Faith • Civilization • Theology

Volume 1, Issue 1 | July-December 2026

BOOK REVIEW | Christian Spirituality and Practical Theology

A Companion Along the Way: Bearings for the Inner Journey

Book author: Stephen Truscott

An editorial book review by Faith • Civilization • Theology

Stephen Truscott. A Companion Along the Way: Bearings for the Inner Journey. Perth, WA: Fullness of Life Centre Inc., 2026. 68 pp. Paperback A$15.95, ISBN 978-1-7649350-0-5. Ebook A$7.99, ISBN 978-1-7649350-1-2.

Stephen Truscott's short book addresses a familiar difficulty in pastoral life: a person's established commitments may continue while the meanings that once sustained them become less secure. Rather than offering a quick explanation, Truscott asks what kind of attention and companionship might help someone live truthfully through that uncertainty. The result is a thoughtful contemplative guide whose accessibility is a strength, although some of its central terms need firmer definition.

The Southern Cross provides its organising image. In southern skies, the relationship among visible stars gives a bearing towards a celestial pole that no bright star marks. Truscott uses this pattern to describe an inner orientation that can remain trustworthy without becoming fully visible. Practice and Companionship serve as the recurring Pointers through five movements: disturbance, rupture, a new centre, fidelity in darkness and return to ordinary life. The introduction explicitly says that these movements may overlap or recur; they are not intended as a fixed sequence.

Each chapter opens with a composite vignette. Ruth encounters a persistent unease beneath an otherwise functioning life. Anna's reliable competence no longer contains her exhaustion and resentment. Elena finds that increased self-awareness has not ended her effort to manage herself. Michael's renewed prayer loses its earlier brightness. David discovers change in a less defensive response to his daughter. These modest scenes make the book approachable. The Author's Note identifies them as composite portrayals, and they should be read as illustrations rather than evidence validating the model.

The book is strongest when it describes changes that can be recognised in ordinary conduct. In Chapter 5, transformation appears through patient listening, a truthful apology and care less burdened by the need to control another person. Inner life is therefore tested in relationships rather than measured by spiritual intensity. Truscott also resists the expectation that maturity removes fear, grief or mixed motives. His language of homecoming allows difficulty to remain.

ISSN 3083-0710

The practical concept of “double noticing” is similarly useful. Readers attend both to what happened and to the response it awakened within them. Note 15 identifies this as the author’s development of Ignatian discernment rather than a quotation from Ignatius. The larger endnote apparatus often shows this same care, distinguishing an affinity from an equivalence or marking a pastoral application as Truscott’s own. A final guide offers questions for individuals, companions and groups, while allowing participants to remain silent or leave matters unresolved.

The theological centre of the work becomes clearest in Chapter 3. Ephesians 3:16-19 connects inner strengthening with the Spirit and Christ’s indwelling, shifting the emphasis from self-mastery towards gift. This prevents the book from being merely a programme for more efficient self-improvement. Yet it also raises a question that remains only partly answered.

Across the book, the deeper centre can refer to integration, a trustworthy orientation to reality, or the presence of God. Truscott declares his Christian conviction and welcomes readers who use other language. This hospitality is a strength. Still, the relation between these meanings needs more explanation. The acknowledgement in note 5 that Jung’s self should not be equated with the book’s centre deserves a more prominent place in the argument. Readers should not have to decide unaided when the same word is psychological, metaphorical or explicitly theological.

The handling of suffering requires a similarly balanced judgement. It would be unfair to say that Truscott treats all distress as spiritual growth. Chapters 1, 2 and 4 explicitly allow for illness, psychological difficulty, treatment, medicine, protection and other practical needs. Surrender is described as active and responsible. Nevertheless, the narrative repeatedly makes rupture and obscurity intelligible through the possibility of a deeper life. The qualifications would be stronger if a worked example showed discernment leading chiefly to practical intervention, or to leaving a harmful situation.

The broad category of companionship also invites further distinction. Friendship, therapy, confession and spiritual direction may share qualities of attentive presence, but they do not involve identical responsibilities or expertise. The book describes a trustworthy companion well in terms of patience and freedom from domination. It offers less guidance about choosing an appropriate practitioner, identifying limits or recognising when a different form of help is needed. This matters particularly for the spiritual directors, chaplains and formation practitioners named among its intended readers.

Its social reach is also uneven. Communities and institutions are mentioned, and Chapter 5 returns the traveller to a shared world. Yet the analysis works mainly through individual experience and interpersonal response. Greater calm and reduced defensiveness may support justice; they do not themselves repair unequal power or institutional harm. An example of collective accountability would extend the argument beyond personal maturity. The framework would also benefit from a life in which continuing disability or hardship places severe limits on any visible return to ordinary activity.

ISSN 3083-0710

These reservations should be weighed against the book's scale and purpose. Truscott has written a brief pastoral companion, not a systematic theology or clinical handbook. Its 21 endnotes and 17 bibliography entries provide useful routes into contemplative and psychological literature, though the synthesis does not fully address the differences among its sources. The repeated vocabulary sometimes limits the sense of development, but the restrained prose generally serves slow reflection well.

For readers navigating uncertainty, the book offers a humane language of attention, receptivity and company. It is especially suited to guided reflection where its questions can be tested rather than simply accepted. Its value lies in helping readers stay with difficult experience while returning them to the demands of love. Clearer distinctions about the centre, suffering and the responsibilities of companions would make that contribution more dependable.

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ISSN 3083-0710