
POPE FRANCIS TRIP AIMS TO THAW CATHOLIC-ORTHODOX RELATIONS IN ROMANIA

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When Pope Francis lands in Romania in late May, the local church hopes that he will be able to encourage a spiritual wind from the East into Europe and rebuild the chilled relations between the Catholic and Orthodox communities in the country.

This side of Europe is a little bit more tied to spirituality, its not yet as predominantly attached to the material world as the West, said Romanian Father Francisc Dobos, spokesman for the Catholic Archdiocese of Bucharest, in a March 18 interview with Crux.

It can become a place to say: Europe wake up! Take a breath from a spiritual point of view, he added.

The interview took place after a meeting with the press organized by Romes Opus Dei-run Santa Croce University, to discuss the May 31 to July 2 papal visit to the Eastern European country of Romania.

Over 80 percent of the Romanian population is Eastern Orthodox, with Catholic faithful representing a minority at only 4.7 percent, according to a 2011 census. While dialogue between the two denominations is peaceful and open, Dobos said during his presentation, it has become more rigid and less fruitful than before.

When Saint John Paul II visited Romania in 1999, he could rely on his strong personal relationship with the then head of the Romanian Orthodox church, Patriarch Teoctist. This bond was manifest in frequent ecumenical displays in the country, from praying together to attending each others Masses.

But according to local clergy the relationship between Catholics and Orthodox lost most of its enthusiasm once Patriarch Daniel took the helm of the Romanian Orthodox church in 2008.

The new Patriarch has not encouraged the celebration of joint prayers, not with Catholics nor with any other religious denominations. There is not even anymore a joint prayer during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, said Archbishop Ioan Robu of Bucharest, president of the Romanian bishops conference in an interview last year.

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