Mark and his readers know that this shared myth has to be used to fill in the gaps? Hasn’t Mark left some traces in his Gospel with regard to this shared myth? Can we reconstruct this myth? (This is my approach to this question, namely that we can and that we have to — especially in the light of the seriousness of the issue and even though scholars [since Weeden raised the question] can not come to an agreement as to how to fill the gaps with regard to the indeterminacies. My approach, in the end, is that it is not so much the indeterminacies which should be interpreted or put under erasure but Mark’s (even though reconstructed) myth itself. My criticism of Aichele would then be that despite the fact that he follows a postmodernist approach, this dangerous myth of conflict is still present — though latent — in his [?] fantasy).

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REPLY TO ‘REMARKS ON “TWO FANTASIES”’

G AICHELE

How should a postmodern author — one who does not believe that the author’s intention is a decisive hermeneutical factor — reply when asked regarding his intentions? How should a reader for whom the text does not mean until it is read answer another Reader who reads the text which he has written?

However, the Reader of my essay has given it such a careful reading, and asks such provocative questions, that I will risk the charges of self-contradiction. Many of this Reader’s questions are ones which initially provoked my interest in this topic, and I continue to struggle with them. In general, I find the Reader’s summary of what I have said, and the probing search for my subtext (and perhaps also my pretext), to be accurate.

I draw heavily on contemporary literary-theoretical approaches to the Gospels, including the work of Crossan, Funk, Kelber, and others. I also follow Crossan, Koester, and others in exploring the non-canonical Gospels, both in relation to canonical texts and as worthy of study in their own right. However, I part company with Crossan and others (such as Funk’s ‘Jesus Seminar’) over the search for ipsissima verba and other relics of the ‘historical Jesus’. I think of this
search as a new, and equally futile, quest for the holy grail. Even if we could journey to first-century Galilee in Bill and Ted's time-traveling telephone booth, we would run into the same problem as the character in Monty Python's *Life of Brian*: 'What did he say? Blessed are the cheesemakers?'

On the other hand, since fantasy is hostile to belief (according to Todorov, not Tolkien), I do assume that the trajectory of the Gospel traditions tends toward decreasing the element of the fantastic (making the material easier to believe). What this may imply about the actual man Jesus, I'm not sure. Other relatively early materials, including Q and Paul, are apparently not fantastic. If Mark had been written much more recently, by someone like Stanislaw Lem or Julio Cortázar, it would be less perplexing. My interest has been in the ways that the literary structure of the fantastic appears in these texts, but I find it turning now also toward theological implications.

2 It is in this context that I am interested in 'myth'. I'm surprised to be associated with Bultmann, as I don't know Bultmann's work very well (although several of my teachers were Bultmannians). I'm not interested in 'eliminating' the mythical, but rather in exploring its relation to the fantastic. I see this relation (following Barthes, Todorov, and Kristeva — also Lévi-Strauss and Freud) as one of paradox and subversion. Yet fantasy is impossible without myth. Perhaps I should have developed this point more. My interest in Mark in not that it is 'more authentic', but that it presents a problem which the other canonical Gospels attempt to solve. This is why the other Gospels must add to, or de-fantasize, Mark (and Peter).

Every reader must also de-fantasize Mark, as the Reader indicates. As fantastic and writerly texts, Mark and Peter call for more work on the part of the reader than do Matthew, Luke, or John. (As I've elsewhere argued, the Gospel of Thomas is also highly fantastic.) What saved Mark (and condemned Peter and Thomas) was that Matthew and Luke (and Paul, of course) showed Christians 'how to read'. I'm not convinced, however, that this calls for a return to Tolkienian fantasy, fantasy as *evangelium*, as the Reader suggests.

3 I'm not sure that there are 'universal points at which the reader gains entry into the text' (or her existence), but otherwise I find this comment very suggestive. On salvation, fantasy, and the Gospels of Mark and Thomas, see my essay, 'Poverty and the Hermeneutics of Repentance', in *Cross Currents* (Winter 1988-89).

4 I also find this analysis very intriguing: the one who lives by fantasy will surely die by fantasy. How hard it is to escape closure! However, I'm not sure that such an escape, if possible (and I doubt that it is), would be 'less alienating'
than the alternative. In any case, I am not suggesting that my reading is the 'only true' way to read these texts.

5 I share the Reader's interest in ideology and the Gospels. Texts (including Mark) are produced by authors with ideologies and read by readers with ideologies; but I do not privilege the author's ideology, nor that of the first readers. There is no innocent reading. The 'Jesus-Judaism conflict' (including the problem of Jesus's identity, the messiah, and the son of man) is open to dangerous readings, but I claim that Mark provides more questions than answers regarding this conflict, in contrast to the other canonical Gospels. This is not, however, intended to exonerate Mark. The question of how or whether ideology is 'in' a text is a perplexing one for me, but I agree that reading Mark as a fantasy does not neutralize the dangers.

6 Those who adopt literary and especially post-structuralist approaches to texts are sometimes cautioned about the dangers of cutting truth free from its historical moorings. Yet as far as I can tell, history, too, is a narrative requiring interpretation. No text, not even the 'text' of history, interprets itself; no text is free from the dangers of (mis-)interpretation. As the Reader has anticipated, I reject the claim that history (or theology) liberates us from cultural blindness.

I suspect that every text — at least every interesting one! — is dangerous. Didn't Socrates warn us of this, in the Phaedrus? I hope that fantasy may provide, not a safety net to guarantee against all danger, but an encouragement to us, to confront and even to live in the midst of an uncertain world, without having to destroy it.