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## Preach

by Mari Syrad Grieves

Some people say we are made in His image. God, then, must be a template for imperfection. Some people say we are sinners. God, then, the original sinner. Poor Satan was long pipped to the post by the time he slithered through the reeds in the Garden of Eden.

Sin, by the way, is a social construct designed to shame us into compliance. They say we are born owing, guilty, our life's work to seek redemption found in that same life being half-lived; a life controlled by a book and a word and a conduit and a building and a lie.

You sin for being a man who loves a man. Wait, what's that in the back? Oh, it's the progressive church calling out, 'Not us - love is love! It's fine to be a man who loves a man just as long as, you know, they don't fuck'. All it takes is lifelong celibacy, then God's cool with it.

You sin for getting divorced so women, endure. Put up with domestic abuse, marital rape, remain a financial hostage, because, God forbid, excuse the pun, you leave the fucker and burn his house to the ground.

You sin for denying God, and this one's a biggie. 'I'm really worried about you,' a well-meaning friend of a friend once implored, 'because you're going to go to hell if you don't accept God into your heart'. 'Don't worry, mate', I said, 'all my friends are there.'

But how can you deny Him, they protest. He is everywhere. They saw his pale dotting face in a cloud (oh, Jesus, born in the Middle East, was white by the way). They saw the Virgin Mary in a slice of fucking toast. So yeah, there's proof. Or so some people say. The solid gold cross that stood mocking the flames that engulfed the Notre Dame, 'Proof', they cried in denial of science: that wood burns in temperatures that gold will not.

God is used as a commodity to justify war and the slaughter of millions. Even though Jesus was Jewish; even though Israel and Palestine are neighbours; even though they're killing over two sides of the same coin on the street in Belfast.

God is used as a political weapon, complicit in the control of women, oh sorry, I mean host bodies, forced to carry an unwanted generation to term despite deformity, incest, and loss of the mother's life. Sanctity of life but only for the unborn. A zygote with more rights than a person of colour in God's America. Take note, *The Handmaid's Tale* is no longer a work of fiction.

So no, I will not go to your evening of evangelism disguised as a fun little get together; 'the perfect opportunity to introduce a friend', the flyer said. No, I will not sit in the Vicar's garden and bow my head in respect as a stranger tells me about how she found Jesus and leads us in a group prayer. I will not tell my children to repent as they are welcomed into this world. But after all that I've started to wonder if it's not God that's the problem after all, but the human beings who created Him?