

Pilgrim at tinker creek by annie dillard: religious and theological beliefs

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In Annie Dillard's book "Pilgrim at Tinker Creek", she references a diverse group of sources which include Albert Einstein, the Karan, and many philosophers, both with secular and sacred beliefs. One which was particularly intriguing was a quote of Jacques Ellul, a French philosopher, law professor, sociologist, theologian, and Christian anarchist (Chastenet). Referred to as a "spiritual genius" (35), Dillard uses Ellul's quote "Launch into the deep and you shall see" in order to explain how essential it is to pay attention to the meaning of every thought and action which occurs. She uses this source to concur that everything happens for a reason. Without paying attention or being present, one will miss so much of the underlying meaning of life which is given to those who ask questions. Rather than strolling mindlessly through life and simply going through the motions, be a part of something much bigger than oneself

At first glance through this book, it was hard to distinguish Dillard's personal position regarding her religious and spiritual beliefs. Upon a second read, it became more clear that she had exposed this. Dillard grew up going to Sunday school in the Presbyterian church, and claims to have been a Christian since she was twenty years old (Cantwell). She has an almost romantic love for the church, viewing it less as a series of rules, and more of a body of believers. It is because of this that she threads a story of faith through all of her books. The structure of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek is complex and multi-dimensional. It is, first of all, a narrative account of her wandering and reading life, of what she spends her days doing. It is at the same time a "meteorological journal of the mind," a quote she uses from Thoreau. It is a supercharged and scientific account of the natural world, a "radiant"

theodicy, a grave, outraged, outrageous inquiry into how it comes that a good creator has produced a world of cruelty and violence.

When seeing the world as it truly is by allowing “ the muddy river to flow unheeded in the the dim channels of consciousness” (Dillard 35), one must “ pay the pearl of great price”. This refers to how the world actually is when you stop to watch it while the ugliness and disparity in it are being revealed. Her suggestion is a seemingly paradoxical premise; seeing beyond sight. However, articulating her awareness guarantees that the moment itself will vanish. Her purpose of using this quote is to highlight that our self-consciousness not only divides us from our “ creator”, but also from our fellow creatures. Ellul’s quote is frequently applied in sermons, which is no coincidence. While originally intended for Christian theology, it is in fact applicable to a far greater span which reaches to Buddhism and life in general.

Dillard does not seem to be biased against religion or theological beliefs of philosophers, and values all sides by using a fair amount of references from each perspective in order to diversify and add credibility to her work. Prior to researching, I was not sure where she stood in the realm of spirituality. However, after it has become clear that she promotes Christian theology, while still respecting and applying the views of other beliefs which overlap. This proves the continuity and similarity between those which are believed to be so opposite.