The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Orthodox Church Probes Priest Who Blessed Stalin Statue

August 18, 2023



Opening ceremony for the Stalin statue in Velikie Luki. **SOTA**

Russia's Orthodox Church announced late Thursday it had launched an internal investigation into a priest who blessed a recently erected monument to Soviet leader Josef Stalin.

Father Anatolyi was filmed dousing holy water on the eight-meter Stalin statue earlier this week during an unveiling ceremony in Velikiye Luki, located in northwestern Russia's Pskov region.

While he admitted that "the church suffered" during Stalin's rule, Father Anatolyi also credited the Soviet-era persecution of Orthodox priests and believers for bringing the church "many new martyrs," according to the independent news outlet SOTA.

Stalin, who ruled the Soviet Union from 1924 until his death in 1953, presided over a totalitarian regime that saw millions imprisoned in labor camps or executed.

Embed:

> A Russian Orthodox priest consecrating a new statue of Stalin in the town of Velikie Luki.
>
> The parish has said the priest was "expressing his personal views" and is investigating, per RIA Novosti. pic.twitter.com/tpHAMC595D
>
> — max seddon (@maxseddon) August 18, 2023

The Soviet dictator's state atheism campaign resulted in the destruction of thousands of churches, including the demolition of Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral.

The Russian Orthodox Church's diocese in Velikiye Luki issued a statement saying it had not granted permission to its members to carry out religious ceremonies at the event.

"Their actions and statements do not reflect the position of the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church and [instead] reflect their personal views and beliefs," the diocese said, adding that an internal investigation had been launched.

The Stalin monument was unveiled on private grounds after administrations in three Russian regions, including Volgograd, which was named Stalingrad during the Soviet dictator's rule, rejected proposals to install it on their territory.

AFP contributed reporting to this article.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/08/18/russian-orthodox-church-probes-priest-who-blessed-stalin-statue-a82178