

Review of *Images of Pilgrimage: Paradise and Wilderness in Christian Spirituality* and *The Soul's Pilgrimage*, Volume 1, both by R. D. Crouse.

Introduction

The Anglican Communion Alliance is something of a spiritual descendant from an Anglican conference which was held in Montreal, QC, in June 1994, called "Essentials." Concerned by some liberalizing trends in the national Church, the conference aimed – and succeeded – at revitalizing a conservative voice within the Church.

The success of the conference led to further cooperation among the leadership of Barnabas Anglican Ministries, the Prayer Book Society of Canada, and Anglican Renewal Ministries. The movement evolved further, when some individuals and parishes later withdrew from the jurisdiction of the Anglican Church of Canada, to become part of the Anglican Network in Canada.

A.C.A. members chose to remain within the Anglican Church of Canada, and continue to foster a conservative voice, with the particular aims of increasing biblical literacy, teaching, encouraging, strengthening relationships, and occasionally, critically assessing some current liturgical rites and moral issues.

An Introduction to the Author

Among all the speakers at the original Essentials conference, it might be easy to forget Dr. Robert Crouse, a priest and academic from rural Nova Scotia, who spoke about a little book produced by St. Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) near the end of his life, on Christian virtues: *Enchiridion: On Faith, Hope and Charity*. Fr. Crouse was surely out of his element – in a hot, packed college gymnasium, with a rather boisterous (for Anglicans!) congregation, with a mix of classical Anglican hymnody and contemporary praise choruses. Yet humbly and clearly, Fr. Crouse presented an accessible, thoughtful summary of Augustine's work, and its relevance for our present circumstances.

Fr. Crouse was mostly known, and best understood, within the Classics Department at Dalhousie University, and the University of King's College, Halifax, NS. However, his influence was wider than most people appreciate, including being the first non-Roman Catholic to teach at the prestigious *Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum* in Rome. As well as having a sharp intellect and a deep classical faith, Robert Crouse was humble and had profound pastoral sensibilities. He could surprise people, because he read about so many diverse subjects, or, by offering a group cheer for a Canadian football team. At times, his wry wit would reveal itself. Many contemporary trends in the Church were not easy for Fr. Crouse. Likely irritating for his opponents, his critiques could be spot-on, yet he always remained gracious and clear. He was an unwavering beacon, pointing us to God, revealed through Jesus Christ. He died in 2011.

A Review of Two Publications

Fr. Crouse taught hundreds of students during his long academic tenure, many of whom now serve in parish ministry or in the academy. A group of former students has decided that his voice needs to become better known. So, two volumes have been published this autumn: *Images of Pilgrimage: Paradise and Wilderness in Christian Spirituality* is from addresses at a Christian retreat. *The Soul's Pilgrimage*, Volume 1, is a collection of Fr. Crouse's sermons, for the first half or so of the

Christian liturgical year. The editors intend to produce more publications in the future.

Images of Pilgrimage

Images of Pilgrimage is a slim volume of six addresses. As the title suggests, the retreat explored the theme of “pilgrimage” in Christian spirituality, not only in the scriptures, but by the patristic bishop Augustine of Hippo, and the Medieval poet Dante Alighieri. Nor did Fr. Crouse limit himself to Christian authors, as it was clear to him that God who is goodness and truth has always been working in his rebellious creation, and attentive and wise people can understand glimpses of God’s order and beauty. Nonetheless, these ancient pagan writers did not know God’s love supremely revealed through Christ’s incarnation, self-sacrificial death and resurrection. As he did so often at the Atlantic Theological Conferences, Fr. Crouse puts it all together at the end.

Fr. Crouse is very clear that, for Christians, “pilgrimage” is not aimless wandering. It is a journey to our true home. It is a work first of all of God’s grace, but we in turn need to learn to shed and to take on, to grasp while also learning to release.

Images of Pilgrimage is not for everyone. Those who are content with the devotional equivalent of a fast-food meal will become impatient at the pace – although it does not drag, but reveals. Yet for those who want nourishment that truly satisfies – piety and devotion which point us to the Bread of Life himself – it is a wonderful little volume. It would, I suggest, be a suitable Christmas gift for a thoughtful reader.

The Soul’s Pilgrimage

The Soul’s Pilgrimage is somewhat different. It is a collection of sermons, and each sermon is meant to be absorbed by itself. The sermons were delivered over a period of at least 30 years, and the author likely didn’t expect they would be published posthumously. Fr. Crouse used to write in longhand on legal-sized foolscap, and very likely, some treasures have been lost. There are three sermons for Septuagesima Sunday, but none for Epiphany 3. (However, as I have already indicated, there are likely more publications to come.)

I suggest *The Soul’s Pilgrimage* is most helpfully viewed like a walk in the woods, where one knows the general terrain, but not the exact route. So, time and again, there is a gentle delight to be discovered in a phrase or a point. For example, do we remember the story recalled at Candlemas, when old Simeon recognized the baby Messiah? I love how Crouse brings out that the offering at that feast “anticipates the more profound sacrifice of free obedience, when the Son himself will be the sacrificial lamb (p. 97).” To take a second example, a sermon for Rogationtide was certainly preached long before the current state of our environment; it addresses how our God-given dominion over nature is really meant to point to God’s glory.

Almost all Canadian Anglican parishes have now adopted the Revised Common Lectionary, perhaps somewhat uncritically. However, Crouse consistently argues that the traditional western eucharistic lectionary has its own logic, helping mould us into the image of Christ. For those who wish to explore it, Fr. Crouse invites us to consider what principles we ought to be applying while reading scripture together.

Conclusion

Fr. Crouse's devotional writings do indeed need to be read more widely, and I think these publications can help more Anglicans engage with his ideas. He moves easily among different sources to make his point, quoting Aristotle or using occasional Latin phrases. Some people might read this as being pretentious, but I am confident that such critics would be utterly missing the point. Fr. Crouse saw the hand of God behind every human work, from great architecture to wise ancient authors to catholic tradition to cultivating roses. Rather, Crouse is trying to awaken a sleepy and careless humanity to eternity; to God's glory; to the overwhelming grace-filled gift who is Jesus Christ himself. One of the Easter sermons concludes,

In the perspective of God's providence, in the pattern of salvation, sorrow and fear and doubt are not just unfortunate accidents; they are elements in God's fitting us for glory. Christ's wounds are the signs of his glory, and so must ours be.

When I asked one of the editors for a copy of these volumes, he mentioned that there was some thought to offer *Images of Pilgrimage* as a Lenten study, with an accompanying study guide which is in the process of being printed. For more information, or to order copies, email ewagner.worksofrobertcrouse@gmail.com; or go to <https://www.worksofrobertcrouse.com/>

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