The Role of Religion in Students' Lives: Religiosity vs. Cultural Tradition
Cvetanova, Ganka

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Ganka Cvetanova
Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research
University "Ss. Cyril & Methodius" of Skopje
Macedonia

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Abstract

The paper gives an insight into the role of religion among the student population in the Republic of Macedonia, in particular their religious beliefs and religious affiliation, the role of religion in their families and their day-to-day living, and the extent of their religiosity. The findings in the paper rely on the data from the research project conducted in the period from 2013-2014. Throughout the paper, the pursuit of these issues is interlaced with a comparative analytical perspective involving the comparison of students' religiosity by their ethnic belonging. The findings point out that there are major differences between the students in terms of their religiosity and the role of the religion in their day-today living belonging to the Macedonian majority, and students belonging to the Albanian ethnic community.

Keywords: religion, religiosity, cultural tradition and students

1.   Introduction

Religion is one of the most complex phenomena in the history of mankind. In its foundation it is multidimensional, including several aspects: the individual, cultural, social, organizational. Hence, religion is the subject of research in many scientific disciplines, such as: theology, philosophy, sociology of religion,

history of culture, art history, anthropology, psychology, demography, political science, law. Depending on the scientific discipline that explores religion, it is treated in various aspects: from the aspect of its religious teaching, from the aspect of its philosophical dimension, from the aspect of defining and determining the relations within the community. In that sense, the sociology of religion deals with the study of patterns of social life related to religion and the interpretations of data derived from this type of research.

The paper elaborates on the position and role of religion among the student population in the Republic of Macedonia by putting particular emphasis on the following aspects: religious belonging, religious belief, the role of religion in their families and their everyday lives, as well as the level of their religiosity.

In this context, within the framework of this paper, three key notions are being operationalized, namely: religious belonging, religious belief and religiosity.

The notion of religious belonging refers to the belonging or affiliation of a given member or group to a specific religious institution, i.e. community.

The notion of religious belief entails a system of ideas.

The notion of religiosity refers to the devotion of a given individual to religion and it pertains to his/her behaviour, attitudes and values.

For the purpose of ascertaining the degree of religiosity of the students in the Republic of Macedonia, in addition to the religious belonging and religious belief, the religious practices and their exercise on the part of the respondents, as well as the familiarization with the religion to which they belong (attending religious services, i.e. reading and familiarization with the Holy Book) were taken into consideration as indicators.

2. Defining Religion

According to Jünger (1979), religion represents a system of beliefs and practices used by different groups of people to fight against the ultimate problems related to human life. The religious beliefs and convictions are not subject to additional verifications by humans, but are taken for granted and considered genuine and eternal. Within the framework of the so-called 'eternal truth', people build the awareness about themselves, about their existence and the world they live in.

In principle, there are two approaches regarding the defining of religion, particularly with regard to its relation to society. The first is the so-called essential approach and it elaborates on the essence of religion, imcluding the beliefs and practices, which on the other hand presuppose inter alia existence of superhuman creatures.

The second approach is the functional one and it deals with the actions of religion and how they affect society. For example, whether religion provides answers to questions that do not have answers (what happens after our death) or whether religion is the bond linking people in a specific form of joint action. The tension between these two types of definitions has existed since the very early days of sociology. Max Weber interpreted religion from the essential aspect whereas Émile Durkheim developed the so-called functional perspective (Davie, 2007).

In the spirit of the essential definition, the vast majority of anthropologists and sociologists highlight the belief as the fundament or essence of any religion. Hence, the belief is regarded as its main aspect.

On the other hand, in view of the functional perspective, Durkheim (1976) defines religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and

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forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.

Religion presupposes a specific code of conduct that derives from the beliefs and feelings. Considered as a system of beliefs, practices and symbols, religion is without doubt transformed into a segment of human culture (Cvetanova, 2007).

Even though it is an issue of two different phenomena, culture and religion remain closely interconnected in a number of ways. Culture and religion penetrate into a large number of identical spheres of human existence enabling people to mutually influence one another and are complementary in many respects. Religion has had an influential role in the creation of cultural systems and systems of values, moral convictions and practices. With regard to the different cultures, it has had a different impact and relevance. On the other hand, culture has affected the way of experiencing religion, the form of practising the religious rites, and even determining its position and relevance in society. As an example we may highlight the great discrepancies pertaining to the Indian, Iranian and Algerian form of the Islam, as well as pertaining to the Chinese, Egyptian and American form of Christianity. Namely, these discrepancies are conditioned by the different cultural traditions of the respective communities. Speaking of their mutual inter-connection, we may ascertain that no religion is independent with reference to culture, or as stated by Parekh (2000), Jesus Christ may be a God, but, nonetheless, Christianity remains a cultural phenomenon.

Nonetheless, no culture is fully founded on religion irrespective of the fact that its influence in the establishment of cultural systems of values and practices is obvious in many respects and at different levels.

According to Song (2007), liberal theory offers a way of conceptually distinguishing religion and culture:

….."Both cultural affiliation and religious conviction may be central components of people's identities, but the demands of religion, unlike the demands of culture, are matters of conscience, matters experienced as binding ethical commitments. As understood within liberal theory, moral, religious, and philosophical outlooks are explicit sources of normative authority. When a person takes a set of moral or religious beliefs to be true, they accept those beliefs as providing reasons for action. Cultures are not sources of normative authority in the same sense. We use the expressions "cultural norms" and "cultural values," but these terms tend to be used to describe what members of a group already do rather than to characterize the perceived authority of what they do. Many of the values associated with a particular culture are understood by their adherents as deriving from religious or moral doctrines. Very few cultures, if any, coincide with a single source of normative authority, a singular moral or religious outlook; many cultures are characterized by a high degree of moral and religious diversity."

Despite the fact that religion represents a system of beliefs and values, it still has an integrative function that may be applicable to the individual or to the community, or more precisely to the community as a whole or to its specific levels, namely the individual, cultural and social ones.

Barbara Hargrove (1989) has perceived the integrative function of religion in its very definition referring to the functional view and stating that religion represents a human phenomenon that has existed for the purpose of uniting the cultural, social and personal systems in a meaningful unit.

Taking into consideration the integrative function of religion, Parekh (2000) indicates that some people may go church and believe in God because it is part of their religious convictions. Some others may do the same because they see this as in integral part of their culture and a consituent part of the culture of the community they belong to or just because this enables them to reinforce their social status.

In this respect some people celebrate Christmas for its profound religious significance; some others because they perceive it as an important culural moment of their history; others because it is a good way of

affirming their belonging to a given society or simply so as not to provoke any unnecessary and negative criticism on the part of the community they live in.

The practising of certain religious rites, regardless whether it is an issue of somebody's cultural tradition or not, is one of the elements defining the integrative function of religion within the framework of society and it simultaneously creates the feeling of belonging to a certain community.

2.1 Religious Belonging vs. Religiosity

Speaking of the position and role of religion, and in particular regarding the topic related research, clear distinction is to be made between the notions of "religious belonging" and "religiosity". For some people, the religious belonging is purely nominal, i.e. they experience it solely as an identifier that differentiates or distinguishes the members of one from another religious group. On the other hand, some others demonstrate great religious zeal. In this sense, on one hand, scholars strive for researching into the religious belonging, i.e. religious identity, and the degree of religious devotion called 'religiosity' on the other hand. Religiosity is related to attitudes, behaviour and values of one individual or group, whereas religious belonging resembles ethnic belonging. It is something which for the most is a segment of their family and cultural tradition, or more specifically a segment of the cultural heritage of the community to which they belong.

While quantification of religiosity is possible (with a large scholarly literature testament to this) there are no clear standards regarding what aspects should be measured. A number are relevant: belief, practice, formal membership, informal affiliation, ritual initiation, doctrinal knowledge, moral sense, core values, or how you are regarded by others. Further, different aspects may relate to fundamentally different types of religiosity (McAndrew, Voas, 2011).

The American scholar Charles Glock (1964, 1965), that in the course of the 1960's defined religiosity, highlights its five basic dimensions: belief, knowledge, experience, practice and consequences.

3. Method

The basic research hypothesis presupposes that the majority of students, especially the ones that belong to the Macedonian majority, even though they are of the opinion that they are genuine believers, experience religion solely as a segment of their cultural and family tradition.

In this context, while compiling the survey, and for the purpose of ascertaining the degree of religiosity of the sudents in the Republic of Macedonia, in addition to the religious belonging and religious belief, the religious practices and their exercise on the part of the respondents (attending religious services), as well as the familiarization with the religion to which they belong, were taken into consideration as indicators.

3.1 Time Framework

The field section of the research took place in the period between 2013 and 2014, whereas the activities from all the remaining phases crucial for the compiling of this study took place between 2014 and 2015.

3.2 Research Instrument

With reference to the research requirements, a survey was drawn up. This survey was divided into logical units and was aimed at identifying the position and role of religion within the family and in the everyday lives of the respondents, the way they experience themselves as believers, as well as the degree of their

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religiosity. In this sense, religiosity was assessed by virtue of indicators such as religious belonging and religious belief, and by taking into consideration religious practices and their exercise on the part of the respondents (attending religious services and reading of the Holy Book). Another indicator was the familiarization with the religion to which they belong, determined with reference to the following questions:

- Does religion play a significant role in the respondents' families?
- How do the respondents experience themselves from the aspect of religiosity?
- How often do they attend religious services?
- How often do they read the Holy Book?
- Do they know/recognize sections from the Holy Book?
- How does the religious belief affect their everyday lives?

The respondents' answers were analyzed from the aspect of their ethnicity The analysis of data using the Chi-square test, and with crosstabulation based on the ethnicity of the respondents, indicated in the case of almost all questions, statistically relevant differences with a confidence level of 95% (p<0,05).
By means of analyzing the results, overlapping was ascertained concerning the ethnic and religious belonging of the respondents. Namely, the respondents of the Macedonian majority belong solely to the Orthodox Christian religion, whereas the respondents of the Albanian ethnic community belong to the Islamic religion.

3.3 Methodological Approach
For the purpose of the research, survey research (face-to-face) selecting an appropriate sample of respondents, i.e. members of the student population in the Republic of Macedonia, was conducted.

3.4 Data Analysis
The obtained data were analyzed on a quantitative level by applying adequate statistical procedures and techniques.

With reference to the final report that entails an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the results by the research team, more complex statistical procedures, which are customary for quantitative data processing, were applied. Namely, in addition to analyzing the data at a univariable level, they were also analyzed at a bivariable and multivariable level by using relevant parameters (in certain cases nonparametric) procedures, such as crosstabulations, (comparison of) mean values and corellations by verifying the statistical significance (Chi-square, Independent T sample test, ANOVA, Post Hoc test, Bivariant correlation, Bynary logistic regression). Results obtained in such a manner may generalize knowledge that would be applicable to the student population in the Republic of Macedonia with a level of significance of p<0,05 (95%).

In addition to the eight thematic units, the survey contained a section on demographic data.

### 3.5 Description of the Sample
For the purpose of the research, an appropriate sample, as the most adequate for the specific target population, i.e. the student population in the Republic of Macedonia, was used.

The applicable criterion for the design of the sample was an active student enrolled in the third or fourth year of undergraduate studies in the Republic of Macedonia. The research sample was the size of N=707 respondents, students at four state universities, one public-private university and one private university in the country.

63,80% of the respondents were female and 36,20% male; 62,50% were Macedonians, 33,80% - members of Albanian ethic community and 3,70% were categorized as "other" (Turks, Bosnians, Serbs, Roma, Vlachs etc); 60.40% were Orthodox Christians, 35,40% - Muslims, 0,40% - Catholics, 0,30% - Other and 3,50% of them decleared that they did not belong to any religion.
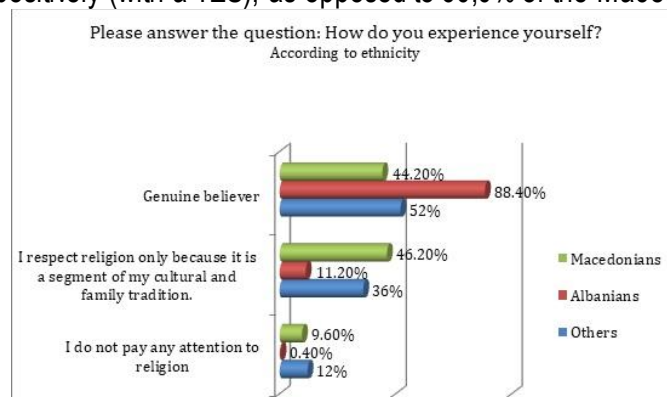
4. Results

In order to detrmine the overall role of religion in students' lives, they were asked if the religion play a prominent role in their families.
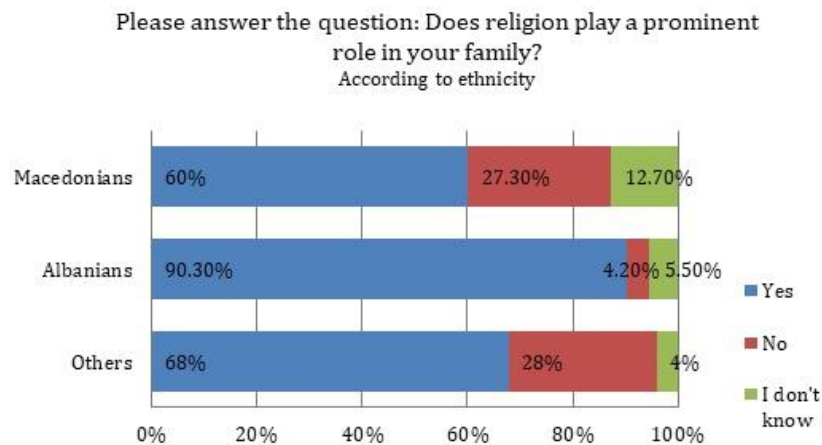
Figure 1.
Answer to the question: Does religion play a prominent role in your family?

From the aspect of the respondents' ethnicity, there is a statistically significant difference ($p<0,05$) regarding the responses given, i.e. 90,3% of the respondents that belong to the Albanian ethnic community answered the question positively (with a YES), as opposed to 60,0% of the Macedonians.

Figure 2.
Answer to the question according to ethnicity: How do you experience yourself?

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The results analyzed from the aspect of respondents' ethnicity point out to the existence of a statistically significant difference (p<0,05) in terms of the answers given. Namely, 88,4% of the Albanian respondents declared themselves as genuine believers as opposed to 0,4% that do not pay any attention to religion. On the other hand, the percentage of Macedonian students that experience themselves as genuine believers and the ones that respect religion only as a segment of their cultural and family tradition is almost identical: 44,2% as opposed to 46,2%.
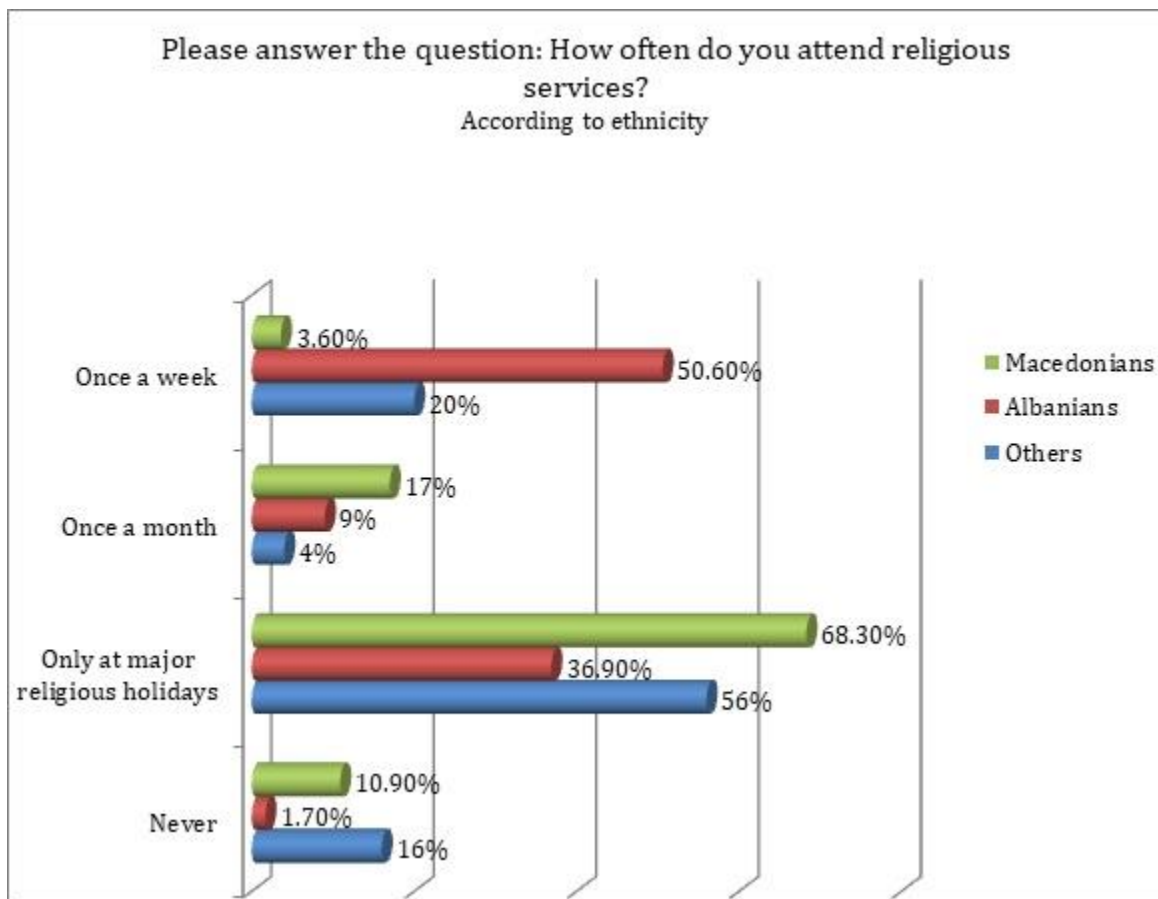
Figure 3.
Answer to the question: How often do you attend religious services?

As far as **Figure 3** is concerned, it may be inferred that, according to the specific indicator of religiosity (attending religious services), more than a half of the Albanian respondents are genuinely religious, taking into consideration that a high 52,4% attend religious services once or several times a week. As opposed to them, 68,3% of the Macedonians attend religious services only at major religious holidays, which is similar to the situation pertaining to the other ethnic communities (56,0%).

The data obtained when putting together the two questions How do you experience yourself? and How often do you attend religious services? is rather interesting with reference to the answers provided by the Macedonian respondents.

It may be inferred that out of the 44,2% of the Macedonian respondents that have declared themselves as genuine believers, only 8,2% attended religious services on a regular basis, as opposed to 62,4% of the respondents that attended religious services only at major religious holidays. Hence, regardless of the high percentage of Macedonian respondents that experience themselves as genuine believers, with the exception of the 8,2% that attended religious services once a week, we could not say that it is a question of genuine religiosity. As for the respondents that stated that they respected religion only because it was a segment of their cultural and family tradition, a high 79,3% attended religious services only at major religious holidays and 9,9% once a month.

Table 1. Answers from the crosstabulation of the questions:
"How do you experience yourself?"
and
"How often do you attend religious services? (only for the Macedonians)"

	Once a week%	Once a month%	Only at major religious holidays %	Never %	Several times a week %	Total %
Genuine beliver	8,2	28,4	62,4	1,0	0,0	100
I respect religion as a segment of the tradition	0,0	9,9	79,3	10,8	0,0	100
I do not pay attention	0,0	0,0	41,5	58,5	0,0	100

Other data that reaffirm the hypothesis that for the Macedonians religion is primarily a segment of their cultural tradition is the very fact that 41,5% of the repondents stated that they did not pay any attention to religion, but, nonetheless, attended religious services at major religious holidays.

The analysis of data, as per the respondents' ethnicity, points out to the existence of a statistically significant difference (p<0,05) with reference to the answers given by the Macedonian and Albanian respondents. Namely, 1,1% of the Macedonians read the Holy Book on a regular basis, as opposed to the Albanian respondents, the percentage of which amounts to a high 31,5%. Even with reference to the answers "I never read the Holy Book" there is a statistically significant difference (p<0,05). Among the Macedonians the same percentage amounts to 51,8%, as opposed to 3,4% among the students of Albanian ethnicity.

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Figure 4.
Answer to the question: How often do you read the Holy Book?

For the purpose of ascertaining the religiosity of the students, crosstabulation was made of the following two questions: How do you experience yourself? and How often do you read the Holy Book?

Table 2. Answers from the crosstabulation of the following two questions: How do you experience yourself? and how often do you read the Holy Book (only for the Macedonians)

|	Regularly %	Seldom %	Rarely %	Never %	Total %
Genuine believer	2,1	8,8	56,0	33,1	100
I respect religion as tradition	0,0	1,4	35,5	63,1	100
I do not pay attention	2,4	2,4	14,2	81,0	100

The answers obtained are rather interesting for the Macedonian respondents. Namely, out of the 44,2% of the Macedonian respondents that declared themselves as genuine believers, a high 89,1% rarely or never read the Holy Book. Hence, regardless of the fact that almost a half of the Macedonian respondents experience themselves as genuine believers, and taking into account that only 2,1% read the Holy Book on a regular basis, it may be inferred that we are not talking about a category or respondents that are genuinely dedicated to religion, nor about a category of religious or genuine believers.

Taking into consideration that one of the indicators of religiosity is the familiarization with religion, the respondents were asked the following question: Are you familiar with sections of the Holy Book?
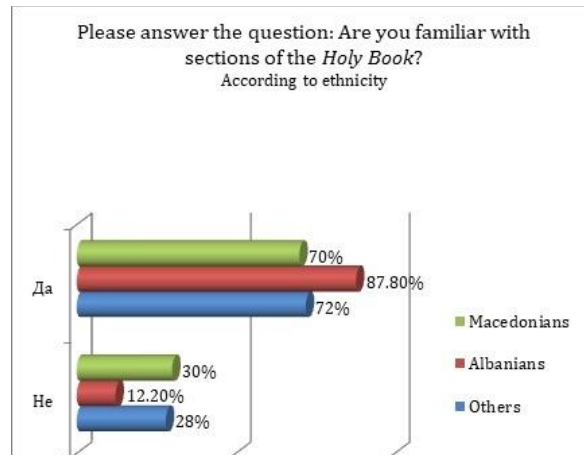
Figure 5.
Answer to the question according to ethnicity: Are you familiar with sections of the Holy Book?

Analyzed from the aspect of ethnicity, the percentage of Macedonian students (70%) and students that are members of the other ethnic communities (72%) is almost identical. Among the members of the Albanian ethnic community, the percentage of those who are familiar with sections of the Holy Book is even greater and amounts to 87,2%.
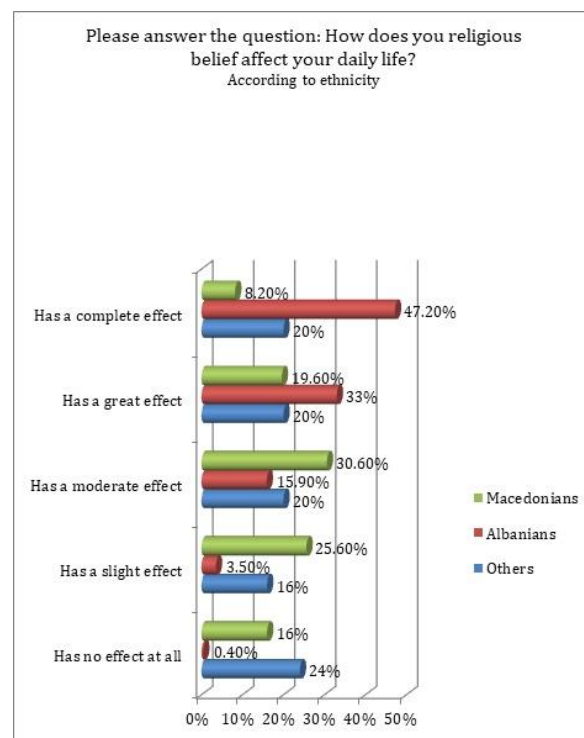
Figure 6.
Answer to the question: How does your religious belief affect your daily life?

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The analysis of data, according to the respondents' ethnicity, points out to a statistically significant difference (p<0,05). In this context, among 80,2% of the Albanian respondents, the religious belief greatly or slightly affects their daily life. Among slightly more than a half of the Macedonian respondents (56,2%), the religious belief affects their daily lives moderately or slightly.

5. Discusion

The main hypothesis of the research was based on the presumption that the Macedonian students experience religion as a segment of their cultural tradition. The research-related results further supported the starting hypothesis that the Macedonian students could not be categorized as genuine believers or religious persons since they perceive religion as a segment of their cultural and family tradition.

On the other hand, the results derived from the obtained answers indicate that for the respondents who are members of the Albanian ethnic community, religion has a much more pronounced role and influence on their day-to-day lives. Hence, in conformity with the indicators of religiosity (exercise of religious practices and familiarization with religion) they could be listed to the category of believers or religious people. The following were derived as general conclusions from the conducted research:

- ➢ Religion plays a prominent role in the families of the student population in the Republic of Macedonia. Nonetheless, among the members of the Albanian ethnic community this percentage is threefold higher compared to the same percentage among the Macedonian respondents.

- ➢ Most of the respondents members of the Albanian ethnic community declared themselves as genuine believers, which is twofold higher compared to the Macedonian students.

- ➢ Somewhat more than a half of the respondents often and rarely read the Holy Book.

Taking into account that the distribution of the answers provided by the respondents pursuant to their ethnicity indicated a statistically significant difference with reference to almost all questions, certain conclusions could be grouped and generalized from the aspect of ethnicity. In this context, the general conclusions regarding the Macedonian respondents would be as follows:

- ➢ Religion plays a prominent role in the families of two-thirds of the Macedonian respondents. One half of the respondents – Macedonian students experience themselves as genuine believers, whereas the other half of the respondents respect religion only as a segment of their cultural and family tradition. The majority of the Macedonian respondents, including even those that described themselves as genuine believers, attend religious services only at certain major religious holidays.

- ➢ The Macedonian respondents, including even those that described themselves as genuine belivers, seldom or never read the Holy Book. In somewhat higher than a half of the Macedonian respondents, the religious belief has a moderate or slight impact on their day-to-day lives.

The research obtained results further supported the starting hypothesis that, in line with the religiosity indicators, the Macedonian students could not be categorized as genuine believers or religious persons. In this sense, it could be concluded that for them religion is a segment of their cultural and family tradition. The fact that the majority of the respondents stated that they attended religious services only at certain major religious holidays, highlights that they respect religion as a segment of their cultural tradition and duly cherish it. The reasons for the way Macedonians experience religion could be sought and traced back to the role of the Orthodox church in the past. Namely, in the period of the Ottoman Empire and the theocratic governance, the church and clergymen were tasked with activities from the secular area (such as administrative, educational and jurisdictional ones) thus leading to diminished engagement and devotion in the area of spirituality.

The general conclusions regarding the Albanian respondents would be as follows:

➢ Most of the Albanian respondents stated that religion plays a prominent role in their families and that they experience themselves as genuine believers. Pursuant to one of the religiosity indicators, i.e. the attending of religious services, it may be inferred that the members of the Albanian ethnic community are genuinely pious, having in mind that more than a half of the respondents attend religious services once or several times a week.

The research indicated certain inconsistencies regarding the manner of exercising the different religious practices, i.e. that the different religious indicators do not correspond with one another:

➢ Namely, the percentage among the two categories of respondents that stated that they read the Holy Book on a regular basis does not correspond, i.e. is significantly lower compared to the percentage of those that stated that they attended religious services once a week.

➢ On the other hand, the percentage of persons that are familiar with sections of the Holy Book is significantly higher compared to the percentage of persons attending religious services once a week.

The questions that seem to prevail in this context are to be subject to subsequent research and analysis.

6. Conclusion

The findings of the research have established the starting hypothesis that the Macedonian students could not be categorized as genuine believers or religious persons since they perceive religion as a segment of their cultural and family tradition.

On the other hand, the findings revealed that for the respondents who are members of the Albanian ethnic community, religion has a much more pronounced role and influence on their day-to-day lives. Hence, in conformity with the indicators of religiosity (exercise of religious practices and familiarization with religion) they could be listed to the category of believers or religious people.

The results and the main research findings were to have secured more comprehensive knowledge and insight into the role and influence of religion among the student population in the Republic of Macedonia, how they experience religion, as well as the degree of their religiosity. Such knowledge may be

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taken advantage of with reference to building the civil identity of the young in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as to development and promotion of the democratic society.

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