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## The relevance of the learning contents for Orthodox religious education in Basic education as perceived by guardians and teachers

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### Abstract

This article focuses on how relevant the guardians of children and young people and their teachers of the Orthodox Religion consider the contents of pupils' own religious education. The study is based on the key contents and some sub contents close to them for the Orthodox religious education in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education in Finland (2014). The background to the study is a review of related studies and an overview of the evolution of the nature of the curricula in terms of objectives and content. The data was collected in February 2020 through an electronic questionnaire with mainly closed questions, but also including open ones, and was answered by 372 people. Based on the results, it seems that guardians and teachers no longer consider the main focus of Orthodox religious education to be on strengthening pupils' Orthodox identity, but to inform the pupils of their own religion. Attitudes to this and other learning contents vary according to respondents' background variables.

**Key words:** orthodox religion, education, curricula, learning contents, guardians

### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to find out and introduce how relevant the guardians and teachers perceive the learning contents introduced in the latest curriculum for the Orthodox religious education (ORE) in the Finnish Basic education (2014). There were seven learning contents to be ranked, which will be introduced in capture 3. In addition, the research task explores whether background variables explain the different attitudes of the target groups towards the content of teaching.

In Finland, the curricula for school education are made by the National Board of Education. Religious education is a compulsory subject in Finnish nine-year basic education (grades 1-9), starting at the age of seven. Since 2003, religious education in Finland is based in basic education and in general upper secondary education on a principle “*in accordance to one's own religion*”. According to the Law of Basic Education (section 13) “*the instruction of religion is arranged in conformity with the religious community*”

*of the pupils as instruction of the religion to which the pupil belongs in accordance with separate syllabi*". As the previous curricula show, religious education was confessional in nature.

In the National Current Curriculum for Basic Education (2014) there are 10 different curricula for Religious Education (RE). Because RE is related to one's own religion, every RE version has been named according to a certain religion such as Lutheran, Orthodox, Islam, Catholic, Jewish, etc. The general aims of the Finnish RE are to familiarize the pupil with his or her own religion, Finnish spiritual tradition, other religions as well as cultural and ethical dimensions of religion. The status of Orthodox instruction differs from other religious minorities. If there are at least three (3) Orthodox children in a municipality, pupils' instruction is automatically provided, and parents' request is not needed. Those pupils who are not members of any denomination or religious group are provided instruction in secular ethics where different worldviews and ethics are studied. (Basic Education Act 628/1998.) The lesson is also called life-stance education or world-view education.

The religious education curricula included in the basic education curricula from 1970 to 2014 are examined in order to present the nature of their content related to RE. The curriculum currently in force (2014) is the fifth curriculum for basic schools. In the area of religion, it includes, to a lesser extent than previous curricula, explicitly the objectives and contents of Orthodox religious education. In addition, research results from related studies, theses and reports are presented to provide a basis for comparison.

## 1. Curricula between 1970-2014

### 1.1. Curriculum in the 1970s – “raising active parishioners”

In the first curriculum for ORE in the 1970s, the main objective, in addition to learning about one's own religious tradition, was to “raise active parishioners” through its contents. The content of the curriculum was written down on the basis of its own ORE objectives for each class and divided into topics to be covered during the autumn and spring terms (Aikonen, 1998, p. 414; Committee report 1970: A5, pp. 252–259; Railas 1981, p. 141).

After the start of comprehensive school in the mid-1970s, the amendments on the division of hours and learning content in religious education meant the reorganization of orthodox religious education. On the basis of the working group's proposal, from the academic year 1978–79 onwards, a curriculum called “Curricula and Instructional Guidelines for Orthodox Religious Education in Primary Schools” was implemented in Orthodox religious education. It had been approved by the National School Board on 23 March 1977 (Kouluhallitus, 1977). Topics related to other churches, great world religions, international education, students' life issues, and social issues were added to the content. The same academic year (1978-79) also saw the introduction of the first grade's textbook in the "I am Orthodox" series for primary schools. Thereafter, new books appeared as the transition to the new curriculum progressed<sup>1</sup> (Railas, 1981, p. 142).

1 The series has been the only and the first textbook series of orthodox religion until autumn 2005. Since then, a series of textbooks written by various working groups of Orthodox teachers for primary school Orthodox religious education began to appear, published by the National Board of Education.

## 1.2. Curriculum 1985 – introduction of social orientation into religious education

The foundations of the basic school curriculum were renewed in 1985. In terms of objectives and content, they followed previous curricula, but it included two changes. The Orthodox subject defined the content to be considered for teaching in all grades: Christmas, Easter, and the liturgical year. The rest of the class-specific syllabus was broken down, depending on the grade, with goals specified in the 3-5 theme set (Kouluhallitus, 1985, pp. 119-125). The content of the curriculum was reformed with a stronger emphasis on municipal-based learning contents (Aikonen, 2015).

One clear phenomenon was that in the 1980s the trend in religious education began to be more socially oriented and pay attention to the general objectives of school education. Nevertheless, religious education was still confessional, and church centered. For example, 4/7 of the objectives of Lutheran religious education dealt with biblical themes and the teachings of their own church. Two objectives were ethical in nature, and one related to the study of other Christian churches and other religions. There were eight objectives for Orthodox religious education. Of these, three were clearly related to the study of one's own church and the Bible, four were concerned with ethical content and one was related to the study of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Christian communities and non-Christian religions. The objectives were more focused on one's own religion, because one of the purposes of teaching was to "raise active members of the church". The objectives also highlighted ethical issues (Aikonen, 2019; National School Board, 1985, pp. 113, 119).

In autumn 1992, amendments to the Comprehensive School and Upper Secondary School Act of 25 January 1991 entered into force (Act amending the Comprehensive School Act 171/1991 § 28). According to this law, the municipality must always arrange religious education if there are at least three Orthodox pupils in the school. What was new in the act was that the municipality could, at its discretion, arrange teaching even for a group smaller than three pupils without the permission of the provincial government (Aikonen, 1998, p. 416). This principle remained essentially the 'dead letter of the law' (Aikonen, 2015).

## 1.3. Curriculum 1994 – the first steps towards the general objectives of religious education

The curriculum for basic education in 1994 brought radical change to the meaning and philosophy of curricula. It was not as normative as the previous ones and gave schools plenty of room to make their own religious education curricula. What was new in religious education was, for the first time, the establishment of general and common objectives for religious education. They, therefore, applied to both Evangelical Lutheran and Orthodox religious education. The general objectives were applied in the preparation of religious syllabus for each religion. In addition, each religion made learning goals and contents in accordance with its own confession. This was the first step towards changing

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The third series of textbooks on primary orthodox religious education, called Aksios, was launched by the National Board of Education in 2015.

religious education to look at religions even outside themselves and in general, even though teaching was based on confession (Aikonen, 2019).

In the 1994 curriculum the objectives of Orthodox religious education were both ecclesiastically oriented and church centered. It was clearly stated in one objective as "to educate active members of the congregation". In terms of structure, the 1994 curriculum was even an educational normative document with scanty content, taken to the extreme. Compared to the previous curriculum, it was no longer possible to apply for class-specific syllabus of subjects. Some subjects, also, did not itemize the objectives and contents of primary and secondary schools (Aikonen, 2019).

There were 4-5 themes for each school level (Basic School, grades 1 to 6 and Secondary School, grades 7 to 9) as a basis for local curricula. For the Orthodox religion, the text was one page long (National Board of Education 1994, later NBE). To support the evaluation of the curriculum, criteria for the grade good (8) were later developed for the subjects (Opetushallitus, 1999). The "I am Orthodox" -textbook series still corresponded to the curriculum criteria (Aikonen, 2015).

#### 1.4. Curriculum 2004 – the end of confessional teaching

The Religious Freedom Act, which entered into force in 2003, also affected the nature of organizing RE. RE could no longer be confessional, but it had to be arranged in accordance with the pupil's own religion. In Orthodox religious education, it was still emphasized that "the central aim of teaching is to strengthen and maintain the Orthodox identity of the pupil" (Curriculum 2004, p. 209). This could not, however, include the practice of religion, but for pedagogical reasons it could include, for example, hymns, chants or prayers. In Orthodox religious education, to illustrate and support the learning content, icons, troparia and prayer texts can be used (Aikonen, 2019).

The Basic Education Curriculum 2004 can be characterized as a return back to basics. In general, the extent, and in particular the description of the objectives and contents of the subjects, relied on the structure that had been in place 20 years earlier (Aikonen, 2015).

For religion, the curriculum retained common general objectives for all religious groups. They were in line with the objectives set out 10 years earlier. The class-specific contents of the syllabus were used in accordance with the current hourly share. The boundary between the hours of primary and secondary schools was set between grades 5 and 6. According to it, the syllabus included grades 1-5 and 6-9. For each religion, there was a description of good knowledge at the end of grade 5 and criteria for the final assessment for grade 8. In 2006, the basics of the curricula of religions other than Lutheran and Orthodox religion in basic education were given (Aikonen, 2015)<sup>2</sup>.

The objectives and contents of Orthodox religious education were based on the general objectives of religion, but they are designed to support the learning content of the teaching of one's own religion. Teaching is characterized by the fact that it implements pedagogy that defragments the contents of one's own religion. It considers the Church's

2 Those were Adventist religion, Bahá'í religion, Buddhist religion, Religion of the People of the Lord, Islam religion, Jewish religion, Catholic religion, Religion of the Krishna movement, Religion of the Kristi community, Mormons and Free Church religion.

tradition of multi-mediaism, using the different senses (Aikonen, 1999a, 1999b, 2003, 2005). Grades 1-5 and 6-9 have their own objectives and key contents. The objectives of the upper secondary school deepen the goals of the primary school. The main contents of primary school education have been described using five themes. There is one fewer for upper secondary school<sup>3</sup> (Aikonen, 2015).

### 1.5. Curriculum 2014 - common objectives and tasks for all religions

The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education in 2014 (later NCCBE) was renewed in terms of structure and content. In the new structure, the implementation of local education must consider the broad, general, and common tasks of religious education, three content areas, and seven transversal competencies in primary education.<sup>4</sup> The competence closest to religion is “Cultural competence, interaction, and expression, T2” (Opetushallitus, 2014, p. 21; see also Aikonen, 2019).

The curriculum’s broad and common general tasks to different religions and three key content areas serve as a basis for the preparation of religious syllabi for each religion and local curricula. Among the tasks for RE, the common tasks include as following: *“The task of subject of religion is to provide the pupils with an extensive general knowledge and ability regarding religion and worldviews. /.../ The instruction provides the pupil with elements for building and evaluating his or her identity as well as personal view of life and worldview.”* (Opetushallitus, 2014, p. 140). For these reasons, the objectives of teaching are no longer focused on one’s own religion, to learn religion, but are broader and more diverse in terms of content compared to the previous ones. The focus is partly on supporting the student’s growth – learning from religion, but in the 2014 curriculum, other things also strongly reflect the broader examination of the importance of religion – to learn about religion (Grimmit, 1987; Hull, 2002).

In basic education, common tasks, objectives, and core contents (TOC) for all religions have been defined for religious education in grades 1-2, 3-6 and 7-9. All these TOCs are common to all the religions taught in the school to ensure a common basis for the subject. The key contents consist of three orientations: the pupil’s relationship with his or her own religion (C1); the world of religions (C2); and good life (C3). These must be addressed in all grades. In addition, each religion has defined corresponding issues from the perspective of the religion being taught, based on a common TOC framework. Compared to the 2004 curriculum, the TOCs are class specific. There are eight objectives for grades 1 to 2, twelve objectives for grades 3 to 6, and ten objectives for grades 7 to 9. In addition, there is a twelve-point definition of the criteria for the evaluation of religion for the final evaluation of grade 6 (verbal/grade 8) and a ten-point list of objectives for the final evaluation of religion for grade 8 (Opetushallitus, 2014, pp. 141–142, 274–276, 468).

3 In the curricula, the contents deal with the characteristics of the Orthodox Church, ecclesiastical life and celebrations, church art, the doctrines of the Church, holy people, biblical content, ethics, phases of Church history and different religions.

4 Thinking and learning to learn, cultural competence, interaction and self-expression, taking care of oneself and managing daily life, multiliteracy, ICT Competence, working life competence and entrepreneurship, participation, involvement and building a sustainable future (NCCBE, 2014, pp. 17-23).

The teaching of religions (Lutheran, Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish, and Islam)<sup>5</sup> is based on the TOC's common to all in the religion subject. A more detailed syllabus description of the religion to be taught has been prepared for religion-specific teaching. In order to achieve the tasks and objectives addressed to each religion, teaching is based on the above-mentioned three religion specific content areas. The revised syllabus descriptions of the Orthodox religion follow the key content areas of one's own religion. Without not opening these grade specific content descriptions for C1-C3, it can be generalized that those include the doctrines and other characteristics of the Orthodox Church, ecclesiastical life and the tradition of the church year, church art, holy people and their teachings, biblical content, ethics, stages of Church history, and world religions (Opetushallitus, 2014, pp. 137, 144, 279, 472).

Compared to previous objectives and contents, teaching will clearly consider culturally diverse orthodoxy. In addition, more specific focus will be placed on religions and their traditions in Europe and other continents, and the characteristics of Christian and non-Christian religions will be examined. Due to the change in the nature of the curriculum, the syllabus of one's own religion has been limited in some details in terms of content and quantity. The focus has been shifted from the Historical Review of the Church to the religiosity of the time, considering the development of one's own religion globally and locally (Aikonen, 2015).

## 2. Studies and thesis on the nature of ORE

School education in Orthodox religion has not been the subject of large-scale research in Finland. It originated with the founding of the University of Joensuu in the early 1970s. One of the university's national missions was and still is, to educate teachers of the Orthodox religion. For this reason, students from that church applied for class teacher training. The education of comprehensive school classroom teachers became master's level education in 1979 (Kallioniemi, Toom, Ubani, & Linnansaari, 2010, p. 14). At that time, the structure of education changed from three years of education to five years, and the studies included a master's thesis. Since the 1980s, they have been the main research dimension until the 2020s.

In the framework of the University's Lecturer in Pedagogy in Orthodox religion, a large-scale study of teachers teaching Orthodox religion (n=183) was carried out in the early 1990s. Among the research questions, there was a question concerning the teaching objectives in ORE. The main three objectives were, in order of priority, to become an active member of the church, to strengthen orthodox identity, and to create a positive attitude toward orthodoxy. A total of 66% of respondents felt this way (Aikonen, 1997, pp. 53–54).

Sari Vatanen's (2001) research investigated whether parents of children participating in Orthodox religious education at school consider religious education to be necessary and how they justify their opinion (Vatanen, 2001, p. 110.) In Vatanen's research, the most important objectives of the 1994 curriculum were considered to be knowledge of personal religious belief, church tradition, and life of worship. More than half want to

5 The religions included in NCCBE 2014. In 2020, the National Board of education approved curricula for Adventist religion, Bahá'í religion, Buddhist religion, Pentecostal religion and Krishna religion.

keep religious education confessional. Somewhat surprisingly, 40% of respondents could not answer the question (Vatanen, 2001, pp. 115–119).

In her research, Elisa Hyvärinen (2014) studied the students' and parents' perceptions and experiences of teaching Orthodox religion. Parents stated (64 %) that the teaching model should not be changed. This was supported by the view that the school should not have philosophy and life stance education as a substitute for religion. This was the opinion of more than half of the respondents. Religion should also not become an optional subject (48 %) (Hyvärinen, 2014, pp. 24–25). 46 % of parents considered the teaching of Orthodox religion necessary and 41 % felt it was important for the immigrant in terms of his or her identity. Among teachers, they stated that a teacher teaching Orthodox religion should be Orthodox (76 %). The open answers highlighted the problems of the schedule, but on the other hand, teachers were satisfied, and teaching had been perceived as of high quality (Hyvärinen, 2014, pp. 57–63). On the basis of the results in Hyvärinen's thesis, parents clearly value the teaching in accordance of pupil's own religion, because parents do not want to change it. After all, the changes would also have an impact on the objectives and content of teaching.

Annika Jonninen's (2014) master's thesis examined teachers' views on the arrangements and objectives of religious education in the academic year 2012–13. Fifty-four teachers of Orthodox religion responded to the survey. The most important goal of teaching was to get to know one's own church and religion. This was the view of 57 % of teachers. The second most important was the teaching of orthodox lifestyle and traditions (32 %), and only the third was the strengthening of Orthodox identity (24 %) (Jonninen, 2014, pp. 64–67). The setting of teachers' religious education goals emphasized cognitive rather than affective goals.

Orthodox religious education and teachers' experiences have been examined by Hyvärinen and Metso (2018). The article highlighted, among other things, the content and practical link between identity and Orthodox religious education. Metso's (2019) study highlighted parents' experiences of teaching their children's Orthodox religion. Parents considered religious education to be an important shape of children's Orthodox identity. In Lyhykäinen's study, teachers highlight a teaching tradition based on their own tradition, which supports the identity of a minority when faced with other religions and beliefs (2009, p. 475).<sup>6</sup>

## 2.1 Approaches to the objectives of religious education

The well-known approach and interpretation concerning the nature of the objectives in Religious education comes, originally, from Michael Grimmit (1987) and adopted by John Hull (2002). The basic types are as follow: 1) learning religion, 2) learning about religion, 3) learning from religion.

According to Hull (2002) in the first model, *learning religion*, the question is that RE is based on one religious tradition and the contents are taught from the inside perspective. The goal is to indoctrinate the pupils into a certain religious confession by strengthen their commitment to it through RE. In a plural society based on this model,

6 See also Aikonen 2021, pp. 256-257.



Hull sees two ways for RE. Either it is not provided at all in the education system, or each religion has parallel and separate lessons in school, taught by qualified teachers. In the first case, RE is a responsibility of religious communities or homes.

The second model, *learning about religion*, the point of view is not confession-based religion as such. The content of the teaching is presented from an external perspective and pupils are taken to look at religion like from behind a shop window. The question is more to learn certain facts and contents of a religion than to adopt its manners to start to live according to them. With this, one can notice some similarities with the science of religion. Hull criticizes this model and states that this leaves the pupils outsiders in the way that the content focused education does not meet pupils' need to get support to their spiritual and moral values.

The third approach in RE is dealing with *learning from religion*. Compared to the previous ones it can be said that this is the most pupil-friendly approach to implement RE at schools. Religion is not considered from the point of view of the science of religion, as in the two previous cases, but from the point of view of educational sciences. In this model, the aim of religious education is to support pupils' growth as human beings, by seeking to teach content that is relevant to their moral and spiritual development as well as to support the formation of their worldview perception. At the heart of religious education is the student as learner.

Hella and Wright (2009) have applied and reflected these approaches in their study concerning RE in Finland and UK. They see that the objectives, learning about and learning from, in RE are linked to each other. The first one is connected to be informed about a religion (knowledge) and the second one is supposed to have an effect with the personal development (skills). In this setting RE is a two-phase process, where knowledge fosters the personal development (Hella & Wright, 2009, p. 54). According to Hella and Wright (2009, pp. 56, 62), the latest curricula are emphasizing both learning about and learning from approaches in Finnish RE and the teaching of religion must be accompanied by a combination of both approaches. They summarize the prevailing approaches: students can achieve a deep understanding of religion (learn about religion), by incorporating this understanding into their own belief system (learning from religion).

### 3. Implementation of the study

A total of 372 persons responded to this survey on Orthodox religious education. The study, based on a phenomenological research orientation, examines the following research questions related to the learning contents of religious education:

1. *How relevant the respondents consider the learning contents introduced in the curriculum for the Orthodox religious education in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education in Finland (2014)?*
2. *Does the respondent's background explain the relevance of the learning content?*

Respondents were asked to rank the seven curriculum content topics (see Graph 1) in order of importance, based on curriculum in NCCBE 2014. These were reflection on ethical issues, knowledge of world religions, familiarization with the pupil's own religion and its customs, learning about different faiths, the content of Bible stories, knowledge of

worship life and the development of the pupil's religious identity. To get more accurate conception of the learning contents from guardians and teachers, these seven topics were also classified and combined into three categories (C1 – C3) introduced in NCCBE 2014.

The data were collected in February 2020 (n=372). The e-form survey was conducted online as an open survey in the Department of Applied Education and Teacher Education at the University of Eastern Finland. Its target groups were guardians of Orthodox pupils in comprehensive school and upper secondary school, as well as teachers teaching Orthodox religion. The actual research questions were closed, but in order to increase the credibility and reliability of the results, they were essentially accompanied by open-ended questions.

The classification of the open-ended responses was carried out first by searching for the same or similar expressions or core words in the responses. Next, the table was used to classify the similar expressions in different colors. These were examined for unifying features, which were grouped into their own categories in different colors. Themes could be identified and named on the basis of the content analysis of the groups. Each response was placed under one theme. The resulting themes have been analyzed by questions in terms of their quantitative percentages in the different open-ended responses.

The respondents' task was to prioritize seven learning content, based on the 2014 curriculum. Respondents expressed their views on a scale of 1= the most important thing, 2= important thing, 3= almost important thing, 4= can be important or not important, 5= less important thing, 6= not important at all, 7= least important thing. In order to clarify the results, the scale was compressed in three categories, by combining the options of the scale into new variables. Variables 1, 2 and 3 were combined into the variable 'important', Variable 4 was designated as 'cannot say' and variables 5,6 and 7 was designated as 'not important'. More condensed names were also given for the learning content (see Graph 1).

The analysis and conclusions of the curriculum content assessment (valuing) are based on a comparison of the percentages of responses by response category. Differences between groups or based on other background variables, only statistically significant, have been reported using statistical indicators. T-test and cross-tabulation have been used as statistical significance tests for different respondent groups or other background variables.

An analytical review of responses examines how background variables have influenced perceptions of the importance of learning content. The background variables were designed to elicit the views of different respondent groups on the actual survey questions. Background variables included the respondent's gender, age in three classes, the respondent's educational background, whether the respondent is a guardian, a guardian/teacher's ecclesiastical background, teacher qualifications, the respondent's residence and the number of inhabitants of the respondent's place of residence. Reporting does not systematically go through all background variables and their potential impact on the view of the importance of learning content. The analysis has mainly considered the impact of the most descriptive background variables related to views. In relation to different background variables, only differences with statistical significance have been recorded in the article.

In the students' thesis, the term "parents or guardians" or "parents" were used. In this report, instead of "parents and guardians", the term "guardians" is used to simplify

and to avoid over-complicating the concept of family, but it also includes the “parents”.

### 3.1. Description of the survey population

Of the respondents (n=372), 3/4 were women and the rest were men. 92 % of respondents were guardians and 8 % were teachers. Just over a quarter (27 %) of guardians reported that they responded in the role of an Orthodox religious teacher. Those teachers (8 %) and guardians in a role of a teacher (27 %) make a group of “teachers”. More than half of the respondents were in the 36-45 age group. Of the respondents, 32 % (n=133) were guardians belonging to the Orthodox Church. Of these, 60 % (n=252) were from ecumenical families, meaning that only one was a member of the Orthodox Church. Among the guardians, 8 % (n=36) was not a member of the Orthodox Church. A church background was not indicated by 6 % (n=25) of the respondents. 71% of teachers reported belonging to the Orthodox Church.<sup>7</sup> The majority had a university education, such as a bachelor’s degree (7 %), a master’s degree (36 %) or a doctorate (7 %).

Most respondents were from Southern Finland (54.1 %) and Eastern Finland (42.2 %). There were no respondents from the Provinces of Åland and Northern Finland. In terms of respondents’ place of residence (over 200,001 inhabitants), the majority of respondents lived in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. 90 % of the respondents were guardians of primary school pupils. Almost 60 % of them had pupils in grades 1-6 and the rest in grades 7-9. 10 % of guardians of pupils in primary education were guardians.

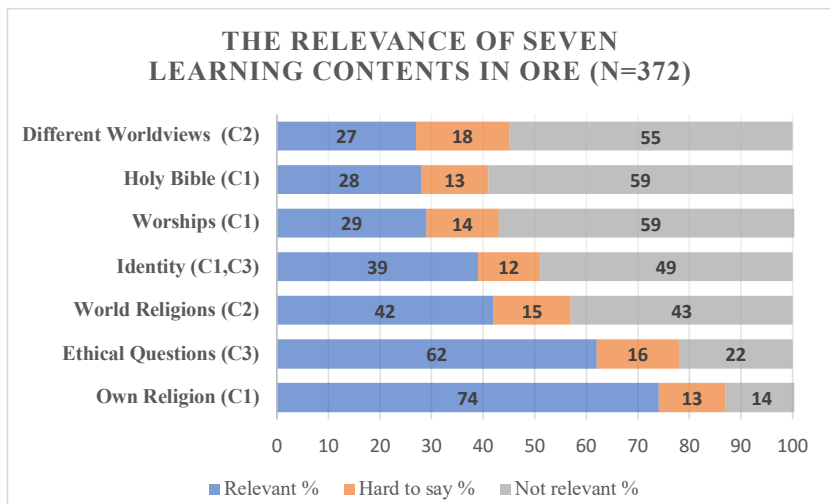
## 4. How relevant were the learning contents considered to be?

### 4.1. Own religion as a content the most prestigious

In the curricula of Orthodox religious education based on the current 2014 curriculum, respondents stated that the primary curriculum content was to introduce pupils to their own religion and its customs (C1). The second highest priority was given to reflection on ethical issues (C3). Knowledge of world religions (C2) was considered the third most relevant content. Respondents ranked the development of pupils’ religious identity (C1) fourth (see Graph 1).

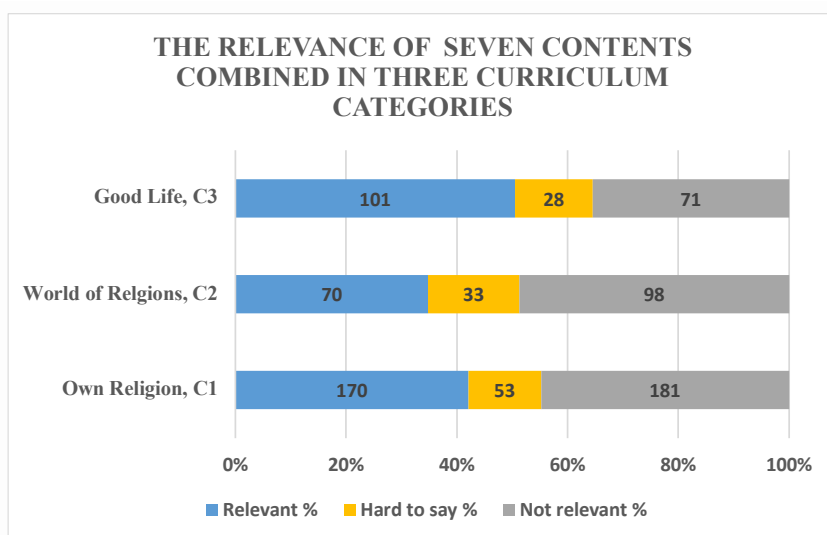
The other three were rated less highly than the previous four, and of almost equal importance. Knowledge of the life of worship (C1) was rated very slightly higher than the other two. Knowledge of the content of the Bible (C1) was rated second last, ahead of knowledge of different worldviews (C2). On a summarized scale, 18 % of respondents were most uncertain about knowledge of different worldviews, compared to other contents. As regards the three content areas, their perceived importance was almost identical. The difference between the other four learning content areas was clear and there were no significant differences between them.

<sup>7</sup> According to the eligibility requirements of the teaching staff, the person teaching religion does not have to be a member of the religion to be taught, but the teacher is required to study in the subject to be taught in comprehensive school and upper secondary school in accordance with the regulations (Act 986/1998 § 21a).



**Graph 1.** The relevance of the seven learning contents in Orthodox religious education summarized into three answer categories.

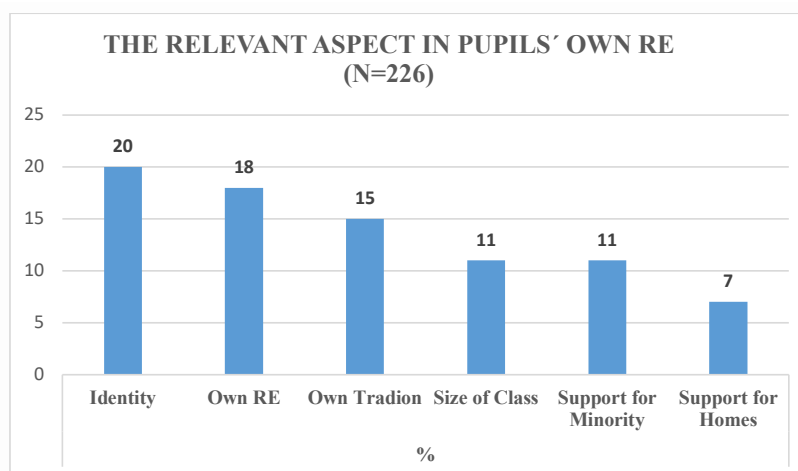
As seen in Graph 1, the guardians and teachers were emphasizing the ethical questions almost as much as the teaching of own religion. In the curricula the C3 includes also the issues related to the growth of pupil’s identity associated with the Orthodox conception of human. This means that identity can justifiably be included both to C3 and to C1 when summarizing the seven learning content areas of the study into the three content categories of the curriculum. When the seven learning contents are applied with the C1, C2 and C3 contents of the current religious education curriculum, the result of the study gives a new perspective. As a result, Graph 2 shows that, compared to the other two contents, Good Life (C3) is the most relevant and valued learning content of ORE



**Graph 2.** The relevance of the learning contents of Orthodox religious education, summarized in three content categories in RE according to the 2014 curriculum.

for guardians and teachers.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the result rises the ethical content area of teaching as the most relevant learning content. Figure 2 also shows that there is a dichotomous approach to C1, while there is a less dichotomous approach to the content of C2 and C3.

Guardians and teachers were also asked to describe in an open-ended question, what they consider to be relevant aspects of teaching religion in accordance with pupil's own religion (see Graph 3). A total of 226 people answered to the open question. One in five felt that the subject was important for the identity of their pupils. Almost the same proportion (18 %) felt that it was precisely the teaching of their own religion that was important. This result gives a somewhat mixed impression of the opinion of guardians and teachers on the relevance of subject content. In the learning contents, identity was not seen as such relevant content, but it is seen central to the subject itself (cf. Graph 1 and Graph 3).



**Graph 3.** The relevant aspect in the ORE on pupils' own religious education.

## 4.2. Background variables and the relevance of learning content

### 4.2.1. Own religion

Almost 3/4 of the respondents considered learning about own religion (C1) to be the most important learning content (see Graph 1). There was no statistically significant difference between the gender of the respondent, but women (76 %) rated this more highly than men (66 %). In the 18-35 age group, 67 % of respondents rated learning about pupils' own religion as important, compared with up to 10 % higher among those older than them. Among those aged 36-50 years, the highest proportion of respondents (77 %) rated learning about own religion as important. 73 % of guardians and 87 % of teachers rated it as important. Compared to other educational groups, respondents with a college or university background (78 %) were slightly more likely to value learning

<sup>8</sup> The 100% scale in Graph 2 compares the percentages that the response rates represent of the total.

about own religion than their guardians with a lower (74 %) or higher (71 %) level of education. The difference between other respondents' educational backgrounds was statistically significant ( $X^2(4) = 11.281$   $p = .024$ ).

According to the average of the responses, the province or the population size played some role. Teaching of own religion was considered important as follows: in Western and North Finland 83 %, in Eastern of Finland 78 % and in Southern Finland 70 %. In regions with a population of between 20,001 and 100,000 inhabitants, the importance of learning about one's own religion was 80 %. In municipalities with less than 20,000 inhabitants, the importance of this learning content was lowest, with only 13 % of the population considering this content important. Regardless of the teacher's qualifications or job title, learning about one's own religion was equally important. There were no statistically significant differences.

However, the respondent's religious background was statistically significant. Guardians of Orthodox and ecumenical families were more likely than other respondent groups to consider learning about their own religion important (80 %). Among non-Orthodox, 46 % agreed with the above respondent groups. More than one in five non-Orthodox did not consider it important and among them almost one in three could not express an opinion. The difference between non-Orthodox and Orthodox and Ecumenical families was significant ( $X^2(4) = 11.422$   $p = .022$ ).

#### 4.2.2. Ethical questions

Reflection on ethical issues (C3) was considered the second most important learning content. Based on the average of the responses, men (72 %) were more likely than women (59 %) to value ethical issues as important learning content. The difference in appreciation between men and women was significant ( $X^2(2) = 10.422$ ,  $p = .005$ ). Respondents aged 18-35 were slightly more likely than older respondents (65 %) to rate a reflection on ethical issues as important, but the difference was not statistically significant. In all three age groups (18-35, 36-50, and 51-65), about one-fifth did not consider this learning content important. Based on the average of the responses, guardians (63 %) also valued this slightly more than teachers (53 %). The second most important content, reflection on ethical issues, was least valued by respondents with the lowest educational background.<sup>9</sup> The difference compared to respondents with higher educational backgrounds was significant ( $X^2(4) = 9.817$ ,  $p = .044$ ).<sup>10</sup>

The school level of the pupils also had an impact on the importance of ethical issues as a subject matter. In secondary school, only slightly more than one in two guardians considered it important. In primary and upper secondary school, 2/3 of respondents considered it important. Examined by the pupils' school level, the difference in valuation was significant ( $X^2(4) = 10.887$ ,  $p = .028$ ). Guardians (77 %), neither of whom were members of the Orthodox Church, considered reflection on ethical issues more important than guardians with an Orthodox background (55 %) or where only one of them belonged to the Orthodox Church (64 %). The qualification or job title of the religious teacher had no statistically significant effect. In both Southern and Eastern Finland, 2/3

9 Primary school, comprehensive school, upper secondary school or vocational school.

10 College level, University of Applied Sciences, or University.

considered important to study ethical issues. In these regions, one fifth of respondents did not consider it important.

### 4.2.3. World religions

The third most valued content was the content that explores world religions (C2). There was an even split between men and women. 43 % of men and 41 % of women considered this important, while 40 % of men and 45 % of women considered this content unimportant. Around 15 % in both groups could not say. There was already a statistically significant difference between the different age groups. Younger respondents (18-35 years old) considered world religions important (54 %), while older respondents (51-65 years old) did not (51 %). These views were mirror images of each other. The difference was almost statistically significant ( $X^2(4) = 8.026, p = .091$ ). There was also statistical significance in the differences in views between guardians and teachers ( $X^2(2) = 8.146, p = .017$ ).

Guardians (44 %) were more than twice as likely to think this learning content was important, while only one in five teachers (20 %) shared the same view as guardians. However, among guardians, 41 % also did not consider it important. 67 % of teachers felt the same way. Further, the church background of the student's guardian had a statistically significant impact on views ( $X^2(4) = 11.995, p = .018$ ). Among non-Orthodox, 65 % of respondents considered world religions as important learning content, compared to only 36 % of Orthodox respondents. Among ecumenical families, 43 % considered this important.

There was no statistically significant effect of the pupils' school level or the respondents' province. The opinions were almost evenly split as to whether or not the content was considered important in relation to the school level of the student or the respondent's province. The educational background or job title of the teacher also played no role. Respondents with a lower level of education (see footnote 9) were more likely than those with a higher level of education to consider the content of world religions more important, with almost half (49 %) of them agreeing. However, the respondent's place of living in terms of the number of the population had statistical significance. In regions with a population of 100,001 to 200,001, nearly one in two (48 %) considered the learning content of world religions important, while in small localities it was not considered important by 45 %. The difference was statistically almost significant ( $X^2(4) = 7.954, p = .093$ ).

### 4.2.4. Pupils' Orthodox identity

The development of pupils' identity was considered to be the fourth most important task of religious education in terms of content (C1, C3). However, one in two men did not consider it important and almost the same proportion of women (48 %) agreed. However, women (40 %) were slightly more likely than men (35 %) to consider it important. The age of the respondent was clearly related to the value placed on this educational task. Almost 60 % of the youngest respondents (aged 18-35) did not consider the development of pupils' identity important and one in two of those older than them (aged 36-59) felt

the same way. Similarly, among those aged 51 and over, almost 40 % thought it was important. Thus, as age increases, this value seems to increase. Two-thirds of teachers also considered it important, while one in two guardians thought it was not an important teaching task. The difference in opinion between teachers and guardians was statistically significant ( $X^2 (2) = 10.779, p = .005$ ).

In addition to the age of the respondent, the school level of the pupils had a similar effect on the perception of the role of education in the development of the pupils' identity. Among guardians, 54 % of primary school pupils' guardians, 48 % of secondary school pupils' guardians, and 27 % of upper secondary school pupils' guardians did not consider identity development important. Among high school students' guardians, one in two guardians considered this role important. It can be seen that the lower the school level of the pupils', the less importance was attached to developing the pupils' identity. Contrary to what might have been expected, in Orthodox families more than half (54 %) of guardians did not consider this educational role important. The same was true (58 %) if neither parent was a member of the Orthodox Church. Identity development was considered most important (39 %) in families where one of the guardians belonged to the Orthodox Church.

Among teachers, there was a statistically significant difference ( $X^2 (2) = 9.229, p = .010$ ) depending on whether the teacher was a member of the Orthodox Church or not. Among Orthodox teachers, views were almost evenly divided between those who considered the task important (45 %) and those who did not (48 %). Among teachers without any religious affiliation, 58 % did not consider the role important. The educational background of the religion teacher played a role, with 77 % of those qualified as an Orthodox religion teacher considering the role important. Among teachers with no qualifications, views on the importance of the issue did not rise as high. A third of those who teach Orthodox religion as part of their classroom teaching responsibilities considered it important, and more than twice as many of those in full-time religious education positions considered it important. However, among part-time teachers, 71 % considered identity development to be important. This view is in line with the qualification.

The educational background of the respondent only slightly differentiated the answers. More than half (54 %) of those with the lowest educational background (primary school, basic school, upper secondary school, vocational school) did not consider this task important. One in two of those with a college or polytechnic degree also felt the same way. Those with a university education were almost evenly split, with 44 % saying it was important and 46 % saying it was not important. In municipalities with less than 20,000 inhabitants, 54 % did not consider it important, the highest proportion compared to larger municipalities. It was most important (43 %) in agglomerations of between 20,001 and 100,000 inhabitants. In Southern Finland, more than one in two (51 %) did not consider it important, while 40 % in Eastern Finland and 75 % in Northern Finland considered it important.

#### 4.2.5. Life of worship

The fifth most important learning content was knowledge of the life of worship (C1).



Women (31 %) ranked this slightly higher than men (22 %). Also, more than a third (35 %) of the older age group (51-65 years) rated this as the most important compared to younger age groups. For middle-aged people aged 35-50 it was the least important (64%). In terms of educational level, the least important aspect of knowing about the life of worship was seen by those with a university education, of whom almost 2/3 felt this way. Respondents with the lowest level of education were the most likely to consider it important (35 %). There was some uncertainty among guardians, with 15% unable to express an opinion. However, the highest proportion of them (58%) did not think it was important. Among teachers, 40 % considered this learning content to be important.

There was a statistically significant difference ( $X^2(4) = 10.566, p = .032$ ) between the views of guardians of pupils in secondary school and those of guardians of pupils in other grades. Among them, the distribution of views was more evenly distributed compared to the others, with 38 % of them attaching importance to the issue and 46 % not sharing the same view. Among guardians of primary and secondary school pupils, only slightly more than a fifth considered it important.

Among teachers belonging to the Orthodox Church, views were also divided. Among them, 39 % considered the issue important. Among non-Orthodox teachers, 71 % did not consider it important. The educational background of the teacher also played a role. Among those qualified to teach Orthodox religion, just under a third considered knowledge of the life of worship to be important as a learning content. Among those without a full qualification, this was seen most positively. Every second of teachers with a master's degree (not Master of Theology) and studies in Orthodox theology saw it as important. The job title of the religion teacher also played a role, with those who taught religion as part of their classroom duties being the most positive. More than half (56 %) of them considered it important. The least important was seen among the full-time teachers of Orthodox religion (77 %). The level of appreciation was also low among teachers in other professions.

In terms of the respondent's province and the size of its agglomeration, there was a convergence of views for the most participating regions. In the provinces of Southern and Eastern Finland, 28 % of respondents considered knowledge of the life of worship to be an important content, 14% did not express an opinion and 58 % did not consider it important. For the other provinces, due to the low number of respondents, the analysis of this issue is not relevant. When looking at the size of the municipality, it can be seen that smaller municipalities were more important than larger municipalities. It was considered most important (40 %) in agglomerations of between 10,001 and 20,000 inhabitants and least important (22 %) in agglomerations of more than 200,001 inhabitants.

#### 4.2.6. The Holy Bible

The gender of the respondent did not play a discriminating role in the content of the Bible stories (C1). Among both men and women, less than a third considered it important. The same was true for all age groups. It was considered most important (30 %) by the 51-65 age group and least important (65 %) by younger respondents (18-35). The educational background of the respondent did not prove to be a differentiating

factor either. In all three groups of educational background, views were almost identical.<sup>11</sup> Among these, less than 30 % of respondents considered the content of the Bible stories important and about 60% did not. However, they were considered most important (29 %) by those with a university education and most unimportant (61 %) also by those with a university education.

There was a statistically significant difference in the perception between guardians and teachers ( $X^2(2) = 9.111, p = .011$ ). Concerning the Bible stories, 28 % of guardians considered those important and 61 % considered those not important. Teachers' views differed, with almost a third not expressing an opinion. Just under a quarter thought it was important and 47 % thought the Bible stories were not important. According to the school level of the pupils, Bible stories were most popular among guardians of primary school pupils. They were the most important (31 %) among guardians of secondary school pupils. The least important (68%) was the consideration of Bible stories among guardians of high school students.

There was a highly significant explanatory difference ( $X^2(4) = 22.166, p < .001$ ) with the ecclesiastical background of a pupils' guardian and how the importance of Bible stories in education was seen. Guardians who belonged to the Orthodox Church were almost twice as likely to consider the stories important (43 %), compared to guardians who were either or both not members of the Orthodox Church. However, among Orthodox guardians, 44 % also did not consider them important. The highest proportion (73 %) who did not consider the Bible stories important was among both guardians who were not members of the Orthodox Church.

Orthodox teachers (34 %) consider the Bible stories important, while non-Orthodox teachers (63 %) consider them unimportant. Similarly, almost one in two of the teachers (47 %), who belong to the Orthodox Church, also think it is not important. Almost half (46 %) of the teachers who are qualified to teach Orthodox religion do not consider this learning content important. Full-time teachers also share a similar view. Bible stories were the most important (38 %) for teachers of religion without formal qualifications and for Primary school teachers, who teach Orthodox religion lessons as part of their duties (44 %)

There was a clear divergence of views between the respondent's province and the size of its agglomeration. In Southern Finland, 32 % of respondents considered the content of the Bible stories to be important learning content. Similarly, 21 % of respondents in Eastern Finland thought this was important and 65 % though not important. For the other provinces, due to the small number of respondents, the analysis is not relevant. In terms of the size of the agglomeration, it can be seen that smaller municipalities were more important than larger municipalities. There was a statistically significant difference in the size of the respondent's township ( $X^2(12) = 23.032, p = .027$ ). Nearly one in two (48 %) respondents in towns with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants considered the Bible stories to be important learning content. The least important was in agglomerations of more than 50,000 inhabitants, where almost two thirds of respondents felt this way.

11 Primary school, comprehensive school, vocational school/ university level, polytechnic/ university of applied sciences.

#### 4.2.7. Different worldviews

Learning about the different worldviews was narrowly the last in the respondents' ratings (C2). There were no statistically significant differences by gender. However, it can be seen that men were more likely than women to attach importance to this issue. One third of men (33 %) thought it was important and 48 % did not think it was important. Among women, 25 % considered learning about different beliefs important and 57 % did not consider this learning content important. One in five respondents of each gender did not express an opinion. There was an almost statistically significant difference between the different age groups ( $X^2(4) = 9.006, p=.061$ ), with the age group (36-50 years) being the most positive. In this age group, 31% of respondents considered knowledge of different religions to be important. This was significantly higher than in other age groups. To the age group (51-65) it was considered the least important (64 %). Also, in the age group (18-35) more than half of the respondents agreed with the older respondents.

The respondents' education did not emerge as a clear differentiator, but it was seen as the most important factor among those with lower levels of education. Almost every third of respondents (30 %) considered learning about different faiths to be important, while less than half (47 %) did not. Almost a quarter did not state their views. In other education groups, around one in four thought it was important and just over half disagreed. There was a statistically significant difference between the views of guardians and teachers ( $X^2(2) = 6.820, p=.033$ ). Of guardians, 29 % thought it was important, compared to 10 % of teachers. Among teachers, 77 % did not consider it important to learn about other religions. In terms of the pupil's level of education, as pupils moved from lower to higher levels of education, this content was also increasingly perceived as important by guardians. This was most clearly expressed by the guardians of pupils in upper secondary education, 32 % of whom considered it important and 46 % not important. A fifth of them did not express an opinion.

The guardians' religious background brought up an interesting observation. Learning about other worldviews was the least valued in Orthodox families, with 22 % saying it was important and 59 % saying the content was not important. This appreciation increased if one of the guardians belonged to an Orthodox church. Among those ecumenical families, 29 % considered it important and 52 % disagreed. Learning about other worldviews was perceived to be most valued by guardians if neither of them belonged to the Orthodox Church. Similarly, among teachers who did not belong to an orthodox church, learning about different faiths was statistically significantly ( $X^2(2) = 10.579, p=.005$ ) valued. This was the view of one in two of them.

Among teachers belonging to the Orthodox Church, 68 % did not consider this important. In both the Southern and Eastern provinces, one in four felt that this learning content was important, and just over half disagreed, according to the respondent's place of residence. The population of the area also had an impact, with smaller localities (less than 5,000-10,000 inhabitants) showing a much higher level of appreciation than others, with one in three respondents considering learning about different faiths to be important. It was least important in agglomerations of between 20,001 and 50,000 inhabitants, where 20 % of respondents did not consider it important.

## 5. Discussion and exploration of the results

The curricula of the Orthodox religion in primary schools (1970, 1977, 1985, 1994) have all had an almost identical teaching goal, where the aim of teaching was “to raise active parishioners” (Aikonen, 2015). Part of the teaching has been to indoctrinate the student into the religion being taught – to learn religion (Grimmit, 1987; Hull, 2002). The 2004 curriculum began to depart from this principle, as confessionalism in teaching could no longer be an option. The principle of “learning about religion and learning from religion” (Grimmit, 1987; Hull, 2002) was introduced.

### Learning about own religion is important, but not for identity

The Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014) emphasizes two aspects of religious education, namely learning about religion and learning from religion. In this survey, based on the 2014 curriculum, 74 % of guardians summarized prioritized *familiarizing pupils with their own religion and customs (C1) – to learn about religion*. This is in line with previous surveys and studies (Aikonen, 1997; Jonninen, 2014; Lyhykäinen, 2009; Vatanen, 2002). The second most important learning content was considered by 62 % of the respondents to be a *reflection on ethical issues (C3) – to learn from religion*. The third most important content was considered by 42 % of them to be knowledge of world religions (C2). Developing pupils’ religious identity was only the fourth most important issue (C1, C3). This was the view of 39 % of respondents. Knowledge of worship (C1), the content of the Bible (C1), and learning about different world views (C2) were less important than the former. In Jonninen’s (2014) study, teachers also considered getting to know their own religion to be a key objective, but strengthening their Orthodox identity was only the third most important objective.

In the context of one’s own religion, it would have been natural that the development of the pupils’ religious identity and knowledge of the life of worship would also have been strongly valued as a learning content, but those were not seen as relevant as one could hypothetically think (Aikonen, 1997; Hyvärinen & Metso, 2018; Jonninen, 2014; Metso, 2019; Vatanen, 2002).

There were differences of opinion between different groups of respondents. Women, teachers, and middle-aged respondents valued learning about one’s own religion the most. Those with a university or polytechnic education considered this learning content more important than those with a lower or higher educational background. Ecclesiastical background clearly played a role, with those who did not belong to the Orthodox Church showing the lowest level of appreciation for learning about their own religion.

### Young persons with lowest educational background valued the ethics, world religions and different worldviews

In this study, *ethical contents (C3)* took precedence over five learning contents. It was most valued by men, the youngest respondents (aged 18–35), guardians and respondents with the lowest educational background. Among guardians of primary and secondary school pupils, 75 % of respondents considered ethical reflection to be important and relevant learning content. Non-Orthodox guardians were the most likely to value this learning content compared to Orthodox or Ecumenical families.

Regardless of gender, *learning about world religions* (C2) was considered equally important. Younger respondents considered this more important than older respondents. Guardians were more than twice as likely to consider this subject important as teachers, only a fifth of whom considered learning about world religions to be important. It was least valued by families with an Orthodox background and most valued by those who were not members of the Orthodox Church. Almost one in two of those with the lowest educational background also considered this important compared to those with higher educational backgrounds. The same trend was also evident in large settlements (100,001–200,001 inhabitants), where one in two respondents also considered the content of world religions more important than in smaller settlements.

Men were more likely than women to think that learning about *different world views* (C2) was more important, with one in three men and one in four women agreeing. Clearly, compared to other age groups, this was most valued by people under 50. Among the over 50s, 2/3 did not consider that learning about other religions was important. Among those with the lowest educational background, this was the most important learning content. The biggest difference of opinion was between guardians and teachers. Almost one in three guardians thought this was important and 10 % of teachers thought this was important. It was least valued among guardians of primary school pupils, although this value increased among guardians in later grades.

In Orthodox families, learning about other faiths was the least valued, with more than half of respondents saying it was not important. It was most valued by respondents, where neither the guardian nor the teacher was Orthodox. Among teachers who belong to the Orthodox Church, 68 % did not consider it important to learn about different faiths. In small localities this was seen as important, as in towns with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants, one in three respondents considered this an important learning content. This was not the case in larger localities.

### **The younger the respondent, the less important the development of pupils' identity and worship life are**

The general view of the respondents was that *developing the pupils' identity* (C1, C3) is not an important learning content (Aikonen, 1997; Hyvärinen & Metso, 2018; Jonninen, 2014; Metso, 2019; Vatanen, 2002). This view was shared by every second male respondent and almost every second female respondent. On the other hand, however, women considered this slightly more important than men. The age of the respondent had a clear indicative relationship, as the older the respondent group, the more the value of identity development increased. Younger respondents, i.e. those aged between 18 and 25, were the least likely to value this.

The age of the respondent was also related to the fact that more than half of the guardians of primary school pupils did not consider identity development to be an important part of learning contents. While 2/3 of teachers considered this important, half of guardians had a negative view. The respondent's ecclesiastical background explained this view, with more than one in three ecumenical families holding a positive view. In Orthodox and non-Orthodox families, among teachers who do not belong to the Orthodox Church and among respondents from the lowest educational background,

more than one in two did not consider identity development important.

Compared to men, women attached more importance to know about *the life of worship* (C1) (Vatanen, 2000). Older respondents (51–65 years old) also agreed with women. More than a third of older ones considered this important. Respondents under 50 and those with a university education did not consider this important. Among teachers, less than half considered it important to know about the life of worship. Among the guardians of secondary school pupils, almost one in two respondents did not consider this subject important. This difference was statistically significant compared to other school levels. In terms of religious background, more than 3/4 of the families who were not members of the Orthodox Church did not consider it important to know about the life of worship. This view was almost similarly shared by Orthodox families (2/3) and Orthodox teachers (approx. 3/4). Slightly more than a quarter in the Southern and Eastern Finland considered this learning content important. Also, in settlements with less than 20,000 inhabitants, almost half of the respondents considered it important.

### **Bible – not relevant for qualified teachers, but for guardians**

As learning content, knowledge of the *Bible stories* (C1) was equally valued regardless of gender, age and educational background. In these groups, less than a third of respondents considered it important. Almost a third of guardians also felt the same way. Among the guardians of secondary school pupils, almost a third considered it important. In Orthodox families, Bible stories were almost twice as important as in ecumenical or non-Orthodox families. Of teachers, almost half of them felt that knowledge of the Bible is not an important content. Among Orthodox teachers, a third considered the content important, and among non-Orthodox teachers, almost two thirds did not consider the stories important. Almost half of teachers without formal qualifications and classroom teachers considered Bible stories important as learning content. This was also the view of one third of respondents in the Southern Finland and one in five in the Eastern Finland.

### **Respondents' age and education mainly explain the relevance of the contents**

There were clear and statistically significant differences in opinions on learning contents between respondents, depending on their background. Those were faced in respondents' gender, age, educational and ecclesiastical backgrounds, pupils' school level, and naturally between teachers and guardians. In some cases, also the size and location of the respondent's domicile had a statistical effect. The main explanatory factors were dealing with the respondents age and educational background and in some terms also the ecclesiastical background. These had a positive impact on the relevance of content related to ethics (C3), world religions (C2) and different world views (C2). In particular, age had a negative impact on the relevance of the content on pupils' identity development (C1, C3) and worship life (C1). Ecclesiastical background, not a surprise, had an effect how relevant the contents of the Bible (C1) were seen.

The general finding of the survey is that guardians and teachers tend to figure out that the nature of the content of religious education will change as we move into the 2020s, becoming more knowledge-intensive and serving the objectives of general

education. Based on the respondents' opinions this means learning about and from their own and world religions, fostering the ethical issues in the teaching of religion (Grimmit, 1987; Hull, 2002).

Thus, teaching is no longer primarily concerned with strengthening the Orthodox identity of the pupil. This is also supported by the fact that knowledge of worship life and the content of the Bible was considered less important. However, the importance of one's own religion was highlighted by the fact that learning about different religions was the last thing that respondents valued. According to respondents, learning about pupils' own religion is relevant, but not in terms of identity.

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