



Father Arseny, 1893-1973: Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father: Being the Narratives Compiled by the Servant of God Alexander Concerning His Spiritual Father

Vera Bouteneff (Editor/Translator)

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Gives stirring glimpses of Fr Arseny's life in a Soviet prison camp and tells the stories of whose lives were transfigured through their connection with him.

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From Reader Review Father Arseny, 1893-1973: Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father: Being the Narratives Compiled by the Servant of God Alexander Concerning His Spiritual Father for online ebook

Valerie says

This book is life changing for me. Father Arseny teaches me to look for the spark of God in every human being because it is in each one of us. He shows me, too, that one reveals one's faith not by words, but by acts of kindness and compassion and selflessness. And, that "it is one of the great mysteries of life that in atmospheres of the harshest cruelty, a certain few not only survive, but emerge as beacons of light and life."

Elaina says

In learning about the Holy and Spiritual life of Father Arseny, I realize how far away I am from complete union with Christ. Father Arseny was a very Saintly priest who spent 31 years in exile and special camps during the years of Statlin's communist control over Russia. His biography is endearing, heartwarming, and life-changing. He impacted so many people's lives and through this book, he impacted mine too.

I absolutely adore this book and everything about it. One of its remarkable features is its format. It starts explaining his life in the first part. In the second part, his impact on others is told in first-hand accounts! I love Father Arseny and I loved those who loved him.

I am doing my best to put my feelings about this book into words, but it is truly impossible. I have no capability to put the extraordinary life of Father Arseny and his impact on me into words that are truly worthy of his story. Read this book no matter who you are! It will make an impact on you in ways that are incomprehensible.

George Mekhail says

This is the first book that I ever read from the EO fathers and it had a snowball effect on my reading because I cannot stop reading books about/from the Greek and Russian Orthodox Church. Although, the Coptic Fathers still play a huge role in my readings.

Volkert says

I just finished reading Fr. Arseny for the second time. The last time I read this was about 14 years ago. I loved it then; I loved it even more this time. Fr. Arseny is an art scholar turned Russian Orthodox priest, who is sent to special prison camps during Stalin's reign of terror. Then he is one of the last prisoners to be released, but he is kept under surveillance while he serves as a spiritual father to a growing flock while living with friends. This book collects memories by people who knew him both in the camps and afterwards. It's a powerful portrait of one who lives his faith under the most difficult of circumstances.

Rachael says

This is one of the best books I have ever read. What an inspiration, what a push toward God it has been for me. Beautiful.

Pray for us, Father Arseny!

Harry Allagree says

There is much in this translation which is uplifting, inspiring and commendable. I was nearly halfway through the book, when I decided to check out Fr. Arseny on Wikipedia, only to discover that much recent research has conjectured that he possibly wasn't a real person. It seems that most of what the book talks about is quite true -- the conditions of Russia under Stalin, the details of camp life, etc. -- that perhaps "Fr. Arseny" is more of a conflation of perhaps a number of saintly priests/monks during that time, rather than an actual historical person. Also, most of what is talked about in terms of Fr. Arseny is quite general, sometimes even a bit vague. One gets the impression that there's probably something of an "agenda" here, albeit well-intentioned, some of it smacking of rivalries between theological groups within the Russian Orthodox Church & monastic system. It's a book not without value, but personally I feel a little disappointed about it.

Rick Boyer says

A beautiful, inspiring, spiritually enriching story; a powerful witness to the presence and grace of God, even in situations of great suffering and cruelty. Father Arseny was a Russian Orthodox priest, caught up in the religious persecutions of Stalinist Russia. He spent nearly twenty years in the Gulag, where, in the midst of unimaginable suffering, he managed to mediate the love of God to his fellow prisoners, guards, and administrators. It presents a vivid picture of what a true life of discipleship really looks like; a necessary counterpoint to the superficial, self-serving nonsense which so often passes today as "Christian living." Any Christian believer would benefit from reading this book

Sam says

This is a life-changing book. Must read!

Maria says

A rare find about a spiritual father and true modern saint. Fr. Arseny was imprisoned during Stalin's most ruthless suppression of religion and transported to a gulag in Siberia where he was to spend 20 years of his life. This book gives us that narrative showing us how a man can suffer so badly for his faith yet still keep strong with it. Later he was released and the second half of the book gives memoir accounts of Fr. Arseny's

life in a village, where he died in 1975. The vast humility and compassion this man expressed snowballed my searches for more works about such people. I have come to realize that the glory of God can be exemplified in humans.

Paul says

This book is a bit rambling and I made my way through the first half in fits and starts, but to say it's a slow read is to miss the point - it's just a book you take at its pace rather than your own. Reading it really is a spiritual exercise. The book is more a compilation of written memories, either by Father Arseny, his spiritual children, or those who knew or encountered him while he was imprisoned in a Soviet spacial camp. What seems to have stood out to all his spiritual children was his wisdom, gentleness, and keen insight from the Holy Spirit. It's inspiring and even poetic, and I felt my faith enlarging as I read on. The underlying themes cluster around dependence on and openness to God, prayer, God's faithfulness, and serving and learning from those around us.

In spite of the fact that Father Arseny was among us and gave many of us a new life, we had changed. We were no longer young, life had worn us out and broken us down. I felt that in our prayers we now asked for help more, and glorified God less. It didn't used to be that way.

I asked Father Arseny once, why is this so? He answered me somewhat sadly, "In a way this is natural. people have lived through too much, through too much difficult. Everything was done to eradicate faith from the souls of the people. Conditions were such that it became necessary to think only about how to survive, to overcome the obstacles which had been created. Just look at the life which has now been created: radio, magazines, television, newspapers, cinemas and theater create a standardized way of thinking, the same for everyone. This leads to a person being unable to be alone with his own thoughts, to feel the presence of God. (p.270)

All this has affected even believers, brought them closer to the 'norm,' made them indifferent. A prescribed way of thinking makes it difficult for a person to become a believer and makes it difficult for the believer to preserve his faith. But do remember, Christ's Church will live eternally even under these circumstances. Preserve your faith, fight for individuality of thought, pray more, read the Scriptures, and God will preserve you, He will not let you lose the clarity of your thoughts, He will not let you think like the faceless mass of indifferent and cold people." (p.271)

The book drops you right into the middle of Orthodox practice, so if you don't come from the Orthodox tradition or know much about it, this may take some adjusting to. The book also lowers the reader right into the hardship and persecution of Soviet life, including Father Arseny's imprisonment in a camp. A very powerful book.

Brianna says

Can I give it more than five stars?

I'm not even sure how to review this. It was compelling, convicting, and just... I really want to say that

everyone needs to read it, but then, I honestly don't know how much it'd mean to someone who's not Orthodox. Would it be the same beautiful book it is to me?

I learned so much through it and it helped me see areas of my life where I was struggling and didn't even know I was struggling.

If you get the chance, read this book.

Quiescence says

A must read for everyone, no matter how religious/pious they are. This is a book that leaves a deep trail in one's heart and mind. I cannot convey in any way the emotions I went through while reading the book. You should read it for yourself and immerse in the vivid atmosphere depicted throughout.

Amy says

Who could dispute the worthiness of such a person and the life lessons his Christian life displays? Certainly not I. However, I can say that the writing (perhaps the translation?) is stilted and trying and I simply could not finish this.

Nate Perez says

An orthodox priest experiences the nature of suffering and patience as he is tested in a Soviet concentration camp.

The individual stories are personal. The structure of the book is problematic as the stories jump around without an even flow. The structure makes it difficult to continue the story.

Nicole.platte says

A truly miraculous book. Read it again and again. Read it to the kids.

Fr. Arseny was an Orthodox Priest in the early to mid-20th century who spent several years in a Communist Death Camp. He prayed unceasingly in the camp, and the results of his faithfulness were very beautiful.

Stephanie says

Fr. Arseny survived the upheaval and cruelty of Soviet Russia and the unbearably inhumane prison life only to shine with the beauty of God's grace, touching the lives of so many; healing, loving, helping, and instructing everyone he met. He is a shining light and servant of God. He prayed without ceasing. This book inspires us to love all people and never give up on them or stop praying for them. Pray for us blessed Father Arseny.

Lisa says

I first picked up this book about 20 years ago and was so encouraged and inspired by the faith and love of Fr. Arseny in the midst of Stalinist prison camps. Interestingly, I finished reading it this time shortly after reading A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich and I was impressed by how incredible Fr. Arseny's faith really was - not only to survive such an experience but in fact to be strengthened thereby and to spark and rekindle the faith of others as well.

Tjb189215 says

This book might change how you view Christianity. There is a great amount of stories involving followers of Fr. Arseny. All the stories are awesome but I like theirs the most.

In one a Soviet Army WWII Recon Trooper is convicted of Espionage and sent to a prison camp. He is away from his home, wife and kids for years when he returns his wife has remarried and he is now in between her and her new husband Boris. The man sees he's been intrusive and through Fr. Arseny's help he becomes a priest. He helps Boris secretly take care of his own children whom Boris assumed as his.

There are glimpses of the total treachery of man in this book. Yet it somehow gives you comfort in reading it. No matter what your beliefs, I strongly recommend this book.

Isaiah the Ox says

This is not a perfect book but I don't know how I couldn't rate it five stars. I read this book slowly but I am so glad I did. I learned so much from Father Arseny, many times I would put the book down and pray in awe of this Holy Saint and the works God can do through His children. This book shows the greatest fall and depravity of man and also the great strength and humility of Christ. I learned so much about humanity, real humanity, God, and especially what true love really looks like. So many lessons are hidden in this book, but probably the most impactful for me was about the goodness of humanity. Many soldiers in the camp were evil and cruel, but even in the worst one Father Arseny saw a light inside of them, and many times we were shown how these evil men did some good even while at the camp. Goodness can hardly ever be entirely diminished, and I saw and learned that in this book.

Yes, the book is disorganized and unclear at times, but that is admitted by the compiler. He even says that the third section needed work. Some people are never introduced, you just hear names, and others are hard to remember or difficult to distinguish apart. But, if you ever hear someone tell a story, the same flaws will appear. Most people I know are horrible story tellers when it comes to personal life, and I doubt 19th century personal reflections would be any different. The stories are still impactful and wonderful, if you also

acknowledge a human (or many people!) wrote this book, not God or a Literature professor.

Wonderful book. First Saint I have ever "met", and I hope to meet more.

J. says

Very uplifting and encouraging tale of Fr. Arseny, who was imprisoned during the Stalin regime, and of his troubles and survival in one of the worst Gulag camps. He faced opposition from the leadership (who imprisoned him) and from the political prisoners (who were atheists). Somehow he managed to not only survive, but to bring a lot of them to God. The second half of the book talks about other spiritual directors who helped the faithful to maintain the Faith during the years after Stalin died, as well as Fr. Arseny's last years giving spiritual advice.
