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Orthodox Christianity Facing the Challenges of Fluidity of Identity

Soočanje pravoslavja z izzivi fluidnosti identitete

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to examine the issue of Christian identity, i.e. the identity of the Church in modern pluralistic society which is described using the terms of “fluidity,” “liquidity” and overcoming of all stable categorical definitions of individuals or social structures. The author describes this world as a positive stimulus for the Church which is obliged to re-examine some inherited theological assumptions of the strong (ontologized) identity and attempt to understand its position in the world where only uncertainty is certain, only insecurity is secure and only the state of continuous change is unchangeable. In this manner, the modern socio-political and religioloical situation in the world would significantly contribute to overcoming certain ecclesiological limitations of modern theological thought (nationalist predispositions, the problem of the ecclesial identity of others, etc.).

Keywords: identity of the Church, globalism, pluralism, fluid identities, Z. Bauman

Povzetek: Namen prispevka je proučiti vprašanje krščanske identitete, tj. identitete Cerkve v sodobni pluralistični družbi, ki se opisuje z izrazi ,fluidnost‘, ,nestalnost‘ in presega vse stabilne kategorične opredelitve posameznikov ali družbenih struktur. Avtor tako stanje razume kot pozitivno spodbudo za Cerkev, ki je poklicana k ponovnemu pretresu nekaterih podedovanih teoloških predpostavk o močni (ontologizirani) identiteti ter k iskanju razumevanja svojega položaja v svetu, kjer je edina gotovost negotovost, edina varnost nevarnost in edina prava nespremenljivost stalna spremenljivost. Tako lahko sodobne družbeno-politične in religiološke razmere bistveno prispevajo k preseganju določenih eklezioloških omejitev sodobne teološke misli (npr. nacionalističnih predispozicij, vprašanja cerkvene identitete drugih itd.).

Ključne besede: identiteta Cerkve, globalizem, pluralizem, fluidne identitete, Z. Bauman

1. Introduction

Identity issues, which have been very present in the last few decades, have made the very notion and concept of identity exceptionally topical in the context of a pluralistic society. A specific set of circumstances can be found behind these movements: the society of continuous changes and the civilization which has become liquid, flowing and fluid, require identicalness. It is the Latin term *idem*, meaning the same, which lies at the root of the term identity.¹

Identity studies have been re-actualized not only at the philosophical (*Enciklopedijski teološki rječnik*, s.v. "Identitet"), anthropological and cultural and socio-political levels, but also at the theological level. The Church identity issue has become more topical than ever due to the entrance of Orthodox Churches into the complex and unpredictable field of ecumenical dialogue and due to the internal issues regarding their unity while facing different challenges. Various developments which followed the convening and holding of the Council of Crete in 2016, or the process of assigning autocephaly to the Ukrainian Church in 2018, as well as the course of the Orthodox-Catholic bilateral dialogue, all confirm the above-mentioned hypothesis about the contemporary character of the Orthodox Church identity issue, and they do this in an open, direct and painful manner.

In this research, we will try to show the depth of historical and cultural changes which have happened quickly throughout the last few decades and made identities incomparably more fluid today than they used to be. Globalization highlights a series of factors which determine a new expression of the Church identification. These factors ask for an ecclesiology which seriously considers the above-mentioned fluidity and which will be open, *in via* and more "synodal" in the literal sense of the words. Such re-examination could point not to the need for inventing new ecclesiological identities but to re-formulation, re-thinking, as well as transformation of the existing traditional ecclesial paradigms within the Church. In this manner, the main task of the Christian dogmatic or systematic theology would be fulfilled. This task lies in Christ's invitation to apostles and all theologians to delve more deeply into the treasure boxes of their own Tradition: "Duc in altum." (Lk 5:4)

Bearing in mind these methodological hypotheses, we will divide the paper into several sections. First, we will provide a short presentation of Bauman's vision of the identity issue in modern pluralistic society.² Then, we will present Orthodoxy which identifies itself as the Church while indicating that the Church is not this very thing, although it usually appears and presents itself as if it were, since many church dignitaries offer such a possibility of identification. Finally, we will synthesize the concept of fluidity as a challenge and opportunity for the identification of the Church.

¹ "Sameness" and "difference" actually co-exist in the concept of identity. This term refers to the sum of specific features which provide a specific person or community with originality (uniqueness) but also to differences which set it apart and identify it. In this manner, we understand the relational character of identifying, identification and identity at the very linguistic level of analysis.

² Primarily on the basis of an interview – a typical and guiding conversation with Zygmunt Bauman. (Bauman 2003)

2. Brave, Fluid World

While questioning all types of boundaries – starting from constitutive and categorical (temporal and spatial) ones, widespread globalization also relativizes the notion of identity. The identity issue defined more and more frequently as the identity crisis, characterizes modern society and sociological research, as well as all Churches and their theologies (Kovačević 2017).

It is not desirable to have a rigid or enduring attitude and a fixed position in the theoretical or practical existence nowadays. Thus, the post-modern expression of the modern issue of identity, which has opened up the problem of its strong and stable construction, has become the question of how to avoid its “stabilization” and maintain it open. “In our times of liquid, fluid modernity (*modernità liquida*) where the popular hero is an individual free to fluctuate without obstacles, it becomes increasingly unpopular to be ‘fixed’, ‘identified’ in an inflexible way without the possibility of rethinking.” (Bauman 2003, 66)

The modern liquid, flowing or flowing-by world has been named fluid. This is the most precise description or a synonym for uncontrollable dissolution (erosion), unmanageable speed of disintegration, decomposition and elusive flexibility, as well as insecurity and anxiety (Dodlek and Malović 2022, 264). All this has direct consequences on the identity field and appears as a need for finding the causes of change in the once untouchable and unique identity – the national one.³ Therefore, Bauman reminds us that today sociologists face a special challenge. He claims that the old principle of *cuius regio, eius natio*, which has been the foundation of creating the ‘identity issue’ for more than one hundred and fifty years, is abandoned as something solid and stable, along with the idea of a nation-state. Therefore, the Polish sociologist claims that the founders of modern sociology are not capable of solving the identity issues which have reached our time, moving in the opposite direction since the point in time when identity stopped being socially anchored and socially determined (Bauman 2003, 54).⁴ This “disembedding,” loss of the social location, unanchoring (loss of the anchor and foundation), dislocation and even disembodiment is essentially an identity issue in its original philosophical or ontological form. It causes structural changes manifested in the escape. Thus, we follow the activities of free spirits who desperately search for the “us” to be integrated into and belong to. However, social affiliations, particu-

³ “Following the dissolution of traditional societies based on the Christian identity, the modern man is in constant search for the establishment of a new identity – in the intellect, human nature, reason, nation, etc.” (Krstić 2022, 44)

⁴ Z. Bauman questions his own national identification in the introduction of his book on identity by confronting it with his British and European “self.” Namely, the problem arose when the sociologist was to accept an honorary doctorate at the University of Prague while the laureate’s hymn was to be played. He was supposed to choose the hymn – Polish, British or European. He started thinking about this and reached the problem of identity. According to Biti: “The basic problem is the fact that the reality considered by sociology in its present but also possible future forms is much more fluid and heterogeneous than anything else that caused the intellectual interest of sociologists in the past.” (Biti 2012, 118) F. Benigno adds that in such a situation the recipes of classical sociology are of no use (Benigno 2006, 258).

larly the inherited (passed down) ones, the ones which are traditionally imposed as identity determinants par excellence (race, origin, place or country of birth, family, social class) become irrelevant, particularly in economically and technologically developed countries. Now an individual has contact with the “societies of ideas and principles,” with ideologies, in comparison to the previous society of life and destiny, which was determined by “face-to-face” experience. In such circumstances, individuals search for new groups which would rapidly influence the fabrication of new identities. As a rule, they are virtual (not topographic anymore) and as such, they are illusions of intimacy, relationships and connections – fictions of community.⁵ This causes the progressive feeling of insecurity in any social location. “And as the ultimate shelter, the wonders of genetic repairs appear in the worryingly distant horizon /.../ drugs are also there, promising a visit to eternity, though a short one.” (Bauman 2009a, 18) Bauman also states that multiplied identities flutter and fly by freely around us, while individuals are expected to catch them as they fly and adopt them or integrate them.

The final product of such an integrating process is called puzzle-identity by Benedetto Vecchi. However, Bauman partially rejects his collocutor’s stance at the very beginning of the conversation related to puzzle identification. He says: “I’m afraid that your puzzle allegory is only partially enlightening” since there is no complete image; it is a defective puzzle which misses certain parts, while we do not even know which ones (2003, 109). Our identity is not closed in a box with all parts of the final image given in advance. What is even worse, there is no target image (usually found on the box of a jigsaw puzzle) which would facilitate the process of completing the mosaic⁶ and there are no guarantees that this identity process will be finished with success. When it comes to jigsaw puzzles, they are outcome-oriented, and their formation is started after the previously known final construction which will definitely be attained if the effort is made. In contrast, puzzle-identity is a completely different reality – the complete effort is oriented towards the means and not the outcome. One starts with the parts one possesses and deems important for one’s own recognition, which one then arranges and sets in order. One creates certain images, integrates them, re-integrates them, dis-integrates them, destroys them and re-introduces them into the mosaic, recycling the identities and experimenting repeatedly with what one possesses.⁷

⁵ “It appears that the greatest primeval success of virtual intimacy is the separation of communication and relationships. In contrast to the old-fashioned topographic intimacy, it requires neither creating relationships in advance, nor the results as a consequence of their creation. /.../ Virtual intimacy alleviates the pressure usually made by non-virtual intimacy. It also represents a pattern for all other types of intimacy. Now each intimacy has to measure its virtues and flaws according to the standards of virtual intimacy.” (Bauman 2003, 80)

⁶ Some authors use the kaleidoscope metaphor, stating that identities, similarly to coloured glass parts in this optical device, form themselves while reflecting each other depending on the person holding and operating the device. Therefore, our different affiliations, multiple characters and experiences form a unique representation of ourselves, while this representation depends on the person observing us. (Calabrò 2013, 86)

⁷ At another point, Bauman names these processes using the following words: “unstoppable, compulsive and obsessive reordering, renovating, recycling, repairing and reconstructing of identity.” (Bauman 2009a, 17)

The question is not which reality one has to possess to arrive, there – “at the destination” (since there is no destination). On the contrary, the question is what is reachable with the means that one has in one’s hands and what else should be acquired to reach new landmarks on this path. “It could be said that a puzzle is solved by means of instrumental rationality (appropriate means are selected for the particular aim). On the contrary, the identity construction is governed by the logic of final rationality (understanding to what degree the available means are suitable for reaching the attractive aims).” (Bauman 2003, 110) Thus, the hero of the liquid, fluid world becomes Ibsen’s Peer Gynt. He represents a popular individual who fluctuates without obstacles and impediments, a continuously mutating person who rejects a fixed identity, chains it and takes away its freedom (2003, 163–165), and knows his way around, as described or predicted by the famous Norwegian writer as early as 1867.

These outlined contemporary sociological and anthropological coordinates present a world where only uncertainty is certain, only insecurity is secure and only the state of continuous change is unchangeable. In addition, they simultaneously reveal one of the most significant positively provocative characteristics of modern identities – the fact that they are in the process⁸ of development, rather than given in advance or absolutely defined, not unchangeable according to dogma, or ontologized, but communicative and relative, with “unquiet” frontiers.⁹ Identities form themselves by means of a mutual relationship between numerous attributes, as well as by mixing the limitations, surpassing the boundaries, and combining frontiers. For instance, the European identity is prerogatively understood as being open (Vranješ 2011, 239–252) and plural (Derrida), interactive and dialectical, “as something which is not unique, homogeneous or having clearly defined *frontiers* /.../ but basically ambivalent, multi-layered and multi-dimensional, with indefinite and fluctuating *frontiers*.” (Vrcan 2005, 11; Matić 2018; Jamnik 2018)

Is the described set of circumstances and hypotheses, related to the loss of rigid identity frontiers, dangerous per se for church identities and ecclesial communities, particularly if they are regarded as fixed, stable and scholastically defined substantial entities?¹⁰ Is it possible for this universally liquid or diluted situa-

⁸ “The identification *process* has the key significance in constituting identity. In different stages of the *process*, an individual is shaped in his/her own identity. Although the identification *process* should be differentiated from the identity category itself, this *process* involves and enables shaping into or acquiring the characteristic symbols of a group or society to which one belongs in all segments of personal and social development. It is the *process* of interiorization or internalization of cultural elements. It is important to notice that this *process* involves several other processes, such as socialization and acculturation.” (Vranješ 2011, 766) Emphasis added.

⁹ “Unquiet Frontiers of Modernity” is precisely the name of one of the chapters of Charles Taylor’s classic work *A Secular Age*. (Tejlor 2011, 722–739)

¹⁰ Vranješ presents the unacceptable version of fluid identity in the form of undeveloped religious identity: “The most frequent reason for this phenomenon [undeveloped religious identity] lies in the fact of attempting to build religious identity according to the functionalist principles of the post-modern era and not accepting it as a gift. The appearance of partially adopted and partially developed religious identity provides a specific kind of ‘fluid religious identity.’ It leads to the partial approach to religion, partial or insufficient acceptance of church teachings and morality, while simultaneously relying on the Christian tradition but also supporting or tacitly accepting the ideas and trends which are diametri-

tion to be a chance for ecclesial communities to start their own serious identity studies? Can Churches be regarded as emerging and developing realities, or “dynamic identities”¹¹ despite their catechetical or dogmatic attitudes towards themselves as being permanent, unchangeable conditions revealed by God? In other words, what happens to ecclesiologies in the civilization which, as we stated in general outline elsewhere (Matić 2021), globalizes space and vacuumizes time making them virtual?

3. Ecclesial Identity – Previous Approaches and Modern Orthodox Theology

Fear of the challenges of the fast-changing world has led to the desire for security and safety realized in the exclusivist, institutionalized, imposed (from above, from the top, in a downward and descending manner) and triumphalist ecclesiology, which wanted to “go back in time” since it perceived only radical relativism in the challenges of society. This (re)action of the ecclesial centres of weakened power, this panic desire for security and avoiding risks, aspiration to flee from relationships and dialogue, need for ensuring security, will for power and immunity of the ecclesial being in the world have even been called a pro-fundamentalist (potentially fundamentalist) ecclesial tendency in the context of Western Christianity.¹² Such an attitude of the Catholic Christianity was changed at the Second Vatican Council. However, “ironically, it can be said that at the moment when the Church seemed to finally open its door to the modern world, it faced the world which understood itself as *post-modern*” (Mannion 2007, 28–29). The original dialogical spring turned into the winter of uniformed newly dogmatized ecclesiological models.

The ecclesial identity of Orthodoxy had not been considered at all until the ecumenical movement appeared and the need arose to provide an affirmative and not only negative solution to the issue of the specific difference of the Orthodox Church and its identity. This highlighted the problem of ecclesiologies with ethnical prefixes and the specific autocephalism of ecclesiologies, the negative outcome of which was evident on the eve of the Council of Crete in 2016, following the century-long talks. The mentioned challenges of ethnophyletism and autocephalism create enclosed ecclesiologies and result in the decentralization of Church-governing bodies, whose representatives are incapable of leading a dialogue with the world. What prevails is the spirit of provincialism, the theology of small backwater towns and ghetto psychology. The Orthodox ecclesiology of *ko-*

cally opposed to the Christian faith and ethics. The main reason for these phenomena is not being established or rooted in the Christian identity. This leads to losing oneself in the globalization trends which become more a trap than an opportunity for living freely and responsibly.” (Vranješ 2011, 769)

¹¹ The expression used by Michele Bassand to describe the European cultural identity. (Stojković 2008, 24)

¹² Zlatko Matić, Fundamentalističke tendencije u enciklici *Quanta cura*, *Teme* 2 (2014): 855–876. The study refers to the Catholic Church but numerous segments of the conclusion can be applied to some Orthodox phenomena.

inonia, similarly to the Catholic communion ecclesiology, is rather anaemic, deformed into its opposites (ecclesiology of the nation, or universalistic or centralistic ecclesiology) when it comes to numerous reactions of the official religious authorities or becomes even unrecognizable or anonymous. The mentioned crisis is not only a product of pluralism. In all theological variations of both Western and Eastern ecclesiology, this can be described and almost defined as the fear of losing one's own "self," which leads to defensive reactions (subordination of the local, the other, different, and plural) and closure into one's own limits of mortality and its security.

What is the Orthodox Christian identity really like? We will offer an answer bearing in mind the attitudes of the leading Orthodox theologian, Metropolitan of Pergamon, John (Zizioulas).¹³ The elements which represent identity are related to the moment of crisis in the Orthodox experience since this is the moment when identity is perceived in its uniqueness and inimitableness. If we are to decide and identify the *differentia specifica* of Orthodoxy and indicate its specificity, we should bear in mind that it cannot be absolute, yet that its "central, most significant and decisive moment" can certainly be highlighted.¹⁴ (Zizioulas 1997, 7) With its numerous elements which appear to be equally significant, the Church, as one of many communities throughout history, is difficult to identify. Consequently, misunderstandings and inaccuracies occur frequently.¹⁵ Zizioulas mentions several tendencies which are prevalent today when determining the identity of the Church, including ideological (professing faith, symbols of faith, dogmatists, a set of ideas determining the Church); missionary (preaching, Church as a group of conscious Christians); moralistic (Church as a puritanical community) and therapeutic (Church as a sanatorium or hospital). (Zizioulas 1997, 7–10) Although he believes that these attitudes do exist in the Church, this world-famous theologian claims that selecting any of these to be the centre of the Church would put its true identity at risk. He states that none of the mentioned above "can determine the identity of the Church," since "the essence of the Church is revealed in the Eucharist" (1997, 12–13). The identity of the Church is in the (Sunday) Eucharist gathering of all Christians belonging to a local ecclesial community.¹⁶ Since this gathering has an eschatological character, the Church derives its being from the future Century, from the Kingdom of God. The Church is not a product of history; it lives in this world, but it does not belong to it. If its identity is Eucharistic, which means it is also eschatological, it implies that the Church is directed towards the future which bears its purpose of existence. If the Church forgets about its escha-

¹³ Primarily his lecture from 1997, published as Jovan Zizijulas, *Identitet Crkve, Sabornost* 1–2 (1997): 5–16.

¹⁴ "Therefore, the aim of identification is singularity, while identity, in the sense of singularity, can never be absolute." (Zizioulas 1997, 6) Classical lexicon entries state that identity is "a term used to name a relationship between the partial or complete sameness, and which is opposite to the term difference although it correlates with it." (Šmaus 2008, 233)

¹⁵ "Consequently, there is always a danger of confusing ecclesiology with sociology./.../ the identity issue is not at all simple and the road to it is too dangerous and slippery." (Zizioulas 1997, 6; 12)

¹⁶ "The true identity of the Church can be seen through the Eucharist gathering." (Zizioulas 1997, 13)

tological identity, it might turn into one of many secular institutions (a state, such as the Vatican; a demochristian political party; a charity, such as the Red Cross; an environmental movement, similar to green parties, which happened in many Protestant denominations; or serve nationalist ideas and ideologists, which has been a constant threat to Orthodoxy). However, if it overemphasizes eschatology at the expense of historical existence, it is threatened by self-sufficiency and sluggishness. This tendency, familiar in some Orthodox circles, involves the risk of forgetting “that the Church and its identity represent a constant struggle” and that the Church acts “while awaiting its complete identity, which will be revealed in the Kingdom of God” (1997, 15–16).

Does this roughly sketched Eucharistic and eschatological identity of Orthodoxy represent a “strong identity” again? Does it take us back to the pre-modernist categorical apparatus? Can this vision of the Church by Metropolitan Zizioulas be used in the dialogical perspective of Orthodoxy and the modern world?

4. Proposition of a Fluid Ecclesiology for the Fluid World

Connecting the Church and a local Eucharist community, which is one of the greatest contributions of modern theology, highlights the ecclesial identity which is established a new every Sunday. Namely, if the Church being itself depends on the response¹⁷ of specific individuals to the invitation to the liturgy gathering, then the identity of an ecclesial structure is completely open, ever developing, always questionable, uncertain, unsecured, dependent on the freedom of specific human beings. The Church, identified as a liturgical community, does not exist on its own as an autochthonous entity, but it emerges, constitutes and identifies itself in the process of many a meeting at a single place. On the other hand, the eschatological identity shows that the Church is an uncompleted reality (“in a constant struggle”), awaiting its final confirmation, ultimate accomplishment and future completeness. This should separate it from the attitude regarding the absolutized identity and make it more fluid in relation to the world in which it exists. This stance is closer to the contemporary vision of the collage-, mosaic- or puzzle-identity. This lack of security makes the Church free in its actions, enabling it to be a witness to the task of mutual creation of identity in the correlation and dialogue with different others. Here we have the opportunity to find concrete examples of how to realize the aforementioned open identity of Orthodoxy. The Church must move beyond all attitudes that lead to particularism, and this leads us to at least three examples: 1) finding new expressions for the concretization of lay service, 2) resolving the problem of nationalism, as a major manifestation of particularism, in the spirit of open identity, and 3) carrying out inculturation as the promotion, not the imposition, of any specific *national* Orthodox culture (especially in Afri-

¹⁷ One must not forget that the name of the Church, *ekklisia*, originates from the Greek verb *ek-kaleo* meaning to summon, to invite. Therefore, at the basic philological level of analysis, the Church itself is a community of the summoned and those who responded.

ca today). Simply, the ecclesial identity is far from the substantial one, since it is completely dynamic. It represents a misunderstanding and misapprehension in opposition to today's visions of identity, particularly the liquid one in Bauman's sense of the word.¹⁸

Therefore, we believe that we can answer affirmatively, without endangering the ecclesial identity, to the question of whether the Orthodox identity can be understood as open and manifold, as interactive and dialectical, or as stated by Vrcan - as something non-homogeneous, without clear frontiers and "ambivalent in its essence, multi-layered and multi-dimensional," having "indefinite and fluctuating frontiers?" (Vrcan 2005, 11) On top of the mentioned developing identity, we can also add that the Orthodox Church represents a community consisting of a larger number (14 or 15) of local Churches, which requires an analysis of the non-homogeneity and multidimensionality since there is unity in the whole set of differences of the ecclesiastical quality of the Arab, Greek and Slavic world. Furthermore, the existence of a strong Orthodox diaspora challenges our citation once again - particularly the part related to the indefinite and fluctuating borders. Homogeneously closed nationalist ecclesiologies are unsustainable outside the borders of the mainly national Orthodox Churches. (Jović 2018) Since they represent a minority, the Orthodox believers in the diaspora give preference to ecclesial activity, having no material and political support given to the Churches in their mother country. They literally make "God's power perfect in weakness."

Attempting to offer an unambiguous answer to the question of finding the ecclesial identity would once again return our research to the ideological or pre-modern field. Therefore, my proposition will be briefly outlined in accordance with some contemporary sociological thoughts. Srđan Vrcan accepts the studies of D'Andrea and, talking specifically about the European identity, he suggests that we should consider things using the "terms of an open plan," demanding identity studies to turn away from the past (origins) and start looking into the future. (Vrcan 2005, 9)

Not only the European but also Christian identity is faced with the same challenges. The above-mentioned search for identity in the future is, at least in principle, in concordance with the mentioned eschatological vision of the Orthodox identity. Next, the ethics of responsibility presents the liturgical identity as a need to responsibly address the problems of others and of the contemporary world,

¹⁸ This attitude also has its ecumenical potential. Vranješ talks about religious identity as a gift, which is deeply ritualistic and represented in religious praxis. Therefore, we believe that our attitudes should be compared with the following: "The socio-anthropological dimension of understanding the man is not sufficient for understanding religious identity. It is necessary to start the process of understanding the beliefs of the religious community, i.e. the Church. A significant feature of a believer's identity is his/her ecclesial foundation, i.e. his/her ecclesial character. The Catholic Church faith has characteristic features of religious identity which are different from the features of other religious communities, as well as from other Christian denominations. /.../ A believer's identity is a gift. Identity is received. It is not a product of man. It can only be received from God in the process whose central part is the ritual sacramental celebration of the mystery of Christ /.../ Religious identity is essentially ritual identity; its ritual dimension is a structural and irreplaceable feature. Religious identity is realized in the religious practices which, starting from sacramental celebrations, encompass the whole life of a Christian." (Vranješ 2011, 767-768)

both the environmental and anthropological ones. The Church is not a given and completed reality once and for all. Thus, according to the proposed vision, Christianity could without reluctance state its responsible role of the “yeast in maturing of the identity able to understand crucial life issues” (Dotolo 2011, 147). In this manner, it could overcome even the material (spatial and temporal) limitations, not only the barriers imposed by human intolerance. The maturing of identity should not be authoritatively preached to others by the Church. However, it should be underlined that maturing is also related to one’s ecclesial “self.”

5. Conclusion

In the analysis of the fluid world, we stated that Bauman offered Ibsen’s Peer Gynt as a personification of the identity seeker. This hero, who desired to become “the emperor of human life,” kept searching for his own “self” until his old age. At the end of his odyssey, he remains disoriented, wistful and confused, asking himself once again where he has really been all this time during his search and where his true and integral “self” has been. No one could provide an answer to this question of his. Actually, no one except Solveig, his sweetheart from his youth, who has remained faithful to him forever and who says to him: “Where have you been? You have been in my faith, hope and love.” (Bauman 2003, 166) One of the bestknown excerpts from the New Testament, Peter the Apostle’s Hymn of Love (1 Cor 13) ends in the following manner: “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor 13:13) If the Church creates its identity listening to the hopes of the modern man and believing that the ultimate reality of its being is the faith in its eschatological “self,” it will be able to show itself as love. Love is a strictly dialogical reality. It connects all identity issues and directs us towards others, as the source of our own identity, both the personal and social one.¹⁹ The Church lives in the world, but she is not of this world. Its stable identity, the enduring city, which is waiting, is in the future. This means that its identity and sacramental structure emerges from the coming Kingdom of God. This enables the Church to always be in the capacity to enter into a dialogue with the present, lower Jerusalem, with the modern world, to create new expressions of her eternal permanent eschatological identity together with it and thus to open up all historical identities for the future, without causing deep ontological injuries of her lasting identity, which she finds in the radical Other, in God, the Holy Trinity.

This eruption of otherness, which undermines the complete, well-rounded, sluggish and anachronous settings of the rigid magisterium, represents simultaneously a challenge, crisis, and chance for breaking limitations, reductions and one-dimensionality, far away from “excitable localisms, dated nationalisms and generally harm-

¹⁹ “For Orthodoxy to become a real and specific life and not theology, we have to immerse inside ourselves, observe our position, turn to God and all other people with our whole being and start living by God’s will – loving, respecting and doing good deeds for each other. This is the essence of the Orthodox identity. We can conclude on our own to which extent this represents our identity today.” (Bigović 2000, 22)

ful mental and social enclosures.” (Forte 2017, 16) It is also an opportunity for re-shaping, transforming and relational establishing the identity of the ecclesial community. Simply, integralism, relativism and the aggressive or regressive platform of the relationship between the Church and the modern world should be set aside, while a progressive and synodal platform, where the Church and the world co-exist in the eschatological perichoresis, inter-relationship and identity formation, should be favoured. What should be preferred is mutuality and relationships, even the fragile ones, determined by the recognition and creation of identity.

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