

# Projection

*John 6:51-58*

INTRO:

Anne Lamott wrote:

***You can safely assume that you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.***

We must be careful assuming what God hates. We must be careful in interpreting what God hates. After all, we can only encounter and understand God within the limits of our own perceptions. So, even though there is an absolute being who is called God out there, by definition we make our own perceptions of him.

We project our images of God upon God, in our *feeble*, *fallible* and *finite* attempts to think about God. At the very same time, God is also projecting his great love for us upon us, in Christ. In Jesus Christ, God **comes** to us, **reaches** out to us in ways we can understand. Our God is a steadily **self-revealing** God who **speaks**, **acts**, and **reaches** out to us. This is the **incarnation**, *God in the flesh among us*.

ME:

It helps me to connect with God when I realize that he left his exalted perch and came to us that we might know him. That we might really understand his love. The Bible shows us that God is transcendent and moves on to show us to show us the imminence of God. **Transcendence? Immanence?**

I read that when we visualize God as being up in heaven, and heaven as being apart from earth, we lose the immediacy of God as part of the story, part of our being, as intimate as the angel who wrestled all night with Jacob and changed his story forever. God was not something apart from Creation or apart from daily life. God was there, marvelously, terribly there.

Angels often appear when they are least expected; that's one of the wonders of angels. But if an angel chooses to wrestle with you, you are going to recognize it, like it or not. And then, perhaps, you may demand a blessing, and receive.

**Transcendence and immanence?** This means God is the Creator and is not creation, but God is in all of creation.

YOU:

**How do you make sense of God's transcendence and his immanence? Do you get it? Does it make sense? Do you project things on God that**

**perhaps you should not?** Let's turn to Jesus and see if he can help us make sense of all this.

Let's pray together first...

GOD:

*John 6:51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."*

*52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"*

*53 So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; 55 for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. 56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."*

WE:

We are getting toward the end of John 6 in this passage. This passage is known as the "**bread of life**" discourse or interchange. Jesus keeps talking about bread using the image of **living bread**" again today. Let's move on

from thinking about this metaphor of bread and concentrate on Christian thinking.

We continue to see that this Gospel is so abstractly spiritual and strange. So much so that it is not easy to connect to our lives. One thing we find is that John is exploring new ways to think about God. John began with the invasion of God's glory that became flesh and dwelt among us. With that beginning, John has to rethink everything he thought he knew about God.

The modern world tends to **misconstrue**, **misinterpret**, and **misunderstand** how Christians are to think. We will think about this and we will defend some of the things the world finds strange about the way believers speak and think.

Jesus comes to us from the outside, not just outside our world, but also outside our consciousness. He is the word, the word that formed the world, made flesh and dwelt among us. He is God Almighty in the flesh, standing before us.

Projection. **What is that? Let me tell you a story to answer that question.**

A student left an Easter Service at a University Chapel saying to the chapel preacher, **"I know what you Christians are up to. We studied all about**

**this in philosophy. This is called ‘projection.’” Feuerbach said that you’ve got this desire to live forever, therefore you projected your infantile wish onto the universe and named that ‘God.’”**

The chapel preacher replied ... *in love*, **”That shows how little you know. If we were going to project a God, we would certainly not have projected this one! We’ve demonstrated, time and again through the centuries, that we are more than capable of producing many more accessible and likeable Gods than this one!**

This is what a lot of people think in our modern world. The modern view of God as childish wish-projection probably began with Sigmund Freud. Freud claimed that the **“petty ceremonials”** of religion are basically a personality sickness. God is only a symptom of deep inner insecurities.

Freud wrote that:

***“One might venture to regard obsessional neurosis as a pathological formation of a religion, and to describe that neurosis as an individual religiosity and religion as a universal obsessional neurosis.”***

To sum it up, Freud thought that only sick people could be religious. It is modern nature to reduce things to something that can be said to be **“only”** something else. There is no reality today outside the self. So then, what we call **“God”** is only a projection of something within us. What we call **“music”** is only a series of sound waves bouncing about the atmosphere. What

we call **“art”** is only a series of marks upon a canvas that encourage the neurochemical processes of the brain. **Reductionism** is in style. Freud dismisses **“the fairy-tales of religion”** as only an illusion **“derived from human wishes”**:

***“The effect of religious thinking may be likened to that of a narcotic.”***

This was like what Marx said about religion as **“the opiate of the common people.”** Religion is just a cheap drug.

Look at our tendency to project images upon the world, not from childish wishes, but from the natural tendency to think about the world. The thoughts of our imaginations might be compared to a movie screen on which images are projected. When we say the world is a **“rat race,”** that is an image. When we say that life is **“a bowl of cherries,”** that is a projection. We are not wrong to engage in such projection. Our projection must be set next to experience and evaluated, and not so too easily dismissed. We are individuals who live in a uncertain relationship with the world. We are busy building up intellectual models to enable us to move in the world.

***But what if the world we live in is not only our projection, ... but also God’s?***

Think about that. Christians claim that the God of Israel and the church, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Mary and Joseph, is more than a helpful **metaphor**. This God is a reality. It is typical of modern humanity to

think that we are the only actors, the only speakers. **But what if the Bible is right in its claim that God is busy acting and speaking to us? What if our images of God are not simply our projections out of our own ego needs, but gifts, gifts from a endlessly revealing God who is determined to be known?** We have admitted that we are busy projecting certain images upon the screen. **But what if God is also busy projecting images up on the screen? What if when we say “God,” we are not just throwing our projections and wishes out into the universe, but we are also being bombarded by images of the good shepherd, the waiting parent, the crucified savior, the patient teacher, the bread from heaven?**

*These are images that have been projected upon us by the Christian faith.*

**What if we are God’s projection, a construct in the mind of God, something that God is working on as a project?** Surely you have been in some classroom in school and had some stunning insight, that **“Aha!”** moment. Normally, we think of these experiences as self-derived. We say things like, **“In that moment it all came together for me. It all came to me. I figured it out.”** But what if those moments are literally times when **“it came to me”?** **What if this Sunday, your faith is not something that you called forth within yourself, but rather it was something that was given to us from the outside, placed upon us?**

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

*Yes we project our things on God, but it's okay, he projects his love, his mercy, and his vision upon us*

YOU:

**What do you ... project ... onto God? How will you open yourself to all that he projects onto you and into you and through you?**

CLOSE:

C. S. Lewis kept arguing for the objective reality of the God whom Christians worship. It was the sheer otherness of God that impressed Lewis and won his undying fascination. Lewis, like many believers, was impressed by how the God of the Bible is a God who is so much larger and more interesting than anything we could have thought up on our own. Sometimes the otherness of God is abrasive, difficult for us. Lewis commented, **“Nothing which is at all times and in every objective reality. It is of the very nature of the real that it should have sharp corners and rough edges, that it should be resistant, should be itself. Dream-furniture is the only kind on which you never stub your toes or bang your knee.”**

*God is transcendent, but in Jesus, we see that God is with us too.*

We have seen how so much of modern life is conceived of something that we think, we do, we say. How different is the action in the world rendered



in the Bible! The prophet Jeremiah speaks of Israel as a glob of clay in the hands of God. The potter at the turning wheel pushes down the clay and forms it into a pot. The clay is passive. The potter—who is God—is active. That clay pot bears the imprint of the creator. So what if my thoughts are not exclusively my thoughts but rather are ideas not merely self-derived, given to me by the great consciousness of God? Plato taught that all of our thoughts are implanted within us, groping sketches of the ideal world that exists in the mind of God. **What if I never really “think for myself” but instead I think those thoughts implanted in me by my creator? Think about it.**

*While you do that, let's pray together...*