

Book Review

Walking Away from Faith: Unravelling the Mystery of Belief and Unbelief, Ruth A. Tucker, (InterVarsity Press, 2002). ISBN 0830823328

—Reviewed by Ralph D. Winter

Tucker has already written more than a dozen books, all of which have been carefully researched and reasoned. This is no exception, in fact, it no doubt took more creative thinking and puzzling than any of the others.

Why? Because so few have delved into the mysteries of those apparently sincere believing people who come to the point of “walking away from faith.” That is, she is not concerned simply with people who do not believe. She treats only those who begin as sincere believers.

One thing she wants to know is whether there is any kind of a pattern for these reversals. Interestingly, for a large number of those who give up faith a major factor is the apparent irreconcilability of continuing to believe in a God of both benevolence and omnipotence when the world is so suffused with pain, violence, suffering and evil. How could this have possibly come about? Why does it continue?

Standard answers to the effect that God has His reasons and that there is a mysterious good behind all evil don't seem good enough. I know that they are not very credible to me.

She cites with feeling the sudden and seemingly totally fortuitous death of her mother in a motor accident at a fairly young age.

I've never been able to say she 'passed away.' Even “died” is not the way it happened. She was killed, and the harder that word sounds the more it fits what happened ... if there is an all-powerful God who sees every sparrow that falls, why did this happen?

But the book is full of people for

whom something like this was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Billy Graham's fellow evangelist, Charles Templeton pointed out shortly before his death that the most troubling turning point in his years of sliding away from faith came when:

He saw a photo in Life magazine of an African woman with a dead baby in her arms, “looking up to heaven with the most forlorn expression.” As he saw the desperation in her eyes, he asked himself, “Is it possible to believe that there is a loving or caring Creator when all this woman needed was rain?”

He goes on more in general.

It is impossible for me to believe that there is anything that could be described as a loving God who could allow what happens in our world today.

C. S. Lewis assumed a belief in God until his mother died. Then, in Tucker's paraphrase:

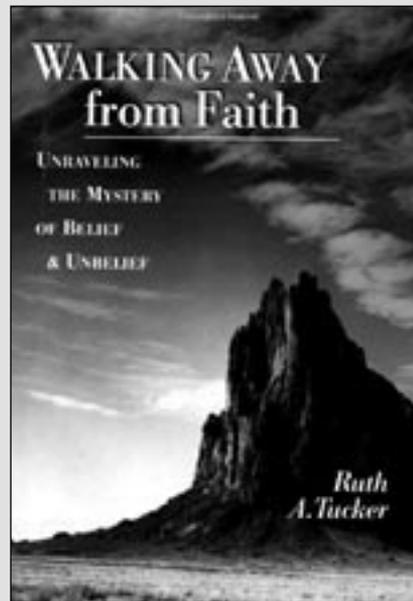
Why, he wondered, had not God, if there was a God, answered his prayers for her recovery?

Same problem.

The book is a very helpful and thoroughgoing treatment of the many pathways to disbelief. But the specific reason this two-year-old book is being reviewed in IJFM at this time is the fact that these passages highlight the dilemma dealt with in both this and the last issue, namely the inadequacy in the long run of an awareness of God in lieu of an accompanying insight into God. See the editorial in this issue.

In the specific case of intellectual bafflement over rampant violence and gratuitous evil in the presence of an all-powerful God, the possible key point is that in none of these accounts is there an enormously intelligent and evil person at work. Thus, only God can be blamed.

Another InterVarsity book, *Is God to Blame*, by Gregory Boyd, or his earlier book (also InterVarsity) *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, forcefully chal-



lenge the Augustinian emphasis (of neo-platonist origin) that God is the initiator of all evil—with good motives that may be obscure.

Of course, that leaves unanswered the origin of Satan. But for me this is no more difficult than the question of the origin of evil human beings to whom God, for reasons of His own, bequeathed free will. Free will must mean the freedom to choose wrong.

But for IJFM readers the missiological issue derives from the common belief in an unemployed Satan and a God who does evil for mysterious reasons. It is the understandable assumption that we cannot fight against an evil which is the initiative of God—which is what we must conclude if Satan is just a bystander.

Thus, mission agency personnel helpfully and compassionately treat the sick, but mission leaders in general do not sense a duty in the name of Christ to ferret out and eradicate the pathogens which cause those sicknesses. We need to ask the question, “What would Jesus have said back then if the people had the grasp we now have of germs, microbiology, DNA?”