

Do I consider myself a Christian?

I know one thing: there is holiness.

by [Annie Dillard](#) in the [June 3, 2020](#) issue



(Illustration by Tim Cook)

We invited Annie Dillard to contribute to the new [How My Mind Has Changed](#) series. She declined to write a full-length essay, but she did offer this short response to our query. —Eds.

How has my mind changed over many years? I identify as a Christian. Many Christians would disagree that I can use the term honestly.

I can't and don't give intellectual assent to many very established and agreed-upon Christian dogmas, if not most of them, if not all of them.

That Jesus of Nazareth is “the only begotten son of God, begotten not made, God of God, light of light, true God of true God” is something I always enjoy saying. But I wouldn't bet the farm on it. I wouldn't render it to Caesar. These are spiritual matters. Their language merely resembles ours. They need not make sense in worldly terms.

Did God create people? Sure, if that's how you like it. We didn't create ourselves. We evolved, just as all other living beings evolved. Every creature alive today is a pinnacle of creation. So is every extinct creature.

Did a personal God—an unmoved mover—set creation in motion? I doubt it. (But I do like the term *Deus absconditus* for its vivid portrayal of God as a fox who absconds with the henhouse.)

Fortunately, in life no one ever calls upon us to give—or to withhold—intellectual assent to anything. No one cares about our intellectual assent.

I know only one thing for certain: there is holiness. Standing there, a person can sing myriad songs.

Maybe there is a divide between people who honor holiness—who bow down before it, who pray on their knees—and people who don't. The opposite of holiness is selfishness, egotism, pride.

I live comfortably with paradox, that something can be both true and untrue. That annoys the daylighters out of people if you proclaim it, but not if you don't. People who are 75 years old don't take to proclaiming. (We bore from within!)

As a serious Christian—humor me—I'm at home with Orthodox Jewish dogma, Hasidic dogma, Islamic dogma, godless Buddhist wisdom, and probably many other views. Christianity is huge. I've studied it for many years. I see no reason to leave the religion of my birth, the religion I know best.

If when I die Jesus says "I know you not," he'll be right, and I'll eat my hat.

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title "Holding on to holiness."