
GDC-RTT: thoughts and reflections on the proposed changes in 200 Religion

Greek Dewey Committee - Religion Task Team
@EDUG Symposium 2025



Hello, I am Father Prodromos, from the Library of the Holy Monastery of Paraklitos in Greece, and I coordinate the Religion Task Team of the Greek Dewey Committee (GDC-RTT).

Today, I will be presenting our group's thoughts and reflections on the proposed changes in the 200 Religion class.

Overview

who we are

and why we are here

proposed changes - OA 200s

what it means and who is affected

implications

- practical
- ideological

are we there yet?

and where we go next

I am going to be covering: who we are and why we are here today, what the proposed changes to the 200s are, i.e. the Optional Arrangement, what it means for us and how it affects us.

Furthermore, we wish to explore with you the implications this overhaul of Religion 200 has on a practical, as well as on an ideological level.

Finally, we would like to consider with you if the time is ripe for such change and where we go next.

GDC - RTT



AGLIS

Greek Dewey Committee (2021)

- Greek literature
- Greek history
- **Religion** → **RTT**

8 permanent members

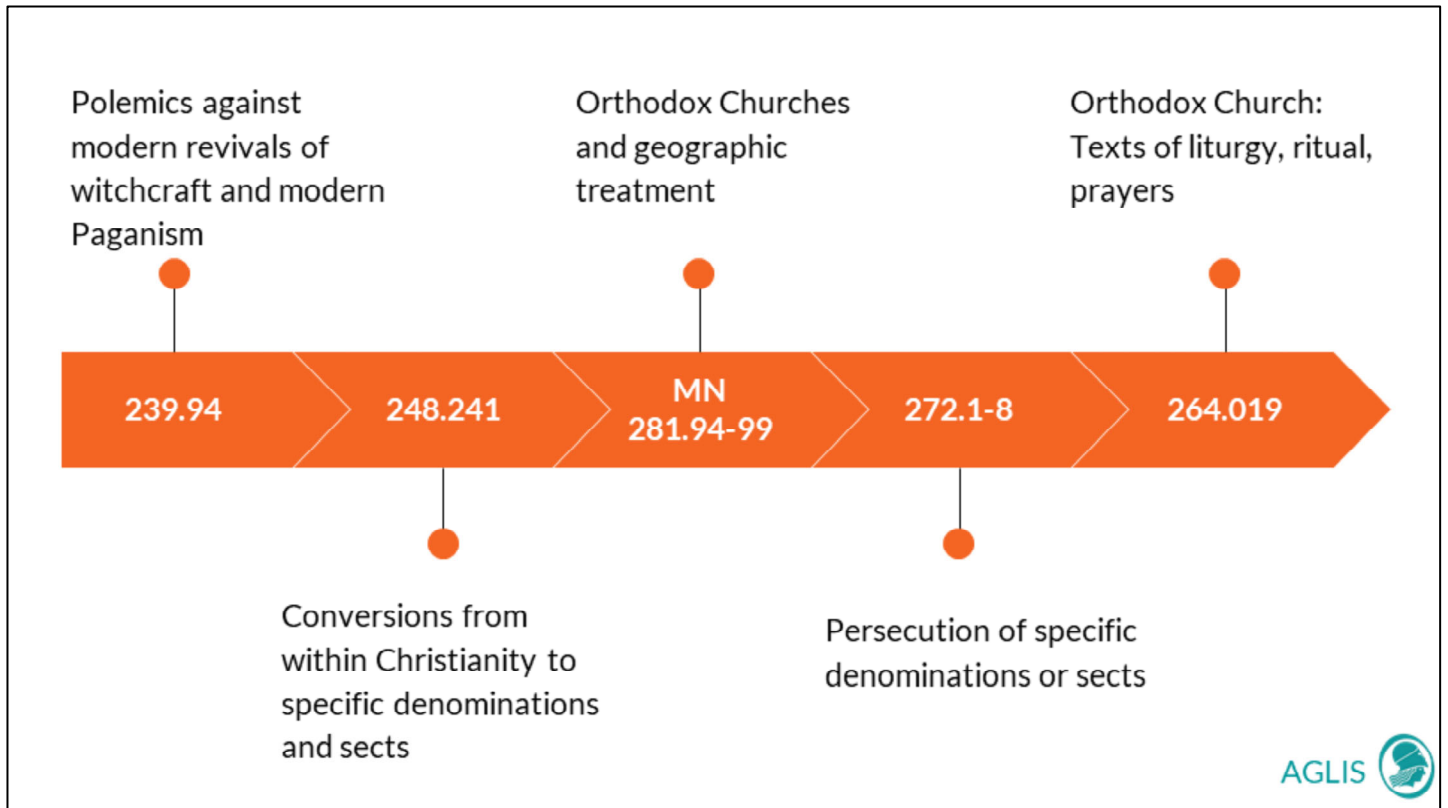
inter-Orthodox approach → **RELinDEWEY**

In 2021, under the auspices of the Association of Greek Librarians and Information Scientists (AGLIS), the Dewey Committee (GDC) was formed as a group to contribute to DDC in the fields of Greek literature, Greek history and Religion.

It has 3 respective task teams, including the Religion Task Team (RTT), which aims to develop the Christian Orthodox perspective in Dewey classes.

The RTT is comprised of 8 permanent members from libraries of academic and ecclesiastical institutions in Greece and Cyprus.

The RTT shares its proposals with affiliated institutions abroad through a Google group, Religion in Dewey.



Since 2011, the RTT has contributed several WebDewey analyses, including: a number for Neopaganism; another for conversions to specific Christian denominations; a Manual Note in Orthodox Churches, linking them to their jurisdictions; a reworking of historical periods for persecutions by denomination; and, currently, a development for Orthodox Church liturgical texts. Hence, we are here to be part of the discussion on the Optional Arrangement in the 200s, and reflect with you on the feasibility of adopting it as the default notation for WebDewey's Religion class.

OA 200s

“... to reduce Christian bias in the standard notational sequence for the Bible and specific religions ... without any changes to the standard notation”

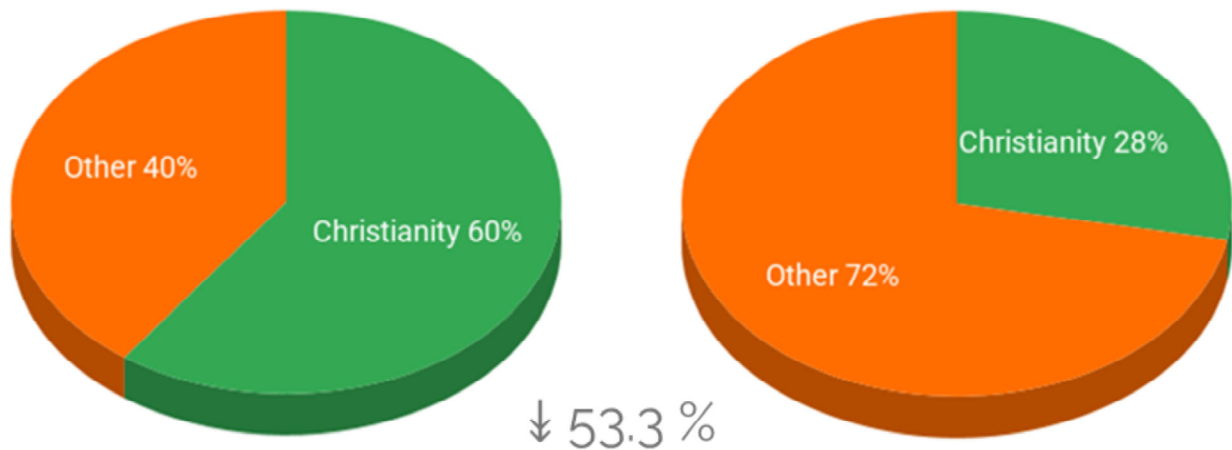
... it is carried out through a series of add instructions, instead of a major reworking of the 200s

In 2012, the last print edition of 200 Religion Class introduced the Optional Arrangement (OA) *“to reduce Christian bias in the standard notational sequence for the Bible and specific religions”*, based on a chronological-regional view. A manual note specified that: *“the intention of the optional arrangement is to provide an alternative view of 220-290, ... without any changes to the DDC notation”*.

By 2019, Dr. Rebecca Green, provided a mapping from the standard notation to the OA. According to a [Dewey Blog post](#) *“the beauty of this mapping is that it is carried out through a series of add instructions, instead of a major reworking of the 200s”*, perhaps signalling that the intention was not to replace the default notation.

It wasn't until the [summer of 2024](#), that we realized that a discussion had already begun, among American public libraries, calling for the adoption of the Optional Arrangement as the default notation in DDC 200.

what it means ...



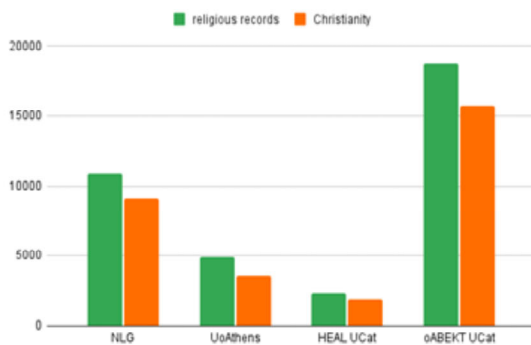
The Optional Arrangement for the 200s, if adopted as the default notation, is said to organize religious subjects more equitably by chronology and geography, rather than centering on Christianity.

Currently, under the default notation, Christianity (excluding the Bible) roughly occupies 60% of the footprint available for religion.

Under the OA, the notational real estate of Christianity will suffer a decrease of approximately 53.3%, down to 28% of the 200's class.

... and who it affects

the Greek case



Observations & practical implications

- reclassification of small collections
- American libraries vs. European libraries
- the Greek case
 - ➔ reclassification not feasible
- lengthy notations for Christianity
 - ➔ 271.81909 49565 → **277.4**81909 49565
- loss of classification common ground
- style vs. substance

We are aware of 5 cases where this notation was adopted as the classification scheme for religion.

Reclassification involved medium to small size collections, ranging from 360 to 2,000 physical items. American public libraries seem to be the prime audience for the OA, the idea being that the more libraries reclassify with OA, the more likely it is to become the default 200 notation.

In the US, the LCC is used by academic and large research libraries, while public and school libraries classify with the DDC. In Europe however, LCC is less prevalent. The DDC is widely used by European national, academic and special libraries. This implies that European libraries are likely to have larger collections, classified and shelved with the DDC, than those found in the US.

In Greek libraries using DDC, Christianity accounts for about 80% of religion-classified records.

With average sizes from 10,000 to 20,000 records, reclassification for Greek religious collections is not an option. Elsewhere, the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL), Bibliothèques Européennes de Théologie (BETH), and the Catholic Library Association have shared similar feedback.

Theological collections would likely find reclassification impractical due to lack of resources, and the risk of overly long notations, particularly impacting

Christianity's detailed classification needs.

Under the standard notation Orthodox monasticism on Mount Athos is classed under a number of 13 digits. Under the OA, the base number changes dramatically and is one digit longer.

Practically, as reclassification will be deferred and new material is classified with a new notation, disarray could occur on the shelves. What's more, most religious libraries of any faith might find the proposed rearrangement unworkable, preferring to either keep the present arrangement centered on Christianity, or else use the options A & B at 290 instead. Of course, the problem with multiple options is that they fracture the classification common ground across collections.

The rebalancing of the 200s will likely create a pragmatic tension on this side of the Atlantic that OCLC will need to address when deciding how to proceed.


Since many researchers study religions on a comparative basis it is doubtful whether sufficient literary warrant exists for a strictly equitable rearrangement.

Shouldn't we consider how other areas and faiths might view this change? Although the move is well-intended, its practical outcome regarding the balance between style and substance remains uncertain.

Literary warrant + a new paradigm

standard practice

the principle of basing a classification on the amount of published literature

- 64%  ~65% DDC200s
- reproduces publication bias

a new paradigm

- + number of adherents
- + perceived significance

- begging the question?
- changing the rules

Literary warrant has been the justification for the development of a class, or, for the explicit inclusion of a topic, in DDC.

In 2019, Green discovered that the real estate given to Christianity was not out-of-line with literary warrant in WorldCat: 64% of the works given Dewey numbers about specific religions were classed with Christianity numbers, while 65% of the 200s' notational real estate was given to Christianity. The amount of notational real estate allotted to specific religions in the standard mapping was found corresponding to the size of their literatures in WorldCat.

However, literary warrant has come under criticism, that it replicates publication bias.

To overcome literary warrant limitations, Green resolved that *“the amount of notational real estate allotted to specific religions in the mapping will be based on the size of their literatures, subject to modification based on their number of adherents and their perceived significance”*.

Here, the new mapping is breaking new ground and creates a new paradigm. It adds two new criteria for allocating notational real estate to specific religions: the number of adherents to a specific religion, and the cultural significance of a specific religion.

Although typically faiths with more adherents also have more published literature, as is the case for Christianity, current levels of adherence to a religion may or

may not correspond to the size of their literature.

Should the number of adherents outweigh literary warrant? Where is the fine line before we start begging the question?

A knowledge organization system aims to organise material and facilitate its retrieval. However, DDC is more than that, providing also a means of shelving a collection's material. We believe that the default notation does and should continue to mirror the real proportions of collections, as well as of the publishing production. A bibliographical classification has to be essentially practical.

Changing the rules could also have other consequences. If literary warrant is no longer paramount, all schedules could be expanded to give all topics "in standing room", their own numbers. The rule of "approximate the whole" may no longer be needed.

EDI for the 200s?

equity		historical context	✓
diversity	+	tradition	✓
inclusion		objectivity	✓

Ideologically, the discussion about adopting the Optional Arrangement aligns with broader themes of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Addressing this debate is not the intention of today's presentation. However, some of its key issues may shed some light on our discussion today.

Some might argue that reworking the structure entirely to achieve absolute neutrality would be impractical due to the vast scope of human knowledge and the legacy classification data already in place.

What if we were to add other principles to balance EDI initiatives?

Let us briefly consider: historical context, tradition, and unbiased representation of knowledge.

Understanding DDC within its historical context, rather than judging it, by contemporary standards alone, can explain how current apparent inequities evolved. DDC's Christian focus has historical validity and reflects practical demands, rather than deliberate exclusion. Historical context helps to ensure that, reforming efforts in DDC respect its historical milestones, and thus, prevent overcorrection or erasure of established cultural narratives.

Tradition represents continuity, identity, and shared values. EDI is often perceived as a challenge to traditional structures and a disruptor of continuity. A careful balance must be struck between traditional approaches and reforms in DDC, so that they don't unintentionally perpetuate exclusivity.

If we strive to objectively represent knowledge without bias, then the need for specific EDI initiatives might be diminished. Critics of EDI argue that its initiatives can lead to reverse discrimination in the name of achieving specific representation quota targets. The pursuit of unbiased knowledge and opportunity could ease these concerns.

Historical context, tradition, and objectivity could serve as frameworks to ensure EDI initiatives are thoughtfully implemented in DDC, avoiding extremes.

solutions?

a symbiosis

“have your cake and eat it too”

→ many options → chaos

DDC as linked data

a remedy?

URIs for discovery?

<https://id.oclc.org/worldcat/ddc/E3Hdq4y9PrPK8tJrjXgkWcXRCt>

230-280: **Christianity**

→ back to controlled headings

Since the discussion on the OA 200s is in its initial stages, it might be premature to speculate on remedies, should the switch take place.

In order to ease our concerns, DDC Editors have reassured us that we could continue to use the 200s as we know them even after a hypothetical switch.

The prospect of WebDewey offering a symbiosis of different notation profiles to choose from, represents a potential "have your cake and eat it too" scenario. Nevertheless, this proposed solution cannot address our major concern: the erosion of the shared classification ground across theological collections.

Presently, the existing two options at 290 and the OA already account for some splintering across theological collections. These collections will now face a further dilemma: to choose to reclassify under the new notation, or refrain from doing so. The fracturing of the classification common ground will likely be amplified. Many options, hybrid choices, could all spiral into chaos.

The recent emergence of DDC as linked data appears to offer a promising remedy. This is uncharted waters for us and we need to understand how this deployment would impact how different classification options work together.

How will the currently default Dewey numbers and OA numbers be linked to their concepts and their URIs?

How will this help machine and semantic searches treat the default and alternative numbers the same, if two concepts can have the same DDC number?

Discovery with just the DDC numbers might still return fuzzy results, if the underlying concept is not provided.

If our understanding is correct, this new method takes us back to using concepts to ensure discovery and access.

The remedy of linked data for multiple DDC notations appears somewhat flimsy.

are we
there yet?

a difficult trade-off

- practicality
- continuity

where do we go next?

In her blog post of 2019 Rebecca Green concludes: *“An institution would need to consider whether the disadvantages of implementing the mapping are offset by using a notation that better represents the religions of the world and their literatures”*.

So, is the trade-off worth it? Are we at the point of an indispensable switch in DDC 200?

While the DDC 200s are not perfect, over time they have proven very functional to organize information and shelve material. Overturning DDC’s class of religion, could cause a great deal of work, for an uncertain practical gain.

Are we not risking a widespread disruption in classification interoperability across collections with such radical change of notation? Maintaining continuity is crucial.

We are not confident that the time is ripe for such an overturn. The DDC editorial team has acknowledged its Christian-centric focus and has taken steps to mitigate it. Optional arrangements are already there to offer alternative classification structures that could serve specific religious libraries of any faith.

Should the switch take place, how are we to tackle such radical change? Do we revert to the printed 23rd edition, since WebDewey seems to be moving toward its 24th edition? How do we not become isolated and lose our classification common ground and communication with other similar collections?

We want to hear from other denominations and parts of Europe. France,

Germany, the UK, and other European countries have large theological collections classified with Dewey. What is your position on this matter? Where do we go next?

thank you



AGLIS GDC-RTT
@Greek Dewey Committee

I wish to thank all who have shared their perspectives on the topic we were invited to develop today.

My sincere gratitude goes especially to Dr. Rebecca Green for introducing me to DDC, as well as Alex Kyrios for supporting me on this journey.