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# Romanian Orthodox Bishop: Dialogue Gaining Ground

**On How 'Domestic Faith' Is Building Relationships**

By H. Sergio Mora

ROME, JAN. 26, 2012 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- A Romanian Orthodox bishop ministering in Italy says that ecumenical dialogue is taking great steps forward, particularly at the grassroots level.

This was the assertion made by Bishop Siluan Span when he spoke with ZENIT after Wednesday's celebration of Vespers at St. Paul Outside the Walls. Benedict XVI led the liturgy, and with it, closed the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

The bishop of the Romanian Orthodox diocese for Italy and member of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church reflected on how things are changing.

ZENIT: What is the situation of ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox?

Bishop Siluan: I believe, despite voices that say that the ecumenical dialogue is in crisis, that in the last 15 years Christians of Eastern Europe -- we are talking of Romania Bulgaria, Russia, but in particular of the countries that are in the European Union -- having the possibility and the willingness to leave, made contact with the reality of all the Western countries. We must say that the Catholic Church in Italy, Spain and other countries manifested an openness and willingness to help, which was much appreciated by the Churches of the East, by the Orthodox Church.

ZENIT: What kind of relationships have been created?

Bishop Siluan: I speak for the Romanian Orthodox Church and I see that different relations have developed from those of the past. In the sense that the Romanian cleaning lady meets an Italian family in its reality. It is a grassroots ecumenism which was never the case before. The Italian family entrusts to her not only the grandmother or grandfather, but also the children. And when the elderly woman prays at night, she asks the Romanian Orthodox cleaning lady to read the Liturgy of the Hours to her. They go to church together and I see that they commend to me names so that we will pray for the persons they look after.

ZENIT: Hence, in daily life!

Bishop Siluan: This prayer for one another, this, let's say domestic faith, is a beginning of closeness and of dialogue that is more profound than that of the high-level commissions. This is also true of the relationship between our parish priests and the Catholics who house the greater part of our communities in Italy. It is a very important dialogue between the different communities, because, for example, in some churches the Catholic community prays in the early morning and the Orthodox at 10 or 11 o'clock.

We see the presence of Italians at the baptism of children and in our churches. Moreover, there are so many mixed marriages, between Romanian men and Italian women and vice versa. Hence, it is a sort of dialogue without precedents.

ZENIT: What was determinant for this change?

Bishop Siluan: It must be said that during Communism, Romania could not have a dialogue of this kind. There was a representative who went out once or twice a year and who did not have the liberty to say what he wished to say. Hence, in these 15 to 20 years, unprecedented relations were created.

ZENIT: This is clear at the horizontal level, but between the religious?

Bishop Siluan: Although there are places and moments in which the dialogue is in crisis, relations undoubtedly matured. I see the meetings with Catholic monks, priests and bishops whom I met 20 years ago, in my case in France. Today we meet as old time friends.

There is no mistrust when we meet for the first time, not only between brothers but also between clerics. We had learned about one another only in books and notebooks, with a rather critical attitude.

Thus it wasn't easy to break in, but little by little we began to know individuals, to talk, to meet and to share what we could.

It is essential to share, food for example. It helps to overcome the mistrust that could not be eliminated by theological argumentations.

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