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Russian Orthodox Church Divided Over Priest's Ill-Fated Satellite Blessing

November 29, 2017



Dmitri Lovetsky / AP / TASS

A debate is raging within the Russian Orthodox Church over whether a priest's blessing caused a satellite to crash into the Atlantic this week.

The rocket carrying the Meteor-M satellite and 18 smaller satellites plunged into the ocean shortly after liftoff from a cosmodrome in Russia's Far East on Tuesday.

A space agency official later said that the satellite was still in space despite not reaching its designated orbit, the NVK Sakha broadcasting company reported on Wednesday.

Related article: Human Error Likely Cause of Russian Meteor-M Satellite Crash

The popular theologian Andrei Kurayev said on Tuesday that the archbishop who blessed the satellite before its launch should be held accountable for its fate.

"It is very strange that the church seemingly offers services but is never held liable for the

quality of these services," he said in an interview with the Govorit Moskva radio station.

Kurayev previously criticized the Amur diocese for delays in Vostochny's first launch in April 2016.

Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin dismissed the theologian's accusations as "quasi-Christian paganism," the Nation News website reported Tuesday.

Another regional priest said the Russian Orthodox Church does not perform miracles and cannot be blamed for the incident.

"Let's put it this way: if you bless a car that has an empty gas tank, it won't start," he told the state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

"We address our prayers to God, but that doesn't rule out the possibility of human error or breakages."

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