Ok, here’s the problem:

When news of the new 2014 Ms. Marvel broke last week, it was everywhere—and, at the same time, nowhere specific. Of course Marvel wanted the story everywhere, sure, but there was no one place where they could have put it, really: Technology announcements might have Wired or Gizmodo, political coverage has its home at Politico or even The Drudge Report, sports items have Grantland or Scout (and, yes, I had to look a couple of those up). The point being: for nearly every news-worthy niche, there is an immediate, authoritative, and informed site/brand/service to which not only everyday readers can turn but on which also related media sites can rely.

Except religion and comics. At least, that’s the one I’m concerned with, and you should be too.

Here’s what worries me. None of the sites or news outlets who covered the Ms. Marvel announcement could offer any real analysis on it. The comics journalists have only the most limited background in religious matters, the mainstream news sources are unlikely to challenge a Disney-owned (or a Warner Brothers-owned) property, religion sites have their own slanted theologies, and the individual bloggers have only their own limited platforms. No one has the whole picture—

—and it goes way, way beyond Ms. Marvel (about which, I should note, I’m excited and enthusiastic). The next time a religious group takes offense to (and perhaps action about) an editorial cartoon or a comic series, who has the background to offer not only nuanced commentary but also useful advice and historical perspective on the event’s handling? The next time a comic book company re-visions a character with a religious affiliation, who would be able not only to encapsulate that character’s publishing history but also speak to the politics and economics that went into the decision? Or the next time that a religious group uses the comics medium to transmit its messages—whether loving or malicious—their motives, their background, and their principles are going to be best assessed, reported, and packaged by whom?

Us. It’s got to be us. It needs to be us.

You’re reading this screed because I consider you an ally. You’re not one particular religion, not one specific vocation, not one class of media consumer (or creator), nor one political, sexual, economic, national, or educational set of viewpoints. You’re someone who I think (1) can recognize the void I’m spotting and (2) has something to contribute toward filling it.

I’m looking to assemble a group of such allies—folks who can help me shape this idea into a given form, a presence, a readership, a business, and a brand. It’s embryonic at this moment, and it needs direction. We need both to identify each other—what expertise, access, and skills we already have at our disposal—and to recognize and reach out to fill gaps that are left.

Several of you have already made strides in this field, examining religion and comics from your own angle and circumstances. I’m looking to bring us together to build this new mass presence. We won’t control the discourse or define the stories: We’ll focus them, make them accessible, make them authentic, make them accountable, and even make them educational and useful.

#empanelment
Publishers need us. Readers need us. The media needs us. The industry needs us. And, if you’ve felt the awkward disconnect between what can be done here with this rich intersection between religion & comics and then what actually gets done, we need us, too.

This is the call to action. Bring others, and begin with me.

A. David Lewis
November 13, 2013
Waltham MA

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