

ORTHODOX RELIGION TEACHING IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL IN THE GREEK REPUBLIC. LAW AND EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. Teaching Orthodox religion in schools in the Hellenic Republic is compulsory and has firm legal foundations as well as original educational solutions within the European Union. The subject of this analysis are: constitutional norms, laws, regulations and relevant literature. The article presents the religious demographics, denominational relations in the Hellenic Republic, constitutional foundations of religious education, freedom of conscience and religion, the legal status of teachers, the structure of education, and curriculum. Religious education includes both catechetical and religious studies elements, with emphasis on the latter. The Greek legal system protects religious and ethical dialogue, which guarantees pupils the right to exercise freedom and conscience. This is expressed in the possibility for pupils to obtain exemption from compulsory participation in religion classes. Although the current multiculturalism of Greek society and globalization mean that the denominational nature of religious education is met with criticism, the link between teaching the Orthodox religion and education remains strong and is generally accepted by Greek society.

Keywords: Greece; religious education in schools; Orthodox Church; freedom of conscience and religion; Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople; Ministry of Education, religion and sports.

INTRODUCTION

The Hellenic Republic is one of eight European Union countries where participation in school religion classes is compulsory. In addition to Greece, this subject is taught as a compulsory course in Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Malta, most German federal states, and Sweden. In another fifteen EU member states, participation in religion classes is optional. These include

Poland, Belgium, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Spain, the Netherlands, Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, and Italy. Among the 27 EU countries, only four do not provide religious education in public schools: Bulgaria, France, Luxembourg, and Slovenia – although it must be noted that in France, in the departments of Alsace and Moselle, religious education is present in public schools due to their specific legal status [Kiciński 2012, 7]. Models of religious education in Catholic and Protestant areas in Europe are relatively well studied, whereas the Orthodox model has remained on the margins of scholarly inquiry which in Greece has original legal framework and educational potential. In Greece, religious education in principle and practice shapes the identity of the inhabitants of the southern Balkans and numerous islands. Teaching the Orthodox religion is a fundamental element at every level of education. The Orthodox tradition is linked to Greece's long history of regaining freedom from Ottoman (Muslim) rule, which lasted more than 370 years. Until Greece achieved full independence in 1830, this tradition fostered and reinforced national identity through language, Christian culture, and its own traditions and symbols. Despite that currently the multicultural character of Greek society and globalization make the denominational character of religious classes to be met with criticism – for example, from the Acherist Union of Greece – the connection between Orthodox religious education and the school system remains strong and is generally accepted by Greek society.

Eurostat reports that Greece has 10,400,720 inhabitants (Eurostat 2025), and the U.S. Administration estimates that Orthodox Christians constitute 81-90% of the population, while others note that the level of religious indifference has been clearly increasing in recent times [Olszówka 2009, 147, note 7]. Followers of Islam represent the second largest religious group. In the administrative region of Macedonia-Thrace, there are about 140,000 Muslims, including Alevi Muslims, who were recognized in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 as descendants of the Muslim minority. According to the Pew Research Center, there are currently about 520,000 Muslims in Greece: asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants; half of them reside in Athens.¹ Other religious communities (approx. 5% of the Greek population) include: Old Calendarist Orthodox, Catholics (in both the Latin and Eastern rites), Protestants, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, adherents of Hellenic polytheistic religions, Scientologists, Bahá'ís, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Sikhs, Seventh-day Adventists, Buddhists, and members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). The Hellenic Republic is also home to about 2,500 Ethiopian

¹ Report on International Religious Freedom: Greece, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/547499-GREECE-2023-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf> [accessed: 22.01.2025].

Orthodox Christians, nearly 1,000 Syrian Orthodox Christians, and about 100,000 adherents of the Armenian Apostolic Church.²

The aim of this article is to answer the following questions: what are the legal foundations of Orthodox religious education, and how is it organized in public schools in the Hellenic Republic? Achieving the research goal required appropriate research methods. The research is interdisciplinary in nature. Interdisciplinarity is today regarded as a genuine necessity in studies concerning legal analyses, particularly those relating to law and religious education in state schools. In the field of educational law, the dogmatic method was applied, associated with logical-linguistic analysis and interpretation of legal texts. In the field of education, the method of critical source analysis was employed. Finally, commonly used methods of analysis and synthesis were applied. Greek legal sources as well as scholarly literature on the subject will be analyzed. Among studies published in Polish, those by Anna Pikulska-Robaszkiewicz [Pikulska-Robaszkiewicz 1998, 249-66] and Marcin Olszówka [Olszówka 2009, 145-75] should be noted. In English, works were published by, among others: Margarita Markovit [Markovit 2019a, 45-48], Nikos Maghioros [Maghioros 2013, 130-38], Vasiliki Mitropoulou [Mitropoulou 2020, 57-84], Marios Koukounaras Liagkisa [Koukounaras Liagkisa 2015, 153-69], and Eda Gemi [Gemi 2021, 88-98]; and in Greek by Athanásios D. Sapounás [Sapounás 2019, 529-40]. The transliteration of the text in Greek (PN-ISO 843:1999) will follow the BGN/PCGN rules ([B.a.] 1996).

1. THE LEGAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE MAIN RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

The tasks and role of Orthodox religious education in schools in the Hellenic Republic stem from the constitutional position of the Orthodox Church. The Constitution itself indicates that the religion of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ defines the identity of contemporary Greece, which is a confessional state. Not only does the Preamble of the Constitution of Greece invoke the One and Indivisible Trinity, but privileges are also granted to the Orthodox Church (Article 3).³ This is evident, for example, in the system of Mount Athos. The Constitution, referring to the ancient privileged status of the Athos peninsula, recognizes the sovereignty of this territory and emphasizes the spiritual jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate over it, as well as the executive authority exercised by the twenty “holy monasteries.” In addition, it enjoys its own judicial authorities, as well as customs and tax privileges (Const. of Greece, Article 105(1-5)).

² Ibid.

³ Article 3 of the Constitution of Greece. Parliament Hellenic 2022 [hereinafter: Const. of Greece].

The organization of the Greek Orthodox Church is complex. On the one hand, it does not cover the entire territory of the country, while on the other, Orthodox Greeks residing in Europe, the Americas, and Australia fall under its jurisdiction. The Orthodox community residing in Greece is divided between the jurisdiction of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church (hereinafter: AOC)⁴ and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (EPC). The Orthodox Church in Greece exercises jurisdiction over the Ionian Islands, Thessaly, the province of Arta, selected areas of Epirus and Macedonia. The hierarchy of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece consists of 1 Archbishop and 45 Metropolitans, in accordance with the Patriarchal and Synodal Tome of June 29, 1850, and the Patriarchal and Synodal Acts of 1866 and 1882.⁵ Meanwhile, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople exercises jurisdiction over Mount Athos, 4 metropolises in the Dodecanese, the Exarchate of the Patriarchal Throne on Patmos, the semi-autonomous Church of Crete (1 archbishopric and 8 metropolises),⁶ as well as 36 metropolises of the Patriarchal Throne in Macedonia, Epirus, Western Thrace, and the islands of Lemnos, Lesbos, Chios, Samos, and Ikaria. These metropolises were temporarily entrusted by the EPC to the administration of the AOC under the Patriarchal and Synodal Act of September 4, 1928 (Const. of Greece, Article 3(1)).

The legal status of the Orthodox Church in the Hellenic Republic is regulated not only by the Constitution (1975/1986/2001/2008/2019), but also by the Law of May 25, 1977 on the Status of the Greek Church.⁷ The Autocephalous Orthodox Church remains inextricably linked with the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople as well as with the other autocephalous Orthodox Churches (Const. of Greece, Article 3(1)). Members of the Orthodox Church in Greece are Orthodox faithful. The Autocephalous

⁴ Autocephaly is the hierarchical, administrative, and judicial independence of a local Church from other autocephalous Orthodox Churches, as well as its autonomy in shaping its own organizational distinctiveness in legislation, within the boundaries of Orthodox dogmatic teaching [Olszówka 2009, 147].

⁵ The Patriarchal and Synodal Act of September 4, 1928 regulates the legal status of the provinces incorporated into the Kingdom of Greece in 1912. The EPC, in agreement with the Kingdom of Greece, temporarily entrusted the ecclesiastical administration of the so-called "New Lands" to the AOC. The EPC continues to exercise supremacy over these provinces. During liturgical services, the name of the Ecumenical Patriarch is mentioned. The EPC also accepts appeals and recourses from the judgments and decrees of AOC bodies in matters related to the so-called "New Lands" [Olszówka 2009, 148-49].

⁶ The Church of Crete is an Orthodox Church with semi-autonomous status, maintaining dependence on the EPC. The Church of Crete consists of 1 archdiocese and 8 metropolises. Its highest administrative authority is the Holy Synod of the Church of Crete, based in Heraklion, chaired by the Archbishop of Crete, with the metropolitans as members.

⁷ The Status of the Greek Church of May 25, 1977, Law No. 590 Government Gazette A' 146/31.5.1977.

Orthodox Church is governed by incumbent Metropolitans. Its supreme authority is the Holy Synod of the Hierarchy (Ierá Sínodos tis Ierarchías), which holds legislative, administrative, and judicial powers. It consists of 1 Archbishop, 45 Metropolitans belonging to the AOC, 36 Metropolitans of the Patriarchal Throne (from the so-called “New Lands”) under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, 9 titular Metropolitans, 18 assistant bishops, and 9 retired hierarchs. Current administrative tasks are carried out by the Permanent Holy Synod (Diarkís Ierá Sínodos), composed of: the Archbishop of Athens as its president, 6 Metropolitans of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church, and 6 Metropolitans of the Patriarchal Throne from the so-called “New Lands”. Both synods are seated in Athens. The Metropolitans of the Dodecanese, Crete, and the Exarch of the Patriarchal Throne on Patmos are not members of the AOC Synod.⁸ Metropolitans are elected and appointed by the President of the Hellenic Republic [Olszówka 2009, 150-52].

The Orthodox Church in Greece holds a dominant position and enjoys autonomy, with its dogmatic indissolubility guaranteed by the Constitution. In Greek scholarly literature, the state’s predominance over the Orthodox Church and religious associations is exercised through the so-called “rule of state law” (*sýstima tis kratoúsīs politikís*), described as a form of “progressive caesaropapism.” Greece, through legislation, may regulate the internal administrative affairs of the Orthodox Church. This system rests on granting Orthodoxy a dominant status. The Orthodox Church maintains dogmatic unity with other Orthodox Churches and enjoys constitutional guarantees for the preservation of the holy canons and sacred tradition (Const. of Greece, Article 3(1)).

By contrast, the legal status of other Churches and religious associations is defined by statute [Pikulska-Robaszkiewicz 1998, 249]. Churches and religious associations recognized as religions (*gnōstí thrískeía*) are guaranteed freedom of worship as well as freedom of conscience and religion (Const. of Greece, Article 13(2)). Freedom of conscience and religion is secured by constitutional provisions, public international law agreements, and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. A recognized religion is one whose doctrine is not secret, practices public worship, and has permission to establish and operate places of worship. In practice, religious proselytism is prohibited; it is understood as systematic, intensive, and intrusive interference with another’s religious consciousness in order to induce a change of religious beliefs.⁹

⁸ The Status of the Greek Church of May 25, 1977, Law No. 590, item 1-9.

⁹ Law of the Organization of the legal form of religious communities and their associations in Greece and other provisions of the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs and other provisions, No. 4301 Government Gazette A’ 223/07.10.2014, item 14.

Public legal personality is granted to the Orthodox Church [Markovit 2019a, 45-48], the Jewish Community, and the Muslim minority in Western Thrace [Stawowy-Kawka 2006, 300-303].¹⁰ By contrast, legal personality under private law is granted to¹¹ the Catholic Church in the Latin, Greek, and Armenian rites,¹² the Anglican Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the German-speaking Evangelical Community, the Greek Evangelical Community, and the Syrian Orthodox Church. Other religious communities are registered as non-profit civil law organizations: Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, and Bahá'ís [Mitropoulou 2020, 58]. The Union of Greek Atheists, established in 2010, was registered in 2012 [Markovit 2019a, 57-58].

2. LEGAL FOUNDATIONS OF ORTHODOX RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The status of religious education in Greek public schools is defined in constitutional provisions, which were subsequently implemented in Law 1566/1985 on the *structure and functioning of primary and secondary education*.¹³ The Council of State (Supreme Administrative Court) has held that religious education has a "confessional" (omologiakós) character, as it includes the teaching of both Orthodox doctrine and moral theology. This

¹⁰ In Western Thrace, a school system has been established for the Muslim minority. Islamic education is provided in both Greek and Turkish, based on approved curricula [Maghioros 2013, 138].

¹¹ Following the 2014 judgment of the European Court of Human Rights against the Hellenic Republic, the Greek Parliament introduced into the national legal system the concept of private legal personality for religious communities. This law established the legal framework for religious communities, creating a unified official register. Churches and religious associations were recognized as possessing private legal personality without the requirement of registration or proof of a sufficient number of members (Law of the Organization of the legal form of religious..., item 13).

¹² The Roman Catholic Church, following a property dispute in Chania, Crete, concerning a church wall, lodged a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights against the Hellenic Republic on October 28, 1996. In its complaint, the Roman Catholic Church argued that it could not bring a civil action because Greek civil courts refused to recognize its legal personality. The Church demanded legal protection which, "de facto," it had enjoyed for centuries. On December 16, 1997, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that there had been a violation of Article 14 (right to non-discrimination) in conjunction with Article 6(1) (right to a fair trial) of the European Convention on Human Rights of November 4, 1950, see *The Canea Catholic Church v. Greece*, Application no. 25528/94, https://www.equalrightstrust.org/ertdocumentbank/The%20Canea%20Catholic%20Church%20v%20Greece%20_fair%20trial%20rights..pdf [accessed: 22.01.2025] [Markoviti 2019b, 1-24].

¹³ Law of the Structure and operation of primary and secondary education and other provisions, No. 1566, Government Gazette A'167/30.9.1985, item 1a.

model of education, in the context of religious and cultural pluralism, is criticized by some scholars on the grounds that it no longer meets the requirements of a democratic and pluralistic society [Sapounás 2019, 533-38]. Supporters of confessional religious education, however, point to sociological and historical arguments. From a sociological perspective, the majority of Greek society declares baptism in the Orthodox Church. From a historical perspective, the preservation of Christian and Greek national identity in the face of Islamic expansion between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries was made possible through the dedicated educational and religious activities carried out by the Orthodox Church [ibid., 530-33].

Religious education is compulsory in both primary and secondary schools [Koukounaras Liagkis 2015, 153]. On the one hand, students have the right to become acquainted with the authentic tradition of the Orthodox Church; on the other hand, they are entitled to exercise their freedom of conscience and religion (Const. of Greece, Article 13(1-2)).¹⁴ The Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, in its circulars of 10 July 2008, 4 August 2008, and 26 August 2008, took the position that under certain conditions students may be exempted from compulsory religious education classes. In a subsequent circular of 20 November 2008 addressed to the Ombudsman, the Ministry clarified these conditions: (1) religious education is compulsory for all students; (2) students who profess no religion or who are non-Orthodox may be exempted without having to declare their religious affiliation; (3) foreign students are required to attend Greek language classes in place of religious education, while Greek citizens must attend alternative classes designated by the teachers' association [Ypourgeío Paideías kai Thriskeumatōn 2008].

The Council of State (Supreme Administrative Court), in its established case law, has held that students may apply for exemption from compulsory religious education by invoking "thriskeutikís syneídísís," i.e., "freedom of conscience and religion."¹⁵ The Data Protection Authority, however, has broadened the scope of this reasoning: students may request exemption on any grounds of a worldview-related nature. Such an approach contributes to ensuring full protection of freedom of conscience (Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights) [Rozner 2022, 111-36]. In this way, even Orthodox believers who disagree with the curriculum may seek exemption from religious education [Vlachópoulos 2023, 30, no. 77].

Finally, it should be emphasized that Greek legislation, which guarantees parents the constitutional right to raise their children in accordance with their

¹⁴ See also: Law 1566/1985 on the Structure and function of primary and secondary education, Government Gazette A'167/30.9.1985.

¹⁵ Symvoúlio tīs Epikrateías kai Dioikētikí Dikaíosynī. 2018 Council of State and Administrative Justice, 2018 [A 660/2018], [A 926/2018]; 2019 [A 1750/2019].

religious convictions, also provides adherents of recognized religions and denominations with the right to establish private confessional schools.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF ORTHODOX RELIGIOUS EDUCATION – ADMINISTRATIVE AND EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS

The central administrative body is the Ministry of Education, Religion, and Sports (Ypourgeoío Paideías, Thriskeumatōn kai Athlitisimou), which is responsible for, among other things, setting long-term educational objectives, developing curricula, and managing budgetary resources. Within the Ministry, the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs (Genikí Grammateía Thriskeumatōn) oversees the implementation of Orthodox religious education. Its responsibilities include protecting freedom of conscience and religion, exercising administrative supervision over the religious education system, and overseeing religious education teachers. The Ministry is supported in its scientific and organizational work by the Institute of Educational Policy (Instituto Ekpaideutikís Politikís), which is tasked with approving curricula¹⁶ in accordance with the Guidelines for Approving Curricula and Educational Activities. At the regional level, responsibility for religious education rests with the Regional Directorates of Education in each of the 13 regions, while at the local level, school principals bear direct responsibility.

All citizens are entitled to free education at three levels. The first includes early years and primary education. The second consists of lower secondary school (gymnasio, cycle A) and either general or vocational upper secondary school (lykeio, cycle B). The third comprises higher education at universities, polytechnics, academies of fine arts, technical institutions, and the Higher School of Pedagogical and Technological Education (ASPETE Anótati Scholí Paidagōgikís kai Technologikís Ekpaídeusis). Compulsory education covers students aged 4-5 to 15. It includes two years of compulsory preschool education (nīpiagōgeío), although in practice, due to the limited number of pre-schools, many children begin at age five. This is followed by a six-year primary school (grades 1-6: dīmotikó scholeío) for students aged 6-12, and a three-year lower secondary school (grades 1-3: gymnásio) for students aged 12-15.

Distinct within the European Union legal and educational framework is the status of teachers. In primary schools, because one teacher is responsible for all subjects, that teacher also teaches religion. To do so, the teacher must be an Orthodox Christian. If no Orthodox teacher is available, a second Orthodox teacher is appointed. Primary school religion teachers are

¹⁶ Law of Structure and operation of primary and secondary education and other provisions, Law No. 1566/1985 Government Gazette A'167/30.9.1985, item 24; Law of The Upgrading the school, empowering teachers and other provisions, No. 4823/2021 Government Gazette A 136/3.8.2021, item 87.

required to have completed four years of pedagogical studies. In secondary schools, religious education is entrusted to graduates of university-level theological studies, which can be undertaken at the theological faculties of Athens and Thessaloniki. These faculties, however, are not confessional in nature. In Greece, completion of pedagogical studies is the sole requirement for obtaining full teaching qualifications. Teachers are appointed through competitive examinations, and the consent of the local Orthodox metropolitan is neither required for appointment nor for dismissal. Primary and secondary teachers are employed and remunerated by the state budget [Pikulska-Robaszkiewicz 1998, 263]. Beginning teachers are obliged to complete internships, which include essential elements for developing professional competencies.

The objectives, content, and implementation of Orthodox religious education are regulated by laws, presidential decrees, and ministerial acts. Religious education is considered a subject of particular importance, as the majority of citizens declare baptism in the Orthodox Church [Maghioros 2013, 130]. Children in preschool (nīpiagōgeío) do not have religion classes, but religious themes are addressed within environmental education classes, which take an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating national and religious celebrations. Similarly, students in grades I-II of primary school do not have separate religion classes, but encounter religious themes in environmental education, which addresses personality development, the cultivation of ecumenical and universal values, and Greek national identity. Religion classes, held two hours per week, become compulsory from grades III-VI of primary school, with a separate textbook for each grade. In lower secondary school (gymnasio, cycle A), religion is also taught two hours per week, with a separate textbook for each grade. In general upper secondary schools (lykeio), students in grades I-II have two compulsory hours of religion per week, while in grade III, one hour per week. In vocational secondary schools, religion is taught one hour per week.¹⁷

The general objectives of religious education in primary and secondary schools are defined by statute.¹⁸ More specific objectives for each grade in primary school [Ypourgeío Paideías, Thrīskeumatōn kai Athlītismou 2021], lower secondary school [Ypourgeío Paideías, Thrīskeumatōn kai Athlītismou 2020a], and upper secondary school [Ypourgeío Paideías, Thrīskeumatōn kai Athlītismou 2020b] are set out in ministerial decrees.

The curricula of 2011, 2014, 2016, 2017, and 2020 emphasize the value of Orthodoxy in shaping the identity of contemporary Greek society, particularly through interreligious dialogue, the discovery of freedom, democracy,

¹⁷ The Deputy Minister of Education and Religions, *Curriculum of the Religious Studies course in Elementary and High School*, Government Gazette 698/B/4-3-2020, item 1.

¹⁸ Law of the Structure and operation of primary and secondary education and other provisions. Law No. 1566/1985, Government Gazette A'167/30.9.1985 [hereinafter: Law No. 1566/1985].

and mutual respect. The goal of religious education in Greek public schools is the comprehensive and harmonious development of students' intellectual and psychophysical potential. It is intended, in particular, to foster love of neighbor, respect for human life and the natural environment, patriotism, and an understanding of the authentic principles of the Orthodox Christian tradition (Law No. 1566/1985, item 1.1.a). The legislator further specifies educational goals for primary and secondary schools. At the primary level, the aim is to help students gradually learn moral, religious, national, and universal values, and to formulate them into an ordered system (Law No. 1566/1985, item 4.1.e).

The general aim of religious education in secondary schools is to develop a system of ethical, religious, national, and universal values, applying them to conduct. Students should be able to direct their emotional life toward universal goals (Law No. 1566/1985, item 5.1.a). Additionally, upper secondary students are expected to gain a deeper awareness of the Orthodox Christian ethos in connection with universal values, fostering a spirit of interreligious dialogue (Law No. 1566/1985, item 6.2.b). Religious education in the upper secondary cycle also emphasizes the development of intellectual competence combined with the ability to critically and creatively evaluate reality (Law No. 1566/1985, item 6.2.c-d). The content and conduct of religious education are supervised by state authorities and are independent of catechetical instruction provided by the Orthodox Church. Education in Greece is free, as public schooling is funded by the state, and religious education textbooks are free of charge and available online.

An analysis of the objectives and implementation of Orthodox religious education in administrative and educational terms shows, on the one hand, that it assists students in discovering their historical and social roots grounded in the Holy Scriptures and the Tradition of the Eastern Church, and on the other hand, that it is a holistic process of building long-term memory encompassing spiritual, moral, and intellectual development.

CONCLUSION

Orthodox religious education in public schools in the Hellenic Republic is legally guaranteed and fully implemented at every stage of education. The issue of Orthodox religion is addressed in the Constitution of the Hellenic Republic and in binding normative acts as a foundation of the functioning of an independent state. The model of Orthodox religious education in Greek schools is comprehensively designed and implemented in both theoretical and practical dimensions. The very name of the Ministry of Education, Religion, and Sports reflects the holistic approach to the education of Greek children and youth, where religion is not considered merely

a private matter or the exclusive concern of the Orthodox Church. This original model of religious education is characterized by the coexistence of both catechetical and cultural elements, while showing a tendency to emphasize the context of Greek culture. The catechetical dimension is evident, for example, in the recitation of the Our Father by one of the students before lessons during the daily assembly, the presence of icons in schools, and the celebration of Christmas and Easter. The cultural dimension is reflected in the fact that the Ministry of Education, Religion, and Sports, through its legal acts, refers to the protection of Orthodox tradition and aims at long-term education in which physical, intellectual, and spiritual upbringing are balanced. Within this model, it is not the Orthodox Church but the Ministry that receives applications, organizes competitive examinations (deciding on the basis of points obtained), and appoints teachers of religion. The President of the Hellenic Republic confirms and orders the publication of such appointments in the Official Gazette of the Government (Efimeridatis Kyverníseōs – ΦΕΚ).

In its religious education curriculum, the Ministry of Education, Religion, and Sports respects the principles of objectivity of scientific knowledge and promotes tolerance toward religions, basic knowledge of religions, theological and philosophical justifications for religious beliefs, appreciation of religious diversity, and the countering of negative religious stereotypes [Ypourgeío Paideías kai Thriskeumatōn 2020]. At the same time, it remains faithful to its own Orthodox identity.

The legislation of the Hellenic Republic provides clear principles for contemporary religious education in schools with a scientific character, while the Orthodox Church organizes parish-based catechesis on its own initiative. The metropolitan grants a mandate to older youth to provide catechesis to younger children. Catechetical meetings include both theological and ludic content with activating methods.

Undoubtedly, Orthodox religious education in schools fosters religious and ethical dialogue in the Greek socio-cultural context of the 21st century and has significant educational potential. It develops key competences, such as preparing students to cope with a dynamic and increasingly secularized world. At the same time, it offers the opportunity to discover one's cultural roots and communicative competences grounded in fundamental Greek values.

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