**Passage from Sheehan we’ve been discussing:**

**"But in all these efforts at understanding the message of his kingdom of God, the point is to see the inevitability of interpretation, that is, to see that what makes us be human is our inexorable finitude, which condemns us to being acts ...of indirection and mediation, where all is "hints and guesses / Hints followed by guesses."[3] If, as we suggested above, living the kingdom means maintaining undecidability (the impossibility of distinguishing the worldly from the divine), then human existence itself, as an act of interpretation, is the enactment of undecidability. We are the inevitability of taking and mis-taking ourselves and the world as this or that; we are the inevitability of heresy. That is to say: All of us, including Jesus, are inevitably and forever a question to which there is no answer. Taking Jesus as his word means understanding and accepting that. Therefore, yes: The message of the kingdom of God is about Jesus of Nazareth--but only insofar as it is about every man and woman.

Recovering the kingdom "without Christ"--that would mean getting to what Jesus said: the present-future, the incarnation. Recovering the kingdom "without Jesus"--that would mean getting to what Jesus was: a hermeneut, a heretic, that is, a human being. The point in recovering the kingdom is to recover oneself as the place of the mystery of the present-future, and thus as one called to enact liberation.

We are brought back full circle to where we started. The crisis Christianity faces today is not sociological or administrative; it has little to do with the otherwise important facts that family life and sexual morality are in revolution, that church attendance and clerical vocations are decreasing, that women are demanding their rightful place in a heretofore masculine church. Christianity will survive all such crises by reshaping its outer form, as it has repeatedly done over the last twenty centuries. The major decision Christianity faces today is not how it might continue as before, or even how it might reform itself so as to return to its origins, to the surety of Simon's vision, to the pristine power of his Easter experience. No, the decision is whether or not Christianity can dissolve itself in order to become what it is about.

The crisis in Christianity is about its origins, its founding story, but not in the sense that its doctrines have been found to be myths (all religious doctrines are mythical) or to be totally lacking in truth (they are presumably as true, and as false, as any other decent religion's) or that they have no more meaning in the sophisticated modern world. Rather, the crisis is that at last Christianity is discovering what it always was about: not God or Christ or Jesus of Nazareth, but the endless, unresolvable mystery inscribed at the heart of being human. This is a chastening insight, but a salutary one, fraught with new possibilities for recovering the radically original impulse behind Jesus' preaching.

The prophet announced that the time had come (Mark 1:15), that the beginning of the end of religion was at hand. Since then, the church has wrestled with the challenge of putting herself out of business the way Jesus himself did: in the name of God's incarnation. That means learning to live at the uncertain point that is the present-future, without appeal to any "beyond." It is there, in the present-future, that all the reified and self-perpetuating structures of religion dissolve into what they were supposed to be about this is the kingdom's "protestant" moment of calling faith back to its origins. But there too the "catholic" moment, when one discovers the simple, universal meaning of those origins. It is the same message that Jesus preached when he came back to Galilee after his baptism in the Jordan: Grace is and always has been everywhere. The task is to make it so.**

From your response to the passage:

[…] the higher critical tradition has consistently held that the "Christ of faith" is a fabrication of the Church. The depiction of Jesus in the NT is therefore mythological and needs to by "demythologized" (see Rudolf Bultmann in *Kerygm...and Myth*). Ultimately, they believe that the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith are not the same, and so they attempt to reconstruct the true historical Jesus, but they can do that only by deconstructing texts that depict him as the Christ (see Albert Schweitzer's *Quest for the Historical Jesus*). In other words, all they have to work with are the texts and their firm beliefs that reports of the miraculous and supernatural can not be true and accurate historical accounts.

So, ultimately, I reject the premises of higher criticism, believing from experience in the supernatural and finding the account of Jesus in the NT to be consistent with my experience of His Spirit in my life. In I John, the writer tells us... that anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ is in the spirit of the antichrist. Now he was talking about gnostics who actually believed in a spiritual presence they called the Christ, but they believed it only hovered temporally in the body of Jesus and then left him on the cross. So their separation of Christ and Jesus is different than the separation effected by higher critics, but I think any doctrine that separates the two is technically a "heresy" when seen through the eyes of orthodox Christianity.

BTW, this passage from Sheehan is a classic higher critical move:

"However, the consequences for Jesus' message were tremendous. Jesus himself had never spoken of returning at the end of time; in fact, at one point in his ministry he may well have expected to be still alive at the end. At most Jesus may have believed--this is much debated--that the definitive arrival of the kingdom would be signaled by the appearance of God's apocalyptic deputy, the Son of Man. Whenever Jesus mentioned this Son of Man (if indeed he did mention him), he always referred to him as a future figure separate from Jesus himself.

Soon after the crucifixion, however, believers invented and put into Jesus' mouth statements which implied that at the eschaton Jesus himself would return as the Son of Man. For example, when Mark wrote his account of Jesus' trial, he constructed it so as to have the high priest ask Jesus whether he was the messiah. And Mark had Jesus respond:

I am; and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven. (14:62)"

If you read that passage (in the comment above) in its context, you see that it is a creative piece of speculation, certainly consistent with the author's presuppositions but contrary to the Church's interpretation of Jesus throughout the past 2,000 years.

**My response to your response to Sheehan:**

**Thanks so much for ALL of that! Very interesting. I’m not sure I see exactly where the speculation resides; I see instances of it, but am unsure as to how the whole of the passage or the gist of it is guesswork. I may just have to scrutinize it more thoroughly. Also not sure how the materialist presuppositions necessarily defeat any particular claim or the piece’s larger claim. But, again, I may just need to examine the whole thing much more closely.**

**Christ of history vs. Christ of faith, the precise instances and kinds of redaction—I’m really interested in these things, and have been reading about them kind of obsessively. But I guess my main question to you is along slightly different lines.**

**My own experience of the supernatural was real and certain enough to haunt me for the last 30 years, but ambiguous enough to keep me kind of scratching my head (or more like gnashing my teeth) for a framework by which to understand it. I don’t doubt the experience I had, but I wonder what ultimate conclusions about the church and organized religion to draw from it, or how exactly to think about Christ. I know how I feel; it’s my brain that won’t shut up. I’m a thinky, philosophical person, but I also do feel what other people of all inclinations clearly feel: a need for ritual affirmation/reminder/ shaping of what we’ve experienced, some kind of daily objective correlative to our belief. I have a need for fellowship, discussion, a place to meditate or pray with others. I just don’t know where to plant myself.**

**Joining any one church or adopting any specific dogma never feels right, as the particulars of any one church usually seem questionable in whole or in part, or any sweeping acceptance of a whole dogma seems arbitrary, a faith-act in the weakest sense of “faith,” and ultimately something which will just divide one group of people from another. Given my personal experience of Christ, I can’t believe that such division is good.**

**So I’m a creed-seeking person who doesn’t believe in creeds, straight out of that Protestant tradition, I guess Sheehan calls it, that wants to shed the external trappings of religion and return it to its primal meanings. (Not sure I believe in primal meanings, but that’s how I’m always drifting…) This is in part where Sheehan’s thinking makes sense to me. Is a Christianity possible that “dissolves itself in order to become what it is about.” Can/should we shed all of the apparatus and just live the message. I think this is why I was attracted to Quakerism—certain branches of it rely only very lightly, and only as absolutely necessary, on anything like reified forms, rituals, dogmas. Its forms and rituals hang on it like a kind of gossamer. I think this is a really demanding form of Christianity—the dogmas, even the conception of Jesus as the Christ, with all of its attendant trappings, may be our impulse, as always, to hang onto external forms and reifications in a way that sort of lets us off the hook, diminishes the real experience (and work) of being in Christ and having Christ in us.**

**For me, all of this relates kind of amusingly to deconstruction and poststructuralist theory generally. Language (like established religions and dogmas) is arbitrary; it doesn’t ultimately mean anything because, as language (like established religion and dogmas) it continually displaces what it would signify. Religion and dogma, as constructs of language, continually postpone their own meanings; they hinder our experience of the divine even as they attempt to connect us to the divine. And yet, like language itself, they are the only means we have. In daily life we take a leap of faith in believing that what we speak and write actually means something real to others, and that what others speak and write is accurately received by us. No matter what we know about mediated cultural realities, we have to behave and function much of the time as though they were *un*mediated. Religion, organized churches, are the only language we have for matters of spirit and so we need them and live with them out of faith, despite their imperfections and mere approximations of truth.**

**But then I’m back to my basic problem: what church? What religion? What language? What is or should be the nature of one’s commitment to a church? I look to the Bible for Jesus’s words, but find it hard to swallow much of the rest, and that puts me at odds with the great majority of Christian denominations. Jesus apparently trusted Peter to carry forth his message, but Peter clearly says things that Jesus (that we know of) never said. E.g: women should be subservient to their husbands. When I read that in 1 Peter, I’m like—huh? Screw you, I think I’ll just stick with what Jesus himself said, thank you! (or our closest rendering of what he said). Even though Jesus sent his twelve out to spread the word, they themselves were not gods and mediated the message in who knows how many different and of course human ways. Isn’t it almost a form of idolatry to take Peter’s or anyone else’s words as divine or perfect? Nowhere does Jesus say that we are to worship and trust without reservation what his followers went on to write. Just because God is working through someone doesn’t mean that Satan isn’t as well. Most if not all things human seem to involve the struggle between both of them in us. Ergo the world and all of its attendant beauties sitting there right alongside all of its attendant horrors. And ergo even the Bible and all of its truths sitting there right alongside some of its weirdnesses and even possible harms.**

**OK! So my question to you, Dale (drumroll; sigh; sheesh, it’s about time) IS: even with the experience you had of the supernatural, how are you so comfortable with all of the Bible and some fundamentalist notions? How are you so at ease in your Christian identity?**