



Dry Bones

Hear the Word of the Lord

Weekly Topics

Week 1: How did we get here?

- The cataclysmic changes of modernity
- Translating between old and new worldviews
- The origin of a violent God

Week 2: Why do we suffer?

- An evolutionary and mimetic understanding

Week 3: Jesus' message of love


- The death of scapegoating

Week 4: The importance of Church

- Feeding our conscious and unconscious selves

Week 5: Living Simple Lives in a Complicated World?

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Overview of Retreat so Far

1. We are evolving from a static worldview to a dynamic worldview.
2. The foundation of Christian salvation is that Jesus saves us from the consequences of Original Sin.
3. Original sin consists of selfishness and mimetic rivalry which evolved from self-preservation.
4. Jesus' life, teaching, passion, death, and resurrection are all transformative lessons in evolving past mimetic rivalry.
5. This week... Evolution continues through connection to community and God.

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Comments/Questions from last week

1. How do we live this stuff? How do we intentionally evolve towards becoming the image of God?
 - Should this be our topic for next week?
 - Focus on applying spiritual principles in our daily lives?
 - Embracing nondual thinking?

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- Yahweh Prayer
- Scripture, Ez 37:1-11, 12a, 14a NRSV

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know."

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Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them.

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Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: ... I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live..."

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Mission Control, We Have a Problem...

Last week we heard the good news of Jesus...


- God is love and favors the vulnerable.
- He showed us the way as we become more like him...
 - We become more capable of and responsible for love.
 - We become more aware of selfishness and mimetic rivalry.
 - We become more aversive to scapegoating.

But aversion to scapegoating presents a problem...

- Scapegoating is how humans avoid widespread violence.
- If scapegoating becomes ineffective, what stops escalating rivalry?



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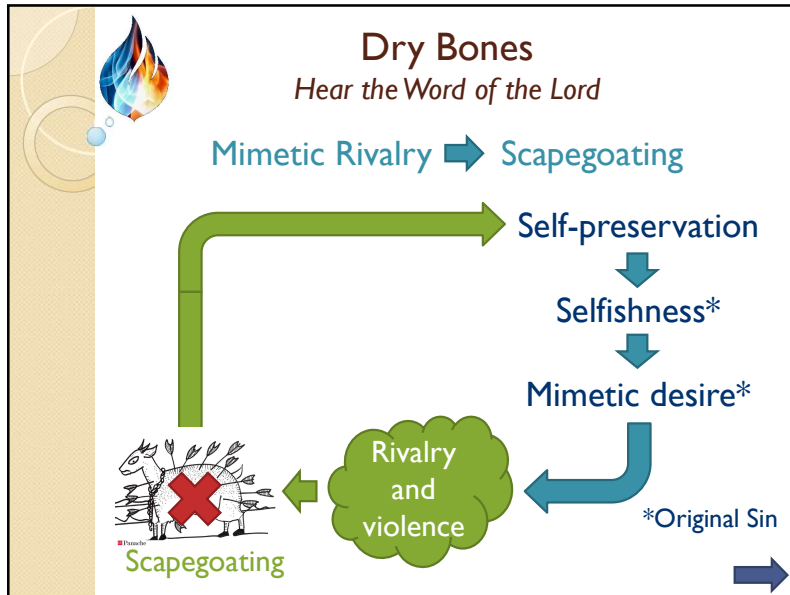
Mission Control, We Have a Problem...

To make matters worse, Girard told us there is no rational path forward...

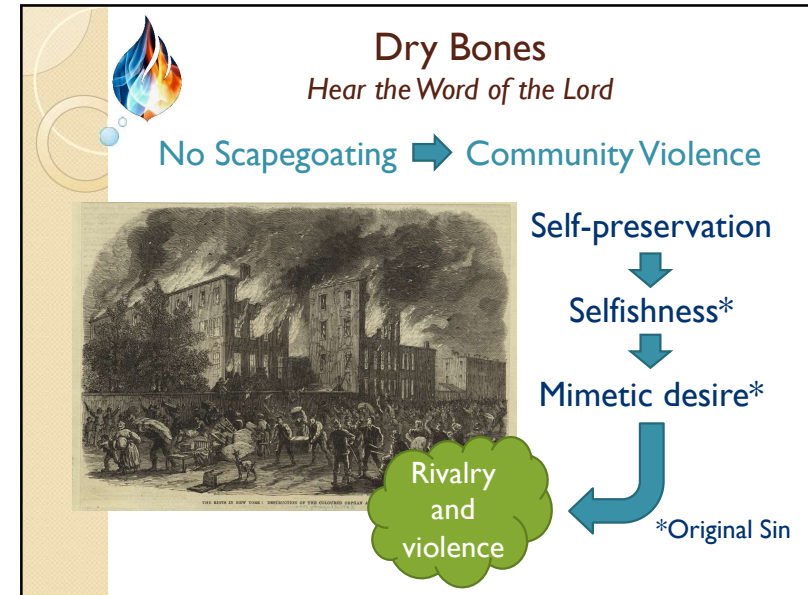
- We can't get rid of self-preservation or mimetic desire – they are foundational to personal and communal survival.
 - It is only when they become cancerous as selfishness and escalating mimetic desire that they produce violent rivalry.
- Mimetic rivalry is our Original Sin, we are not in control of it. We can't make a rule that says, "no rivalry."
- Rivalry leads to violence. And as we become more aware of scapegoating, it becomes less effective. This means that widespread violence is more likely.



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Finding a Path Forward from Mimetic Rivalry

But if we know this now, why isn't a rational path viable?

- Selfishness and mimetic rivalry are typically not conscious choices.
- Rational thought is ineffective at plumbing the depths of unconscious fears and desires.
- Unconscious knowledge (body knowledge) is accessed through meditation/contemplation, ritual, and paying attention to affective movements within us.
- These "tools" (meditation, etc.) also nurture and heal our unconscious.
- Unfortunately, science considers these tools 'touchy feely' and untrustworthy.

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A moment in the weeds!!!

The modern philosopher Ken Wilber finds science's response to meditation irrational. He says the following in *The Religion of Tomorrow* (my paraphrase)...

For thousands of years, people who regularly meditate over long periods have described their meditation experience as 'oneness with the divine'. Wilber invites scientists to practice meditation and help create experiments to learn more about this experience. Then he says, 'if you aren't willing to participate in this experience, then please don't criticize those of us who do.'

The important point is – you gotta enter the experience of prayer and religion to know ♥ what happens there.

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Finding a Path Forward from Mimetic Rivalry

So, the rational path isn't viable, but Girard sees a non-rational path forward from mimetic rivalry...

- God must intervene.
- But how? By you and I choosing to be transformed by God through prayer.
- Girard was not a Christian before he studied the Bible as mimetic literature. He became one afterwards.



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Finding a Path Forward from Mimetic Rivalry

Stunningly, we have shifted from God designing an impersonal system that evolves towards consciousness/love, to requiring a personal relationship with God as the mechanism for evolving to our next phase of development.

- I see this "plot twist" as theologically brilliant! It is transcendent love that has moved us forward through evolutionary time to consciousness, and now this love invites us to use our freewill (as we become self-aware) to grow in love through our relationship with God.
- We are growing up!

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Another moment in the weeds!!!

Do you see the beauty of this shift from transcendent to personal? Do you see how rational it is in hindsight? It affirms the great insights of the static worldview!

- God is love.
- God is both transcendent and personal.
- Bonaventure's (1221-1274) understanding of Jesus' incarnation as salvific, the "sixth day" of creation, the last piece of creation/revelation to show us the way.
 - God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day.

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Finding a Path Forward from Mimetic Rivalry

So, the positive path forward (still through evolution) is now in the hands of God and the mystics.

"The devout Christian of the future will either be a 'mystic'—someone who has 'experienced something'—or will cease to be anything at all."

– Karl Rahner, S.J. (1971)

Our hope is in our formation as humans through direct experience of God, of the divine. This won't be a linear path; no relationship is linear. You and I are not in control, yet this relationship evolves only if we choose it.



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Finding a Path Forward from Mimetic Rivalry

We must be wise in our approach when we pay attention to affective movements to seek the divine...

- Without guidance we can slip outside of communal norms.
- Moving too far outside of communal norms is considered 'mental illness' and can impact self-preservation...
 - Jim Jones
 - The Branch Davidians
 - The spaceship folks...
 - Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (Robert Persig)



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Finding a Path Forward from Mimetic Rivalry

The image of a divine flame (fire) within you is helpful...


- It can sustain you – spiritual food and warmth.
- It can guide you – light to see by.
- It is powerful – leads you to wisdom or endangerment.
- Don't fear it – but do respect it.
 - Abusing any human super-power can harm you (intimacy, love, power/self-preservation, the divine)

We need boundaries to safely access this flame.

We need a beacon, so we know where home is.

Providing boundaries and a beacon is the Church's role.

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The Role of the Church

What is "the Church"...

- It is the People of God.
- It is a sacrament of Christ, an outward sign of an inward reality.
- "It is both a sign and an instrument of (a) intimate union with God & (b) the total union of humans to one another."
 - Vatican 2 Constitution on the Church, Bill Huebsch translation
- It is the Body of Christ, experienced sacramentally...
 - We are the outward sign of an inward reality!
 - Through our baptism we are united to Christ.
 - The community is nourished and fed through the Eucharist – and experiences communion with Christ.

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Why Be a Part of the Church?

The Church is important because it's God's community...

- Choosing to belong to the Church is an act of faith in God
 - We dedicate ourselves to the mission of becoming the Body of Christ in gratitude for what God has done for us.
 - We give ourselves to the church Christ established, whether it is healthy or sick at this moment in history.
- We practice positive mimetic desire.
 - We learn the spiritual path from the spiritually wise, past and present.
 - We learn to pray; and we pray for each other.

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Why Be a Part of the Church?

The Church is also important for its Tradition...

- If you can't find a home within the boundaries of perennial wisdom, you're probably in trouble.
- Guidance from those that went before us.
 - Wisdom that throttles mimetic desire through taboos and prohibitions (moral codes).
 - Wisdom that provides a safe container for experiencing the fire of God.
- Rituals that incarnate the ineffable.
 - Ineffable = too great or extreme to be expressed or described in words.



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Why Be a Part of the Church?

The Rituals of Baptism and Eucharist...

- The power of ritual is known in our bodies. It is a primal, deep, often not conscious way of knowing. It's trustworthy.
- Baptism is a ritual drowning followed by rebirth. Anointing conveys being entrusted with a special purpose.
 - Does sprinkling water convey the power of death and rebirth?
 - When a baby is baptized, who is impacted by the ritual?



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Why Be a Part of the Church?


The Rituals of Baptism and Eucharist...

- Eucharist is ritual eating – receiving nutrition and life – from someone that chose to die so that you can live.
 - This is shockingly intimate – so intimate that we tend to rationally shutdown. It is taking the other's life within you – and becoming one. The other is no longer other.

How your brain understands ritual is very different than how your body knows through ritual.

- Rachael's dance.
- Eucharist after loss.
- The importance of funerals and weddings.

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The Role of the Church

The Church's role is to support people as they develop a deep, personal relationship with God.

As we strive to become better lovers, we become increasingly moral.

- Mimetic rivalry gets in the way. Instead of growing our relationship with God to become moral – we fake it. We try to be moral without the "letting go" required for relationship. I think that is where church intolerance comes from – people lacking in experience of God's transformative mercy trying to will personal and communal moral behavior.

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The Role of the Church

The deeper we go, the harder it becomes to talk about God. God is perfect oneness in diversity...

- There is no division within God. The Christ is not the Father, but the Christ is not other than the Father.
- There is no division between you and God. You are not God, but you are not other than God.
- There is no division between God and the Church. The Church is not God, but the Church is not other than God.

To be one with God is salvation.

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The Role of the Church Summary

1. The Church is the people of God. It is both a sign and an instrument of (a) intimate union with God & (b) the total union of humans to one another.
2. The Church's role is to support people – through community and Tradition (boundaries and ritual) – as we develop through personal relationship with God.
3. As we grow our relationship with God, we become better lovers and increasingly moral people.
4. God is oneness in diversity.
5. A loving relationship with God is salvation.

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Putting it Together

1. Humans long for a personal connection to something bigger than themselves. We call this something "God."
2. The wisdom over 3,000 years tells us that there is a barrier that keeps us from God. For 1,500 years we have called this barrier "Original Sin."
3. This same wisdom tells us that it is only through our relationship with God that we can overcome this barrier.
4. Our new, dynamic worldview helps us to see God and our relationship with God from a fresh perspective.



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Putting it Together

5. Teilhardian theology tells us that Original Sin is not a failure to be what we were created to be. Instead, it is a consequence of not being done yet – of becoming what we are created to be.
6. Girardian theology offers a foundation for understanding Original Sin as evolving from self-preservation into culpable sin when we choose to be (a) selfish and (b) driven by rivalrous mimetic desires.
7. Communities use scapegoating to relieve the threat of widespread violence from mimetic rivalries. This approach is inefficient, in that we keep having to kill scapegoats.




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Putting it Together

8. Jesus clearly teaches the danger of escalating mimetic desire and the unacceptability of violence, including scapegoating.
9. Jesus also demonstrated that it is possible to evolve beyond escalating mimetic violence to love via a loving relationship with God.
10. Since Jesus was nonviolent and is one with God, God is also nonviolent.



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Putting it Together

11. The Church's role is to help the Body of Christ evolve by nurturing our relationship with God through the Tradition, ritual, and community.
12. It is through "right" relationship with God that we, like Jesus, can evolve beyond mimetic rivalry and violence.
13. That is salvation! A loving relationship with God and neighbor.

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Table Discussion

The Church is both a sign and an instrument of (a) intimate union with God and (b) the total union of humans to one another.

Name one thing that struck you in today's presentation and that you will think/pray about this week.

Insights to share with the whole group?

Next Week – Living simply in a complex world

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