

Eastern Orthodox Christian understanding of children and young people's conversion to Christianity
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The paper deals with the issue of Christian conversion as seen from the perspective of the Eastern Orthodox theology of conversion and the ecclesiastical practice of the Orthodox believers in their daily life in Jesus Christ when children and young people come to the realisation of a close connection to Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and of dependence of their entire life on His mercy and grace. It will be argued that “sudden” conversions to Christ are very rare occasions in Orthodoxy, and that children and young people convert to God mainly through the ecclesiastical discipline of prayer, listening to the Word of God and learning it, active participation in the church services, especially the liturgy, participation in the church's sacraments, fasting, regular confession of sins and taking of the Holy Gifts, and the discipline of “enduring the faith”, that is, persisting in their “being in the Church” and “being the Church” while obeying the church's hierarchy and the believer's spiritual father and while being helped by the believing family, both their own and the congregation as a family.

The paper further clarifies whether such an attitude to child's conversion to the faith may be called a “silent conversion” to Jesus Christ, and how Orthodoxy defines “passive” and “active” in acquiring the faith and in practising it in the community and in the personal life of children and young people. It is argued that conversion, as understood in Eastern Orthodoxy, is seen as an active “communication” between a person and God and that such a “conversation” is not an instant act but a process whereby the young person becomes God's child only through the community of believers and not by acts of personal endeavours.

The paper is to be presented at the IAMS' “Children, Youth and Mission” study group.