

# PUTIN EQUATES COMMUNISM TO CHRISTIANITY

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on recent remarks made by Russian president Vladimir Putin:

Russian president Vladimir Putin is making some waves with his recent statement equating communism to Christianity. He said that "communist ideology is very similar to Christianity," crediting Soviet communism for preaching "freedom, brotherhood, equality." Though he admitted that religious persecution took place under Soviet rule, he nonetheless lauded it for its ideological commitment to these ideals.

Pope Francis himself said in 2016 that it has been noted many times that "it is the communists who think like Christians." By that he meant the communists profess a commitment to the poor.

So is Putin saying the same thing as the pope? Not at all.

The pope was saying that although the communists have adopted the rhetoric of Christianity (with regards to the needy), they have done so dishonestly: He said the "communists have stolen our flag," meaning they have ripped off our legacy to serve their own interests. In fact, he pointedly said in 2013 that "The Marxist ideology is wrong."

Putin believes that the state should serve the poor. That is not the Christian way: people must serve the poor, albeit there is a role for the state. "The family constitutes the best 'social capital,'" Pope Francis said a few years ago in his trip to Ecuador. "It cannot be replaced by other institutions." In doing so, he was enunciating the Catholic principle of subsidiarity, meaning that those closest to the problem are best suited to fix it. That is an anathema in Soviet discourse, something shared by Putin.

If Putin were right, then the most communist nation in the world would also be the greatest champion of the poor. But he is wrong—North Korea is the most communist nation on the globe and it is also the most oppressive. Not only does it starve its people, in the latest Open Doors report on Christian persecution around the world, North Korea is listed as the number-one offender. In fact, it has led this list for 16 consecutive years.

This is not an accident. “The primary driver of persecution in North Korea is the state,” says the Open Doors report. And who do they persecute the most? Christians. “Christians are seen as hostile elements in society that have to be eradicated.”

Putin is not only wrong about equating communism to Christianity, he needs to tend to his own house. While religious liberty has improved in Russia, overall levels of freedom are a disgrace. Freedom House, which monitors freedom throughout the world, rated Russia “Not Free” in its latest report. On a score of 1 to 7, where 1 = Most Free and 7 = Least Free, Russia’s composite score was 6.5, earning a 7 for political rights and a 6 for civil liberties.

If Putin wants to help the poor, he can begin by shelving his authoritarian state and allowing individual rights to thrive. Then he would be modeling his nation on Christian principles.