

Russian Orthodox Church Under Fire Over Stalin Calendar

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Russian Orthodox Church has come under heavy criticism on the Internet this week over a 2014 wall calendar published by a revered monastery's printing house that features portraits of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin.

The black-and-white calendar, titled "Stalin" and costing 200 rubles (\$6), is advertised as "a great gift for veterans and history fans." Historian Mikhail Babkin brought it to public attention on his blog on Jan. 7.

"Disgrace, shame and insult to all those who perished," one person wrote in one of nearly 200 comments under Babkin's post, referring to the millions who died because of Stalin's forced farm collectivization and brutal political repression.

The Russian Orthodox Church, which was severely persecuted under Stalin but has enjoyed a resurgence since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, said it dismissed the head of the

printing house in July once it found out about the printing but the calendars had already been delivered.

"The Russian Orthodox Church was subject to the most severe repressions during Stalin's rule when thousands of priests were deported and executed. Releasing such a publication in a church establishment ... is morally unacceptable," Vakhtang Kipshidze, a spokesman for the Russian Orthodox Church, told Reuters.

But reflecting the sympathy for Stalin still felt by many Russians who credit him with victory in World War Two and giving their country a superpower status, Kipshidze added:

"Though one should work on the assumption that both in the Russian Orthodox Church and in Russian society there are differing views on the role Josef Stalin played in Russian history, and everybody has the right to hold on to their views."

Critics of the Kremlin accuse President Vladimir Putin of burnishing Stalin's image and celebrating the Soviet Union's modernizing achievements to prop up national pride.

Since returning to the Kremlin in mid-2012, Putin has also sought to appeal to conservative voters to boost his own authority and has increasingly promoted the Russian Orthodox Church as the standard bearer for national values.

The church, in turn, has faced growing criticism from critics who say it has fostered excessively close ties to the Kremlin and sought too powerful a role in secular life.

"This is business. The Russian Orthodox Church is using its resources to make money," Andrei Kurayev, a cleric and religious activist, wrote on his blog. "This is where the trouble is, not in Stalin pictures."

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