing	System	6	,6
Total		1032	100,0

2.1.1 Frequency analysis-Pre-organizational questions

The survey questionnaire included two questions as pre-organizational, outside of the main body, after the demographic part, because they were not included in the axes during the initial design, but it was considered important to contain them. The first question explores the level of parental involvement in RE, while the 2nd explores the level of awareness of the right to parental responsibility. The data show that the large majority of survey subjects (67.2%) are positive about having a legal right to decide on the RE, showing that they value this right as important and have a personal interest in the religious lesson.

Table 2. The will to have the legal right to decide on the content of RE

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	Yes	684	66,3
	No	189	18,3
	I don't know/ I'm neutral	145	14,1
	Total	1018	98,6
Missing	System	14	1,4
Total		1032	100,0

The data show that the large majority of survey subjects (74%) answer positively to the question of whether parents/guardians know that they have the right and duty to choose the child's religion and RE, thus expressing either awareness about their right or that they consider it self-right.

Table 3. Knowledge about the right and duty to choose the child's religion and RE

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	Yes	752	72,9
	No	187	18,1

	I don't know/ I'm neutral	82	7,9
	Total	1021	98,9
Missing	System	11	1,1
Total		1032	100,0

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Below are analyses by frequency of selected research's data, with their graphs that related to the interest of the parents and their attitude to the RE, to the choice of the character of RE and their opinion about the value of the RE. These include variables related to the general attitude of parents to the Orthodox Christian faith (Orthodox content of the RE).

The data show that the majority of survey subjects (51%) respond positively to the direction of the religious lesson towards the Orthodox faith, however, there is also a significant proportion of about 35% who have exactly the opposite view and about 14% who take an indifferent stance on which will be the direction of the religious lesson that will be taught to their children. The data show that the trend is moving towards the Orthodox faith, but this is not supported by the vast majority of research's subjects.

Table 4. The RE in Greece needs to have only the Orthodox faith as a content

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	I absolutely disagree	165	16,0
	I disagree	187	18,1
	I don't know// I'm neutral	146	14,1
	I agree	282	27,3
	I strongly agree	235	22,8
	Total	1015	98,4
Missing	System	17	1,6
Total		1032	100,0

The data show that the large majority (65%) of those who have been subjects of the research are in favor of the existence of orthodox faith in the content of the religious course, but also of the existence of other religions in separate sections, apparently stating the position that, in this way, it will be achieved a better understanding of the learned subjects of the course. An important point of these data is that the majority of the subjects are not negative about teaching other religions combined with the orthodox faith, but this must be done distinctly, in order not to affect the clear knowledge of orthodoxy.

Table 5. The RE in Greece needs to have as its content the Orthodox faith and elements of the known religions separately

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	I absolutely disagree	97	9,4
	I disagree	133	12,9
	I don't know// I'm neutral	128	12,4
	I agree	407	39,4
	I strongly agree	249	24,1

	Total	1014	98,3
Missing	System	18	1,7
Total		1032	100,0

The data show that a large majority of survey subjects of the survey sits (64%) are negative about the multi-religious nature of the religious course, apparently considering that teaching all the religions in once, does not satisfy their own choices about the RE of their child.

Table 6. The RE in Greece needs to have multi-religious content

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	I absolutely disagree	370	35,9
	I disagree	277	26,8
	I don't know// I'm neutral	122	11,8
	I agree	171	16,6
	I strongly agree	66	6,4
	Total	1006	97,5
Missing	System	26	2,5
Total		1032	100,0

The data show that a large majority of survey subjects (65%) advocates that Orthodox pupils are treated unequally when they are not taught their faith compared to other religions' pupils who are taught their faith, apparently expressing the opinion that orthodox pupils would also want to have the same opportunity for reasons of egalitarianism.

Table 7. Orthodox pupils are treated unequally when they are not taught their faith compared to other religions' pupils who are taught their faith

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	I absolutely disagree	97	9,4
	I disagree	142	13,8
	I don't know// I'm neutral	123	11,9
	I agree	269	26,1
	I strongly agree	393	38,1
	Total	1024	99,2
Missing	System	8	,8
Total		1032	100,0

The data show that the vast majority of survey subjects (82%) of respondents (82%) of the survey sits advocates the view that the RE is beneficial at the greek school.

Table 14. The RE is beneficial at the Greek school

	Frequency	Percent %
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Valid	I absolutely disagree	52	5,0
	I disagree	50	4,8
	I don't know// I'm neutral	79	7,7
	I agree	305	29,6
	I strongly agree	539	52,2
	Total	1025	99,3
Missing	System	7	,7
Total		1032	100,0

The data show that a large majority of survey subjects (78%) advocates the view that the RE is beneficial because it teaches to the student the message of life of the Orthodox Christianity.

Table 8. The RE is beneficial, because it teaches to the student the message of life of the Orthodox Christianity

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	I absolutely disagree	64	6,2
	I disagree	76	7,4
	I don't know// I'm neutral	99	9,6
	I agree	290	28,1
	I strongly agree	496	48,1
	Total	1025	99,3
Missing	System	7	,7
Total		1032	100,0

The data show that a large majority of survey subjects (78%) advocates the statement that the RE needs to be associated with the Orthodox Christian faith as a component of the modern Greek culture.

Table 9. The RE needs to be associated with the Orthodox Christian faith as a component of the modern Greek culture

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	I absolutely disagree	62	6,0
	I disagree	74	7,2
	I don't know// I'm neutral	92	8,9
	I agree	333	32,3
	I strongly agree	466	45,2
	Total	1027	99,5
Missing	System	5	,5
Total		1032	100,0

The data show that a large majority of survey subjects (70%) advocates the statement that it is imperative that the RE bring the student in contact with the parish life of the Church

Table 10. It is imperative that the RE bring the student in contact with the parish life of the Church

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	I absolutely disagree	80	7,8
	I disagree	104	10,1
	I don't know// I'm neutral	126	12,2
	I agree	331	32,1
	I strongly agree	384	37,2
	Total	1025	99,3
Missing	System	7	,7
Total		1032	100,0

The data show that a large majority of survey subjects (77%) advocates the statement that the teaching of Orthodox Christian tradition affects the shaping of their children's personality.

Table 11. The teaching of Orthodox Christian tradition affects the shaping of my child's personality

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	I absolutely disagree	36	3,5
	I disagree	80	7,8
	I don't know// I'm neutral	122	11,8
	I agree	365	35,4
	I strongly agree	422	40,9
	Total	1025	99,3
Missing	System	7	,7
Total		1032	100,0

The data show that a large majority of survey subjects (73%) of respondents (73%) of the survey's subjects (73%). advocates the declaration to keep their children in adulthood the religious identities they has given to them with their baptisms.

Table 12. I want my child to keep in adulthood the religious identity I have given to him with his baptism

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	I absolutely disagree	53	5,1
	I disagree	56	5,4
	I don't know// I'm neutral	166	16,1
	I agree	295	28,6
	I strongly agree	457	44,3
	Total	1027	99,5

Missing	System	5	,5
Total		1032	100,0

The data show that a majority of survey subjects (47%) is negatively opposed to the statement that their personal opinion of priests affect their opinion of the religious subject. However, there is also a significant proportion of 38% who have the exact opposite view and about 15% who take an indifferent stance on whether their personal opinion of priests affect their opinion of the religious subject. According to the data, it appears that the trend is moving towards the agreement with the view that the personal view of priests does not affect the opinion of the RE.

Table 13. Personal opinion of priests affects my opinion of the RE

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	I absolutely disagree	227	22,0
	I disagree	257	24,9
	I don't know// I'm neutral	157	15,2
	I agree	260	25,2
	I strongly agree	124	12,0
	Total	1025	99,3
Missing	System	7	,7
Total		1032	100,0

The data show that a majority of survey subjects (52%) disagree with the view that the RE in Greece should be adapted to the international political developments. However, there is also a significant proportion of about 30% who have exactly the opposite view and about 18% who take an indifferent stance on whether the RE in Greece should be adapted to the international political developments. According to the data, it appears that the trend is moving towards disagreement with the statement that the RE in Greece should be adapted to the international political developments, but this is not supported by the vast majority of the research's subjects.

Table 14. The RE in Greece should be adapted to the international political developments

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	I absolutely disagree	262	25,4
	I disagree	272	26,4
	I don't know// I'm neutral	182	17,6
	I agree	215	20,8
	I strongly agree	95	9,2
	Total	1026	99,4
Missing	System	6	,6
Total		1032	100,0

The data show that an overwhelming majority of survey subjects (86%) of respondents (86%) of the survey advocates that one's attitude towards the RE can be influenced by their parents' attitude towards the Orthodox Christian faith.

Table 14. One's attitude towards the RE may be influenced by their parents' attitude towards the Orthodox Christian faith

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	I absolutely disagree	18	1,7
	I disagree	35	3,4
	I don't know// I'm neutral	95	9,2
	I agree	543	52,6
	I strongly agree	333	32,3
	Total	1024	99,2
Missing	System	8	,8
Total		1032	100,0

The data show that a large majority of survey subjects (69%) positively respond that they have a personal interest in the RE.

Table 16. I have a personal interest in the RE

		Frequency	Percent %
Valid	Not at all	63	6,1
	A little	135	13,1
	I don't; know/ I'm neutral	116	11,2
	Very	285	27,6
	Very much	426	41,3
	Total	1025	99,3
Missing	System	7	,7
Total		1032	100,0

These are the results from frequency analyzes for parents and guardians:

As to their interest and attitude to the RE: they consider important the right to decide on the RE (67%), have a personal interest in the RE (69%) and the right to decide on the RE (67%), they are aware of the parental right to choose their children's RE (74%) and they claim that one's attitude to the RE may be influenced by their parents' attitude towards the Orthodox Christian faith (86%).

As to the character of the RE: They do not reject the purely Orthodox lesson (51% positive and 14% neutral, that means 65% do not reject it). They are not negative in the teaching of other religions, but this is being done distinctly, in separate sections (65%). They agree that Orthodox pupils are treated unequally when they are not taught their faith compared to other religions' pupils who are taught their faith (65%).

As to the value of the RE: They are in favour of the view that the RE in the Greek school is beneficial (82%) and that it is beneficial because it teaches the student the message of life of Orthodox Christianity (78%). and that it is important to bring together the student with the

parish life of the Church (70%). They are positive supported by the statement that the teaching of Orthodox Christian tradition affects the formation of the child's personality (77%).

4. CONCLUSION

If we bear in mind that the analyses of a questionnaire essentially establish a snapshot of the investigated zone of interest, we will attempt, having this canvas in front of us, to come up with conclusions and reasonable claims about the question of whether orthodox Christian education and, by extension, the Orthodox Christian religion seem to have lost their cultural and social value in modern Greek society. The following results shall be formed from all of the above data analyses:

In conclusion, orthodox Christian education and by extension the Orthodox Christian religion seems not to have lost its cultural and social value, at least for the population of research, as parents/guardians: a. choose to base the RE on orthodox Christian tradition, b. consider orthodox faith a component of Greek culture, c. have an increased personal interest in the RE, d. want to be associated with the parish life of the Church, e. they consider it important and beneficial as a cultural good, e. believe that it affects the formation of their child's personality. From all the above, it seems that an image of modern Greek society is depicted, where secularism has not eroded the cohesive social fabric of modern Greek society and still dominates a collective culture with fairly solid levels of religiosity. However, it is notable to see cultural variation, as a specific analysis has shown that residents from "Rural Area (up to 2,000 inhabitants)" seem less secular, closer to traditional cultural elements, such as the influence of the school, the value of the RE and the preservation of the religious identity of children etc. among community members leading to high In conclusion, orthodox Christian education and by extension the Orthodox Christian religion seems not to have lost its cultural and social value, at least for the population of research, as parents/guardians: a. choose to base the RE on orthodox Christian tradition, b. consider orthodox faith a component of Greek culture, c. have an increased personal interest in the RE, d. want to be associated with the parish life of the Church, e. they consider it important and beneficial as a cultural good, e. believe that it affects the formation of their child's personality. From all the above, it seems that an image of modern Greek society is depicted, where secularism has not eroded the cohesive social fabric of modern Greek society and still dominates a collective culture with fairly solid levels of religiosity. However, it is notable to see cultural variation, as a specific analysis has shown that residents from "Rural Area (up to 2,000 inhabitants)" seem less secular, closer to traditional cultural elements, such as the influence of the school, the value of the RE and the preservation of the religious identity of children etc. among community members leading to high rates of compliance in group norms as well as due to low levels of alienating factors in such communities.

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