

WEEK 3

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# Digging Deeper

The Accused: Resist

## Daredevil's Catholicism Makes Him Marvel's Biggest Hypocrite

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It is impossible for Daredevil to be a good Catholic while also being a good superhero, and this contradiction makes him a better character.

Almost no one else is as fanatical about sticking to his own moral code in Marvel Comics as Daredevil. Living in a city as crime-ridden as New York, Matt Murdock sees adhering to his Catholic beliefs as an ultimate safeguard against falling victim to the corruption around him. And while he is aware of the moral ambiguities of everyday life in the modern world through his experience as a lawyer, Matt is unable to reconcile this fact for himself, leading him to self-flagellate for his perceived slights. This emerges from the fact that he deeply distrusts those around him, taking it upon himself to try to model an impossible level of virtue stemming from his Catholicism.

A superhero's sense of morals are the foundation of their identity, creating a sense of conflict that Daredevil is unmatched on. Chip Zdarsky's current Daredevil run depicts a Matt Murdock who is obsessed with doing "the right thing" in accordance to a strict interpretation of Catholic teaching, even when reality presents a messier picture. In doing so, it emphasizes the ways that Matt Murdock is a hypocrite in his life as the Man Without Fear, tormenting him as he is forced to reckon with the consequences of his actions. In his current view of Catholic doctrine, it is impossible for Matt to be a good Catholic while also being Daredevil. As a result, the intensity in which Daredevil still holds himself and others accountable to his moral code despite its impossibility makes his efforts ring hollow.

Due to the moral ambiguities of life in Hell's Kitchen, Matt Murdock feels caught between trying to embody a traditional sense of morality as taught in Catholic teaching, while also addressing violence occurring around him every day. Matt is at once outraged by how everyday people are taken advantage of by New York's criminal underground, and moved to act on his feelings through physical combat, while simultaneously disgusted at himself for craving violence in this way. As a result, Daredevil is trapped in a moral Mobius strip, where to be an effective superhero is also to be a neglectful Catholic, and he cannot exist as one of these things without feeling immense guilt for its flip side. Despite being known as the Man Without Fear, Daredevil is intensely afraid of letting innocent people suffer as a result of his moral indecision.

And while plenty of characters in recent issues of Daredevil have called Matt out on his self-serving hypocrisy, Daredevil is achieving a new type of significance through his





flaws, challenging the ways in which superheroes are traditionally seen as moral paragons in comics. Daredevil's contradictions may make him Marvel's biggest hypocrite, but it doesn't necessarily make him a failure as a superhero. In fact, the struggle that he endures as a result of his acceptance and later rejection of Catholic models of behavior in the interest of doing good in the world makes him relatable to Catholics experiencing a similar crisis, albeit without the superhero setting. So while on paper, Daredevil fails at being a "good Catholic," he excels at

embodying a Catholic condition of being unsatisfied with rigid models of morality that have scant applicability in modern life. This unlocks Daredevil's greater significance as a character, because in failing to measure up to his ideals, he becomes a patron saint for readers experiencing contradictions of their own.

Viewing Daredevil as extraordinary in his own flaws marks a break from typical superhero conventions, and presents an opportunity to rewrite what fans expect from the genre. Instead of being empowered by his morals, Daredevil is often hindered by them, presenting Catholicism as a process of wrestling between the realities of the world and a traditional moral code rather than as a static set of beliefs. This not only makes him significantly more relatable to readers, but also changes the terms on which superheroes are expected to act in accordance to their ideals. In this sense, Daredevil's dramatic power as a character is derived from the push and pull of the beliefs that would ordinarily define him as a superhero, imbuing him with complexity while also imagining an alternative to how superheroes typically exist in comic books. Daredevil isn't an aspirational figure just because he wants to alleviate suffering in his city, but because of how honestly he handles his own failure to live up to the perfection he expects from himself.

Daredevil's tumultuous relationship with his own moral code makes him not only more human on the page, but also representative of the fact that there is no realistic way to be a "good Catholic." By centering Daredevil's narrative around his character's contradictions, Zdarsky eschews a hagiographic approach often seen in the superhero genre in order to get at a deeper problem of how people negotiate between their personal demons and their desire to do good in the world. Now, fans don't necessarily open a Daredevil book to read a story about a fully formed "good guy" doing good things—they read a Daredevil book to witness a man trying to work out how to be good in the first place. As Zdarsky's Daredevil run evidences, heroism can be found in embracing your own failures alongside good deeds.

Daredevil may be the biggest hypocrite in Marvel Comics, but his contradictions are what renders him human in visceral detail. While it is likely that he will never be able to reach a solid conclusion on how to be both a good Catholic and a good superhero, Matt Murdock has the opportunity to define for himself how he wants to be a force for good in Hell's Kitchen. This aspect of self-determination makes Daredevil a unique representative of the moral conditions felt by Catholics like Matt Murdock, who are faced with a question of how they can be a good Catholic amidst the messiness of their lives. And though this journey has been far from easy for Daredevil, it is easily the very thing that makes him a hero at the end of the day.

