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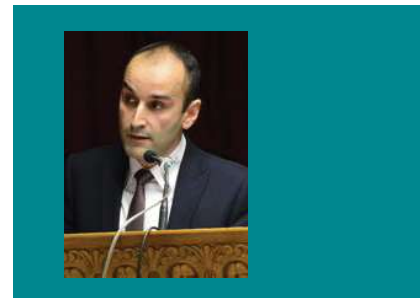
Peace as a Challenge for Religious Education in Southeastern Europe

The Case of the Curricula 2023 in Greece

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Abstract

Greece has been involved in global, local and civil wars in the past. Due to its geopolitical location, the country has also experienced both the threat of war and its political, religious and social consequences over time. This article examines whether the experience of wars and their aftermaths, as well as the threat of war, have been taken into account in the new curricula for religious education (2023) in Greece, in order to use the theological and pedagogical potential and perspectives of religious education to defend and build peace at interpersonal, local and global levels.

Keywords

Peace Education – Religious Education – Curriculum – Greece – Human Rights Education – Textbooks

Frieden als Herausforderung für den Religionsunterricht in Südosteuropa

Der Fall der Lehrpläne 2023 in Griechenland

Abstract

Griechenland war in der Vergangenheit in Welt-, Lokal- und Bürgerkriegen verwickelt. Aufgrund seiner geopolitischen Lage hat es im Laufe der Zeit sowohl die Bedrohung von Kriegen als auch deren politische, religiöse und soziale Folgen erfahren. In dem beiliegenden Beitrag soll untersucht werden, ob die genannten geschichtlichen, politischen sowie auch sozialen Herausforderungen in den Lehrplänen für den Religionsunterricht (2023) in Griechenland nicht außer Acht gelassen wurden. Dieses Anliegen zielt darauf ab, dass es gezeigt wird, inwiefern sowohl das skizzierte theologische und pädagogische Potenzial als auch die Perspektiven des Religionsunterrichts im Blick auf die Verteidigung und Schaffung von Frieden auf zwischenmenschlicher, lokaler und globaler Ebene, berücksichtigt wurden.

Schlagworte

Friedenserziehung – Religionsunterricht – Lehrplan – Griechenland – Menschenrechtserziehung – Lehrbücher

1. Brief Overview of the Greek Education System and the Latest Developments in Religious Education

The religious homogeneity of the student population in Greek schools has changed significantly due to the large immigrant and, more recently, refugee influx to Greece. This had a direct impact on Greece's educational policy. In the field of religious education, the diversity of students' religious identities raised the question whether existing curricula are appropriate for the multicultural and multireligious identities of the student population. The basic cause of this discussion is pedagogical and seems to originate from the past and to extend towards the future. This is related to the timeless need for the subject matter to respond to the contemporary needs and pedagogical expectations of students in the Greek schools. In 2011, in the context of the educational reform of that year, new curricula for religious education were designed, which, over the next decade, were challenged, revised and finally abolished in a multifaceted process that had the adoption of new curricula for religious education in 2023 as its last stage.¹ The 2011 education reform attempted to answer the question of the change of religious homogeneity of the Greek students by designing new religious education curricula, which were completed for all levels of education in 2014.

The 2014 religious education curricula were designed to create a course that would appeal to all pupils, regardless of their religious identity. In order to achieve this objective, the new curricula focused on the teaching and study of religion in general as a historical, social and cultural fact. In other words, they introduced the notion into the Greek educational system that overcoming religious differences and contradictions in the school environment is possible if the religious education course is based on the study of religion in general. Thus, the new curricula aimed at religious literacy and the critical development of students' religious consciousness, providing knowledge, values and attitudes *about* and *from* religions, regardless of their personal religious beliefs. However, they fell short in teaching knowledge, values and attitudes as they were taught to students without allowing them to have an active role in the teaching and learning experience. As a result, the design of the new curricula did not take sufficient account of the theological and experiential self-consciousness of each religious tradition, the ways in which it develops and functions within each historical and cultural context, and the ways in which it is experienced by its believers. After two years

1 Cf. GOVERNMENT GAZETTE, 615/B'/09.02.2023: *Πρόγραμμα για το μάθημα των Θρησκευτικών στο Δημοτικό Σχολείο*. [Curriculum of the Religious Education for the Primary School]; GOVERNMENT GAZETTE, 416/B'/30.01.2023: *Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών του μαθήματος των Θρησκευτικών των Α', Β' και Γ' τάξεων Γυμνασίου*. [Curriculum in Religious Education for the A, B and C grades of Gymnasium]; GOVERNMENT GAZETTE, 573/B'/06.02.2023: *Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών του μαθήματος των Θρησκευτικών των Α', Β' και Γ' τάξεων Γενικού Λυκείου*. [Curriculum in Religious Education for the A, B and C grades of General Lyceum].

of pilot implementation, the new religious education curricula were officially adopted.² However, the new curricula did not meet the educational needs of religious minorities or Orthodox Christian students. This inadequacy resulted in its annulment by the Council of State³ and the annulment of its revised form⁴, with the main argument that the marginalization of the theological approach to religion, the reduction of theological knowledge and the restriction in the teaching and study of its social and cultural characteristics did not contribute to the development of the religious consciousness of students in accordance with the Constitution of Greece. This fact raised the question of changing the model of the design of the religious education curricula, a question that the 2023 curricula of religious education⁵ aspire to answer.

2. Religious Education Enhancing Peace in Previous Research

In the debate on peace education, religious diversity is presented as often being a cause of conflict and violence. In this context, Yaacov Boaz Yablon's research on the role that religion can play as a factor in the effectiveness of peace curricula is of particular interest.⁶ To be precise, bearing in mind both the research presenting religion as a factor of conflict, division and confrontation and also the fact that religion has been marginalized in contemporary educational systems, Yablon studied it from a different starting point. He studied the possible contribution of religion to enhance tolerance, mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence and solidarity. He used the relations between Jews and Arab Muslims in Israel as an example for his research.

Furthermore, Claudia Mahler and Reetta Toivanen view the contradiction that while religion plays an important role in the development of the European legal framework for human rights, it is at the same time absent from human rights

2 Cf. GOVERNMENT GAZETTE, 2920/B'/13.09.2016: *Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών του μαθήματος των Θρησκευτικών στο Δημοτικό και στο Γυμνάσιο*. [Curriculum of Religious Education for Primary School and Gymnasium]; GOVERNMENT GAZETTE, 2906/B'/13.09.2016: *Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών του μαθήματος των Θρησκευτικών του Γενικού Λυκείου*. [Curriculum of Religious Education for General Lyceum].

3 Cf. COUNCIL OF STATE, Decision: 660/2018 & Decision: 926/2018.

4 Cf. COUNCIL OF STATE, Decision: 1749/2019 & Decision: 1750/2019.

5 Cf. GOVERNMENT GAZETTE, 615/B'/09.02.2023: *Πρόγραμμα για το μάθημα των Θρησκευτικών στο Δημοτικό Σχολείο*. [Curriculum of the Religious Education for the Primary School]; GOVERNMENT GAZETTE, 416/B'/30.01.2023: *Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών του μαθήματος των Θρησκευτικών των Α', Β' και Γ' τάξεων Γυμνασίου*. [Curriculum in Religious Education for the A, B and C grades of Gymnasium]; GOVERNMENT GAZETTE, 573/B'/06.02.2023: *Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών του μαθήματος των Θρησκευτικών των Α', Β' και Γ' τάξεων Γενικού Λυκείου*. [Curriculum in Religious Education for the A, B and C grades of General Lyceum].

6 YABLON, Yaacov Boaz: Religion as a Basis for Dialogue in Peace Education Programs, in: Cambridge Journal of Education 40/4 (2010) 341–351. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2010.526590>

education programs.⁷ In a research project carried out between 2003–2007, Claudia Mahler and Reetta Toivanen found that religiosity and belief were absent from human rights education programs.⁸ The marginalisation of religious issues is rooted in the perception that religion is a factor of confrontation and conflict. Among other reasons, this is due to the fact that religion is sometimes associated with manifestations of fanaticism and extremism,⁹ even though proposals have been made to overcome this through religious education.¹⁰ The attacks of 9/11 seem to have reinforced this impression. Various models of religious education have been proposed to strengthen and consolidate world peace,¹¹ as well as models for developing inter-faith and inter-religious relations through religious education and values education.¹² However, teachers prefer to avoid teaching religion because they consider it a source of conflict. They think that the goal of promoting and strengthening peace is best achieved by teaching a body of common principles and values regardless of the religion and religious beliefs of the students, for example, human rights education. Nevertheless, religious communities have taken various initiatives in order to jointly promote the ideal of peace.¹³ Also, the results of Claudia Mahler’s and Reetta Toivanen’s research showed that in Germany the goal of human rights education can best be achieved through religious education or ethics courses.¹⁴ On the other hand, the same study found that human rights education material underestimates the value of

7 MAHLER, Claudia / TOIVANEN, Reetta: Avoiding an Obvious Conflict? “Religion-Neutrality” in Human Rights Education in Europe, In: ENGBRETSON, Kath / DE SOUZA, Marian / DURKA, Gloria / GEARON, Liam (eds.): International Handbook of Inter-religious Education. International Handbooks of Religion and Education, vol 4, Springer: Dordrecht 2010, 950. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2_57

8 Cf. *ibid.*, 949.

9 Cf. *ibid.*, 966.

10 MEIJER, Wilna A. J.: Fanaticism, Fundamentalism and the Promotion of Reflexivity in Religious Education, In: ENGBRETSON, Kath / DE SOUZA, Marian / DURKA, Gloria / GEARON, Liam (eds.): International Handbook of Inter-religious Education. International Handbooks of Religion and Education, vol 4, Springer: Dordrecht 2010, 729. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2_57

11 NIPKOW, Karl Ernst: Education for Peace as a Dimension of Inter-Religious Education: Preconditions and Outlines, In: ENGBRETSON, Kath / DE SOUZA, Marian / DURKA, Gloria / GEARON, Liam (eds.): International Handbook of Inter-religious Education. International Handbooks of Religion and Education, vol 4, Springer: Dordrecht 2010, 641. DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2_39; Cf. KAMAARA, Eunice Karanja: The Role of Inter-religious Education in Fostering Peace and Development, In: ENGBRETSON, Kath / DE SOUZA, Marian / DURKA, Gloria / GEARON, Liam (eds.): International Handbook of Inter-religious Education. International Handbooks of Religion and Education, vol 4, Springer: Dordrecht 2010, 659. DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2_40

12 LOVAT, Terence: Improving Relations with Islam Through Religious and Values Education, In: ENGBRETSON, Kath / DE SOUZA, Marian / DURKA, Gloria / GEARON, Liam (eds.): International Handbook of Inter-religious Education. International Handbooks of Religion and Education, vol 4, Springer: Dordrecht 2010, 695. DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2_43

13 ENGBRETSON, Kath: Muslims, Catholics and the Common Purpose of Justice and Peace, In: ENGBRETSON, Kath / DE SOUZA, Marian / DURKA, Gloria / GEARON, Liam (eds.): International Handbook of Inter-religious Education. International Handbooks of Religion and Education, vol 4, Springer: Dordrecht 2010, 683. DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2_42

14 MAHLER / TOIVANEN 2010 [note 7], 966.

religiosity and therefore does not defend the right to freedom of religion and religious diversity in practice.¹⁵

Ursula King has identified and underlined the fact that the nature of war today has changed. The forms of violence are varied and are not limited to military battlefields. This makes it necessary to redefine the concept of peace and highlights the important role that Religious Education in schools can play in this regard.¹⁶

In Greece, the content of the religious education textbooks of the period 1974–2006 has been researched in the light of the Pedagogy of Peace.¹⁷ The research concludes that the overall evaluation of the religious education textbooks of this period reveals an effort to cultivate peaceful behavior in students.¹⁸ The fostering of peace through religious education reveals additional aspects of peace in addition to the transnational, personal and interpersonal ones. On the other hand, an effort was made to inculcate in students the belief that there is a need to reduce military weapons at the local and international level.¹⁹ Also peace, in the books of the above period, is associated with the defense of human rights.²⁰ However, the research finds that despite the effort to cultivate peaceful attitudes and behaviors in the students of the period, the curricular design of religious education was dominated by an ethno-religious exclusivity, which did not meet the educational needs of that time.

3. Methodological Issues

The main purpose of the paper is to examine whether the new curricula (2023) of religious education in Greek schools contribute to the strengthening and consolidation of peace. In the context of the research, the curricula for the last four grades of primary school, as well as the six grades of secondary education, three grades of gymnasium (junior high) and three grades of lyceum (senior high) are studied.

¹⁵ Ibid., 966–967; Cf. SCHWEITZER, Friedrich: Children’s Right to Religion and Religious Education, In: ENGBRETSON, Kath / DE SOUZA, Marian / DURKA, Gloria / GEARON, Liam (eds.): International Handbook of Inter-religious Education. International Handbooks of Religion and Education, vol 4, Springer: Dordrecht 2010, 1071. DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2_63

¹⁶ Cf. KING, Ursula: Religious Education and Peace: An Overview and Response, in: British Journal of Religious Education, 29/1 (2007), 115–124. DOI: 10.1080/01416200601037593

¹⁷ ΤΣΕΚΟΥ, Aikaterini: Τα Σχολικά Βιβλία των Θρησκευτικών της Δευτεροβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης (1974–2006) [The School Textbooks of Religious Education of Secondary Education (1974–2006)], Thessaloniki: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki 2015 (= PhD Thesis).

¹⁸ Ibid., 349.

¹⁹ Ibid., 351.

²⁰ Ibid., 362.

In terms of their structure, the religious education curricula include, inter alia, the *general objectives* of religious education, the specific aims and the didactic frameworks for each *cycle* of education, as well as assessment guidelines and teaching material classified into teaching areas and teaching units. Each curriculum is accompanied by the teacher's guide, which includes information on the theoretical documentation of the new curricula, instructions for its educational use as well as *indicative activities*, which the teacher can apply during the implementation of the curriculum. The textbooks of the new curricula are in the process of being written and, according to the Ministry of Education, are to be used from the next school year onwards.

The selection and classification of the educational material in religious education curricula is according to the theory of big ideas²¹. Thus, the eight big ideas, which in the curricula are called *thematic fields*, have been selected. The eight *thematic fields* are repeated in a spiral form in four *cycles* of education, i.e. *cycle* one (grades C and D) and *cycle* 2 (grades E and F) corresponding to primary school, *cycle* 3 corresponding to gymnasium and *cycle* 4 corresponding to lyceum. According to this model, the content of religious education in primary school, gymnasium and lyceum is closely linked to the specific thematic areas (big ideas) that are repeated in each *cycle*. It is, however, differentiated in terms of the individual teaching units that each thematic area includes in each *cycle*, in order to adapt to the pedagogical potential and needs of the students. In addition, the individual *thematic units* of each *thematic field* are structured around three basic ideas, which contribute to the achievement of the specific objectives of religious education at each educational level.

These ideas answer the following questions: a. What does it mean for a student to be an Orthodox Christian and how does this choice affect their life, b. How does religious faith affect the Greek cultural context and how does the student's Christian identity affect the social roles they assume in the wider social context, and c. How does the student's Christian identity affect their functioning as a citizen of the Greek state and the world at large.²² Therefore, each *thematic field* is repeated in each *cycle* and includes *thematic units* that are directly related to the *thematic field* and respond to the three basic questions. It also includes expect-

21 Cf. MITROPOULOU, Vasiliki / STOGIANNIDIS, Athanasios / VAVETSI, Chrysanthi / EFRAIMIDIS, Pavlos / ZIMIANITIS, Konstantinos / KARELA, Georgia / KOLLIAS, Sotirios / MICHPOULOS, Vasileios / PRENTOS, Konstantinos / TZINOS, Georgios: Οδηγός Εκπαιδευτικού. Θρησκευτικά Δημοτικού. [Teachers' Guide. Religious Education for Primary School], Athens: Institution of Educational Policy ²2022.

22 Ibid., 5; KOUKOUNARAS-LIAGKIS, Marios / VOULGARAKI, Evangelia / DESPOTIS, Sotirios / PAPAIOANNOU, Emmanouil / SISKOU, Giolanta / SYRGIANNI, Maria / TRIANTAFYLLOU, Kyriaki: Οδηγός Εκπαιδευτικού. Θρησκευτικά Γυμνασίου [Teachers' Guide. Religious Education for Gymnasium], Athens: Institution of Educational Policy ²2022, 7.

ted *learning outcomes* according to the learning potential of the students and *indicative activities* for teaching and assessment.

This research aims to extract dominant themes and patterns in the new religious education curricula and to examine the identity of Christians and their relationship with religiously different people in Greece. During the analysis stage, themes and messages were identified in the curricula texts. According to this research, the above findings aim to highlight the importance of peace and the peaceful coexistence of religious differences in the curricula. These results are data that could contribute to establishing the degree of preparation and encouragement of students, that they may need for encounters, dialogue, peaceful coexistence and solidarity between Orthodox Christians and religiously diverse students.

4. Peace and its Teaching in the Context of Religious Education according to the 2023 Curricula

The first explicit reference to the term peace is common to the *general objectives* of the three curricula, where it is stated that religious education contributes, among other things “[...] to highlighting the importance of religious education in terms of students’ competency to communicate with themselves, with others and with the world at large, to create, to act on their own initiative, to cultivate skills and to produce new knowledge, which is transformed into action in society, inspired by the vision and hope for peace, coexistence, equality, democracy and, in general, for change and improvement in the world”.²³

The *general objectives* of religious education in schools include objectives that indirectly enhance the peaceful coexistence of people. The indicative references to the fact that religious education contributes to the development of free and responsible citizens who are prepared for their presence in the public sphere as bearers of universal principles and values is of paramount importance. The familiarisation of pupils with religious traditions and non-religious worldviews in order to cultivate skills of dialogue, respect for diversity and peaceful cooperation and coexistence with religiously different people, is an indirect reference to the value of peace and its defence.

23 MITROPOULOU, Vasiliki / STOGIANNIDIS, Athanasios / VAVETSI, Chrysanthi / EFRAIMIDIS, Pavlos / ZIMIANITIS, Konstantinos / KARELA, Georgia / KOLLIAS, Sotirios / MICHOPoulos, Vasileios / PRENTOS, Konstantinos / TZINOS, Georgios: Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών για το Μάθημα των Θρησκευτικών στο Δημοτικό. [Curriculum for Primary School], Athens: Institution of Educational Policy ²2022, 3; ΚΟΥΚΟΥΝΑΡΑΣ–ΛΙΑΓΚΙΣ, Marios / ΒΟΥΛΓΑΡΑΚΙ, Evangelia / DESPOTIS, Sotirios / ΠΑΠΑΙΟΑΝΝΟΥ, Emmanouil / ΣΙΣΚΟΥ, Giolanta / SYRGIANNI, Maria / TRIANTAFYLLOU, Kyriaki: Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών για το Μάθημα των Θρησκευτικών στις Α΄, Β΄ και Γ΄ τάξεις Γυμνασίου [Curriculum for the A, B and C Gymnasium grades], Athens: Institution of Educational Policy ²2022, 7; ΚΟΡΝΑΡΑΚΙΣ, Konstantinos / ΑΛΒΑΝΑΚΙ, Xanthi / ΓΟΥΛΑΣ, Konstantinos / ΠΕΠΕΣ, Evangelos / ΤΣΙΡΕΒΕΛΟΣ, Nikolaos / ΦΑΝΑΡΑΣ, Vasileios / ΧΡΙΣΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, Nikolaos: Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών για το Μάθημα των Θρησκευτικών στις Α΄, Β΄ και Γ΄ τάξεις Λυκείου. [Curriculum for the A, B and C Lyceum grades], Athens: Institution of Educational Policy ²2022, 3.

The term peace is also found in the *special aims* of the first and second *cycle* of education (primary education), while implicit references to its value are found in the *special aims* of all *cycles* of education. In particular, in the first two *cycles* of education, religious education aims at making pupils “[...] aware that the vision of the Kingdom of God, which the Orthodox Church experiences, leads effortlessly to the assumption of responsibility and to the struggle for peace, equality, justice and practical solidarity among human beings”²⁴ and “[...] to cultivate the moral values of Christianity, as a proposal and attitude to life in the public sphere expressed in practical solidarity with the suffering, peaceful coexistence, respect for diversity, equality and justice”.²⁵ At the same time, reference is made to people’s relationship with God and its importance as a source of inspiration for changing the way of thinking and living and transforming society and culture.²⁶ Furthermore, in the fourth *cycle* of education (lyceum), the defence of peace is analysed as a result of the Church’s teachings on the Triune God, Christ, the Church, the world and people, the value of the human person and its contribution to the overall development of humankind and people’s social life with respect and love for their fellow human beings and the environment.²⁷ The term peace is not included in the *thematic fields* that are repeated in a spiral form in the four *cycles* of education. The term war and other related terms are not identified. According to the theoretical framework for the design of the new curricula, peace, war and related concepts are included as content in the *thematic fields*, which serve as central reference points – in this case corresponding to fundamental aspects of Orthodox theology – from which the *thematic units* – which are different in each *cycle* – that are taught to students are derived. Therefore, the *thematic field* “The phenomenon of religion in the world around us”, which functions as a big idea in the new curriculum for gymnasium, includes a *thematic unit* entitled “Dialogue with religious diversity from the perspective of the Orthodox faith” and the expected *learning outcome* is the realization of the need to cultivate dialogue between believers of different religious communities as well as non-believers.²⁸ The corresponding *thematic field* of the lyceum curriculum includes a *thematic unit* entitled “Inter-religious dialogue” and the expected *learning outcome* is the discovery of the individual aspects of religious dialogue

24 MITROPOULOU [note 21], 4.

25 Ibid., 4.

26 Ibid., 3.

27 KORNARAKIS [note 23], 3–4.

28 KOUKOUNARAS-LIAGKIS [note 23], 40.

by students and the way in which dialogue affects both the personal and collective lives of believers and people in general.²⁹

The term peace is found in a *thematic unit* of the primary school curriculum, as well as in the expected *learning outcomes* and in the *indicative activities* of the curricula for primary school, gymnasium and lyceum. In particular, in the *thematic field* “Church–Worship–Scripture” in primary school, a *thematic unit* entitled “The Church, which remains united and peaceful through struggles and sacrifices” is included.³⁰ The expected *learning outcomes* indicate that the aim of this unit is, on the one hand, to cultivate pupils’ historical memory of the efforts made during the period of the First Ecumenical Council for the unity of the Christian Church and, on the other hand, to highlight the importance of the council system as a democratic way of solving problems within the Church. In this context, there are also references to the role of the Church during the Turkish domination and the Second World War³¹ and during the Holocaust of the Jews.³²

There are, however, numerous indirect references to the contribution of the Christian tradition to the preservation of peace or to the promotion of a way of personal and social life that fosters equality, fraternity and solidarity in the modern world. Indicatively, expected learning outcomes in the first and second cycle of education (primary school) are the students’ awareness of the need for the care and love of everyone without exceptions, the understanding of the importance of the cooperation of everyone for the common good based on the Tower of Babel narrative, the recognition of the value of unconditional love on the basis of the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the recognition of forgiveness as an element of overcoming conflicts and confrontations as a conclusion of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Furthermore, the recognition of childlike simplicity which contributes to overcoming differences between people, the understanding of love as a unifying element among Christians in Christian communities and among people in general, the acquaintance with the charitable work of the Church and the awareness of the equality of the genders and of everyone regardless of differences of gender, race, language and faith.

29 KORNARAKIS [note 23], 52.

30 MITROPOULOU [note 23], 33.

31 Ibid., 36–37.

32 KORNARAKIS [note 29], 47.

5. Critical Analysis

The explicit statement of the vision of peace in the general objectives of religious education in the new curricula (2023) highlights its importance as a social good and its fragile nature, a fact which probably arises both from the experience of the previous wars in which Greece was involved, and from the contemporary experience of modern wars that have taken place in the recent past or are ongoing at the global level. Moreover, the inclusion of the objective of strengthening and consolidating peace among the objectives of school religious education underlines the important role it can play among other subjects in achieving this objective.

The explicit and implicit references found in the *special aims* of the four *cycles* of education, apart from highlighting the social dimension of the Christian doctrine and the teaching of other religious traditions, offer a new dimension of peace to students in an exclusive way. That is, it links the harmonious and peaceful coexistence of human beings with the restoration of the relationship of each person with God and creation, which was disrupted by man's departure from paradise. Peace, in this case, is also considered in the light of Christian theology, and its prevalence in modern society presupposes the reconciliation of people with their Creator God.

Peace, war and related terms are missing from the *thematic fields*, but they are found in the individual *thematic units* of the four *cycles* of education. The productive connection between the *thematic fields* and the *thematic units* of the curricula makes peace a challenge for contemporary religious education and for the pupils, who, in the context of their own initiative, depending on their developmental level and with the help of the teacher, are called upon to link the social good of peace with the social teachings of Christianity and, more broadly, of other religious traditions in order to solve social problems and to consolidate social stability.

Moreover, in this way religious education becomes a means of demonstrating the peaceful character of Christianity and other religious traditions to pupils and informing them of specific initiative by religious communities to protect and consolidate peace.

This is particularly important as it makes a decisive contribution to strengthening the conviction that religions, as well as being causes of conflict, can be important factors in consolidating the peaceful coexistence of individuals and peoples.

Peace appears only once in a *thematic unit* of the primary school curriculum and refers to the importance of maintaining the internal peace of the Church and the synodical way of solving its problems during the period of the First Ecumenical Council. In other words, at the level of *thematic units*, the ideal of peace is found once in the first *cycle* of education (primary school), with reference to conflicts between Christians. Conflicts due to religious differences, as well as violence, conflicts, or confrontations at the social level, are dealt with in the subsequent *cycles* (gymnasium and lyceum). However, according to the theoretical design framework, the new curricula have the expected *learning outcomes* as the starting point of their design, shifting the focus of pedagogical interest from the subject of teaching to the outcomes of the process of teaching and learning in the context of religious education. Direct and indirect references to peace and its social value in the field of expected *learning outcomes* are abundant. Similarly, there are many references to the social virtues of love, fraternity, charity, forgiveness and solidarity, as well as to the skills of dialogue, cooperation, peaceful coexistence and fruitful interaction with the religiously diverse. Indeed, in the context of religious education and in a spiral progression, the examination of the above elements offers students the opportunity to deepen the theological content of these virtues and skills. It also creates the appropriate conditions for the reduction of social inequalities and the consolidation of equality, peaceful coexistence and interaction of religiously and culturally different people as responses to the various expressions of war and violence in the contemporary Greek social context.

The educational reform of 2011 resulted, among other things, in the change of the model of religious education in Greek schools in order for religious education to respond to the diversity of religious and non-religious traditions of Greek school students and to serve the inclusion policy of the period, which is based on the establishment of conditions of peaceful coexistence of religiously and culturally diverse citizens in Greece. The release of the curricula in 2023 changes the model of religious education in Greek schools again. The question regarding the effectiveness in terms of cultivating the social virtues and skills for peace of the model of religious education introduced by the 2011–2021 curricula remains open for future research.

Moreover, given the fact that the new textbooks that will frame the new curricula of religious education have not been published yet, it would be interesting to conduct further research on the educational material included in them after their publication. This way it could be seen whether the objectives, aims and expected

learning outcomes mentioned in the new curricula regarding the issue of peace have been achieved.

Conclusion

The wars of Greek and world history prove that the nature of peace is always very fragile. Therefore, peace as a personal and social good should not be seen as an acquired good, but as something constantly sought after. The Greek direct experience resulting from Greece's participation in wars as well as the indirect experience of their consequences, such as, for example, the contemporary refugee flows from Syria, raise theological and pedagogical questions in the context of religious education about how to strengthen peace as a social reality. Additionally, it also poses questions about the ways in which the indirect consequences for the educational and wider social context of wars taking place in areas outside Greece can be successfully addressed. In other words, the contemporary requirement for the Greek educational system as a whole and religious education in particular is an education for peace which, on the one hand, will teach students and future citizens of Greek society ways of preventing war and defending peace and, on the other hand, will be effective in an ever changing society whose ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural homogeneity is constantly changing.

The years from 2011 to 2023 are characterized as a period of change for religious education, which, among other things, aims to answer the question of the pedagogical management of religious diversity in religious education at school, which has a direct impact on the peaceful coexistence of religiously and culturally diverse students both in the school and in the wider social environment. The 2023 curricula for religious education conclude this period of change. An analysis of their content has highlighted the fact that peace is a fundamental aim and objective of religious education in primary school, gymnasium and lyceum. The examination of the theological dimensions of both the causes of conflict and violence and the conditions for their prevalence highlights the important role that religious education can play towards defending and consolidating world peace. Finally, the new model of the religious education curriculum design aspires to change traditional forms of teaching and enhance the effectiveness of religious education in achieving its aims and objectives and thus the goal of personal and social peace. The evaluation of the implementation of the 2023 religious education curricula and the use of the new religious education textbooks in schools is the next step of the research that will either confirm the success of this objective, or not.