



Plough

STORIES | IDEAS | CULTURE Q U A R T E R L Y

WINTER 2021



what are families for?

The Case for One More Child Ross Douthat • **Not Just Nuclear** Edwidge Danticat
Jonathan Sacks • Cardinal Schönborn • M. M. Townsend • Zito Madu • Rachel Hadas



Catherine Panebianco, *Sunday Supper*, 2019

Catherine Panebianco, a fine art photographer, describes her series from which the photograph above is taken:

"No Memory Is Ever Alone is a visual conversation between my dad and me. He used to bring out a box of slides that he photographed in his late teens and early twenties every Christmas and made us view them on an old projector on our living room wall, telling the same stories every year. It was a consistent memory from a childhood where we moved a lot and I never

felt like I had a steady place to live and create memories.

"By placing the slides in my current landscape, I create not only a connection between his life and mine, but a trail of memories, each that had its own association for both of us. These little vignettes of family life in my current space comfort me that my parents and others are still near, watching over me. They create a home for me wherever I go." See more of Panebianco's photography at catherinepanebianco.com. ➤

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ABOUT THE COVER:

In the cover artwork *Shell Spiral* by Yulia Brodskaya, circles of many patterns and sizes are grouped together, just as individual families are connected via kinship and community. No one stands alone, as cells of fellowship include others who would otherwise be isolated – the single, the elderly, lonely neighbors. The offshoots suggest the budding next generation as new families are formed, and the spiral toward the center of origin points us to our ancestors.

FAMILY & FRIENDS

AROUND THE WORLD



Photograph from Ahmet Dagli / Sandkil-Dha

Askıda Ekmek: Is There Bread on the Hook?

Metin Erdem

Bread for the poor is hung outside a bakery in Turkey.

There is a bakery near our apartment in Maltepe, Istanbul, that makes more than fifteen hundred breads, biscuits, pastries, and cakes every day. You can smell the fresh bread calling you from hundreds of feet away.

One recent morning at the bakery I saw a sign, “Askıda Ekmek 37,” which means there are now thirty-seven loaves of “bread on the hook”—free for anybody in need. People come and ask, “*Askıda ekmek var mı?*” “Is there bread on the hook?” and if they can’t pay, they can take a loaf of bread for free. The baker told me that almost one hundred loaves are given every day. At times a customer pays for two loaves but only takes one, and the other is hung on the hook.

The tradition of “Askıda Ekmek” can be traced to the Ottoman Empire, which had the principle, “Let the people live and so the state will live.” With Islam as the dominant religion, people recognize Muhammad’s instruction: “He who sleeps contentedly while his neighbors sleep hungry did not believe in my message.” Still today hospitality is very important in Turkish culture, especially in the villages. People believe that you are a guest of God and they will invite you in to share their food and home.

The Breaking Ground Project

Susannah Black

“It’s April 2020,” we *Plough* editors thought to ourselves a few months ago. “Why not spice up our apocalypse by partnering with a bunch of Canadians and Reformed folks in starting a new

online magazine?” This may seem like an odd choice, but we’re very pleased with how it’s worked out.

Breaking Ground is a new media project of the Canadian think tank *Cardus*, run in partnership with *Cardus’s* magazine *Comment*, The Davenant Institute, and other Christian organizations. Spearheaded by *Comment* editor-in-chief Anne Snyder, the project has as its senior editor *Plough’s* Susannah Black; many others in the *Plough* orbit are also involved.

This year has thrown challenge after challenge in our faces. We need, on an emergency basis, to be wise. *Breaking Ground* is dedicated to marshaling the wisdom of the Christian traditions—from Anabaptist, to Reformed, to Catholic—to face the current crisis head-on.

With podcasts, videos, and a series of live events, as well as essays from those

whose voices – familiar and unfamiliar – need to be heard, *Breaking Ground* is doing just what we hoped it would: it's building community, building connections, and providing an outlet for some of the most interesting and useful writing that 2020 has produced, guided by two thousand years of Christian social thought. We're so glad to be fellow travelers on their voyage.

breakingground.us

Special Announcement: Rhina Espaillat Poetry Award

In summer 2021, *Plough* will announce the winners of its first annual Rhina Espaillat Poetry Award. The winning poet will receive a two thousand dollar award and the winning poem will be published in *Plough*. In addition, two finalists will receive two hundred and fifty dollars as



Petra Zantingh,
*Choosing
Life Tree*
(detail).

well as publication in *Plough*.

This award honors the achievements of the great Dominican-American poet, translator, and public school teacher Rhina Polonia Espaillat. The Rhina

Espaillat Poetry Award will be awarded for an original poem of not more than fifty lines that reflects her lyricism, empathy, and ability to find grace in everyday events of life.

In contrast to most other poetry competitions, *Plough* will not contract out judging of this award to a prominent poet. Instead, *Plough's* new poetry editor A. M. Juster will select approximately twenty poems for further consideration, and then the editors will reach a consensus on the winner and the two finalists.

Submissions will open in early 2021, and the deadline for submissions is March 30, 2021. All poems must be submitted electronically via the contest webpage. All decisions of the editors will be final. Results will be announced in early summer at Plough.com, and by email to all contestants. For details, visit plough.com/poetryaward.

Rhina
Espaillat



Photograph by Nicole Sanchez

FAMILY & FRIENDS

CONTINUED



Zoom Bible Study with Dr. John M. Perkins

David Burleson

Dr. John M. Perkins is known for many things: his work in racial reconciliation; Christian community development; his books on justice, faith, and race. He has served as an adviser to presidents and a neighbor to gang leaders. He and his wife, Vera Mae, have just celebrated their seventieth wedding anniversary (he is ninety and she is eighty-seven). But his greatest love and passion is teaching the Bible.

I met John in 1984 when I went to Pasadena to visit a childhood friend who was volunteering with him for the summer. John convinced me to stay, and for three years we worked together building up his ministry to the children of the drug dealers and prostitutes in the neighborhood. But on Tuesday mornings at 5:30 a.m. we had Bible study – mostly the First Letter of John, but also John’s Gospel.

When Covid-19 forced everyone into an unnatural isolation, I spoke with John about participating in his Bible study using Zoom. Over the past months,

these gatherings have grown and have become a focal point for what is affecting Christians around the country. John has invited many different speakers and teachers to join him.

John’s Bible studies are challenging; the gospel message is so simple, yet so demanding. As he reminds us over and over, God’s longing is that we might know him, be known by him, and make him known to all people. That is the good news. Learn more or join the Bible studies here: jvmpf.org/drperkinsbiblestudy.

Poet in This Issue



Rachel Hadas studied classics at Harvard, poetry at Johns Hopkins, and comparative literature at Princeton.

Since 1981 she has taught in the English Department at Rutgers University, and has also taught courses in literature and writing at Columbia and Princeton. She is the author of many books of poetry, prose, and translations, including *Poems for Camilla* (Measure Press, 2018).

Read her poems “Trying to Get to School” and “Lyric Leap” on page 38. ➤

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

(Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

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Image used courtesy of the Perkins family



Family Matters

PETER MOMMSEN

THERE IS A STORY about the modern family and it goes like this: Families are in crisis, and the cause is moral breakdown. Our society raises ever fewer of its young in two-parent homes; people are getting married ever later (if at all), long past their prime child-bearing years; in fact, swelling cohorts of the young are uninterested in any committed relationship – or even in sex. To be sure, members of the educated classes, if they marry, still practice fairly traditional family values (even if

they don't preach them). But among the rest of the population, a pattern of family instability marked by serial cohabitation and fatherless homes swamps any positive trends. And even the stably married are, as a group, complicit in cratering birthrates, which are bound to cause grave economic and social ills as the old come to outnumber the young. We urgently need a deep renewal of our family culture, supported by public policies that strengthen traditional marriage and encourage childbearing.

Pablo Picasso, *The Happy Family* (Le Retour du baptême, d'après Le Nain), 1917

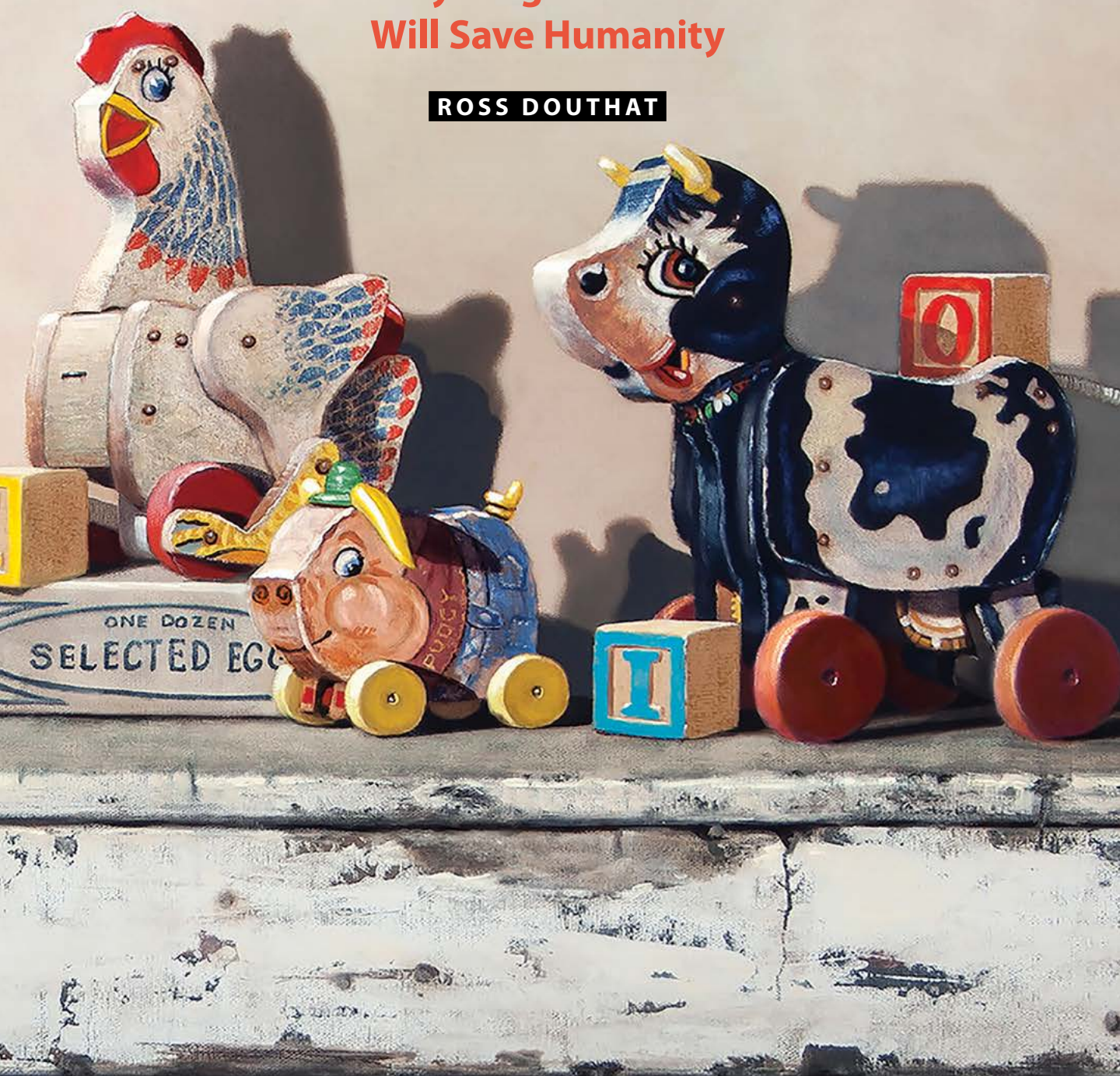


ard Hall

The Case for One More Child

Why Large Families
Will Save Humanity

ROSS DOUTHAT



**Our society's future
would be radically different if
people simply had as many kids
as they desired.**



What's stopping them?

START WITH THE CAR SEATS. They hulk in the back seats of any normal sedan, squeezing the middle seat from both directions, built like a captain's chair on *Star Trek* if James T. Kirk was really worried about taking neck damage from a Romulan barrage. The scenes of large-family life from early in the automobile era, with three or four kids jammed happily into the back seat of a jalopy, are now both unimaginable and illegal. Just about every edition of *Cheaper by the Dozen*, published

in 1948, uses an image of the Gilbreth kids packed into the family automobile, overflowing like flowers from a vase. Today, the car seats required to hold them would take up more space than the car itself.

In his 2013 book *What to Expect When No One's Expecting*, Jonathan V. Last described "car seat economics" – the expense and burden of car seats for ever-older kids, the penalties imposed on parents who flout the requirements – as an example of the countless "tiny

Ross Douthat is a columnist for the New York Times and the author of several books, most recently The Decadent Society: How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success (Simon & Schuster, 2020).

Return to Vienna

A Kindertransport Child Comes Home

NORANN VOLL



Lotte Berger Keiderling lost her mother in the Holocaust – and went on to bear thirteen children to “give Hitler a kick in the pants.”

JUST DAYS BEFORE MY FRIEND Lotte Keiderling died in August, I received a handwritten card from her – the last of many sent from her home in an upstate New York Bruderhof to the Australian outback where I live. We’d been friends since my early twenties, when I helped care for her daughter Sonja, who required full-time care for her disability. We’d stayed in touch ever since – with her gift for friendship, at age eighty-nine Lotte still corresponded with scores of extended “family” members like me around the world. In fact, we’d recently become properly related when one of my nephews married her granddaughter; as I write,



Lotte with her mother Valerie Berger (right) and her aunt, uncle, and cousin (left), ca. 1934

I'm holding their baby, Ava, Lotte's great-granddaughter, in my non-writing arm.

But I only understood why Lotte so deeply treasured her family, both biological and adopted, when in 2018 she made a trip back to Vienna. She had always described her childhood hometown in vivid terms: a wonderland of promenades lined with horse-chestnut trees where she and her father gathered conkers; world-class musicians and Strauss waltzes; delicious *Torten*. She told of holidays in the Alps, ice cream by the Danube, and enough love from two adoring parents to overflow the heart of any child. As an adult, she could still sing the folksong her father had taught her: "*Nun ade, du mein lieb' Heimatland*": "Farewell, my beloved homeland."

Above all, she remembered the mysterious Ferris wheel, or *Riesenrad*, every Viennese

child dreamed of riding – the tallest Ferris wheel in the world. She told of walking hand in hand with her father on Sunday afternoons along the Wiener Prater, into the Riesenradplatz, where it stood. There, Lotte would beg her father to take her on the wheel.

"Please, Papi, please?"

But the answer was always the same: "Lottchen, when you are old enough I will take you. Not yet."

These precious memories comprised an entire childhood, condensed into a few short years. It ended abruptly, when she boarded a train without her parents; she didn't return for eight decades.

BY AGE SEVEN, after the 1938 *Anschluss*, Lotte had watched Hitler screech from a swastika-emblazoned balcony to adoring throngs shouting "Heil Hitler!" Not long after, she was chased down the streets by boys shouting "Jew! Jew!" Her parents had their bakery confiscated; she remembered her father refusing the nightly demands from bands of roving Nazis that he clean the pub across the street.

In June 1939, sensing impending doom, Josef and Valerie Berger put their much-loved seven-year-old daughter onto the lifesaving *Kindertransport* train with a small suitcase, a blanket, and her favorite foods. Where she was going, they told her, there would be horses (Lotte imagined the Lipizzaners of Vienna's Spanish Riding School). They promised that they would soon follow.

Lotte rode the train with hundreds of other weeping children, and, after a brief reconnection with relatives in London, was welcomed into the Cotswold Bruderhof, which had

A farmer's daughter from New York, Norann Voll lives at the Danthonia Bruderhof in rural Australia with her husband, Chris, and three sons. She blogs at Bruderhof.com on discipleship, motherhood, and feeding people.

You Can't Go Home Again

For an immigrant family, storytelling saves those you love from oblivion.

ZITO MADU

MY FATHER LOVES TO TELL the story of the time my older brother and I got lost coming home from a festival in a neighboring village. We grew up in a remote Nigerian village in Imo State, and though the gathering was within walking distance, it's very dark at night out in the countryside.

My brother and I stayed at the festival much longer than we should have. By the time we began walking home, it had become difficult to see, and it was pouring rain. Maybe out of fear, or frustration, or simply because I was a difficult child, I eventually quit walking and sat down in the rain to cry.

My father, sensing that something was wrong, got on his motorcycle and set out to search for us. He rode around both villages,

asking people if they had seen us. Eventually he found us on the side of the road. We rode back in the rain, my brother in the back and me clinging to my father's neck.

When my father tells the story, he does it in such detail that it seems as if he has just lived that day. He remembers the festival we went to, how long we were gone, what time it was when he started being worried, the people he spoke to, the road he found us on. It's as if he took detailed notes, yet there's no notebook or recording of the event. He can simply recall it whenever he wants.

It's not just his personal history and experiences that he recalls in such detail: our culture is passed along orally, and my father is a great storyteller. He has an almost encyclopedic

The author in front of his family's first house in Detroit (collage)

Zito Madu is a writer living in Detroit, a contributor to GQ, and an avid lover of poetry.



**The Unchosen
Obligations of
Family**

Why Inheritance Matters

**An Interview with
Cardinal Christoph Schönborn**

Cardinal Schönborn, archbishop of Vienna, talks with *Plough's* Kim Comer about family history, celibacy, monument toppling, and the healing of memory.



Image public domain

Skalka Castle,
birthplace
and ancestral
castle of
Cardinal
Schönborn

*Previous
spread:*
Portraits
of Cardinal
Schönborn's
ancestors

***Plough:* The child Christoph Maria Michael Hugo Damian Peter Adalbert Graf von Schönborn was born at Skalka Castle in 1945 and entered the world laden with a certain status and certain expectations. Did this inheritance ever seem oppressive?**

Cardinal Schönborn: I was just nine months old when we were forced to leave our family castle in Bohemia, along with the other two million ethnic Germans expelled from Czechoslovakia after World War II. The next time I was inside a castle owned by my family, I was eighteen. In the meantime, I lived very far from castles, as the child of a refugee family – mostly we stayed with relatives who put us up here and there.

It's true that I was born into a family where certain things were expected of me, but I was the second son. My older brother would have inherited the family's estates according to the rules of *fideicommissum* succession, under which the oldest son is the sole heir to avoid

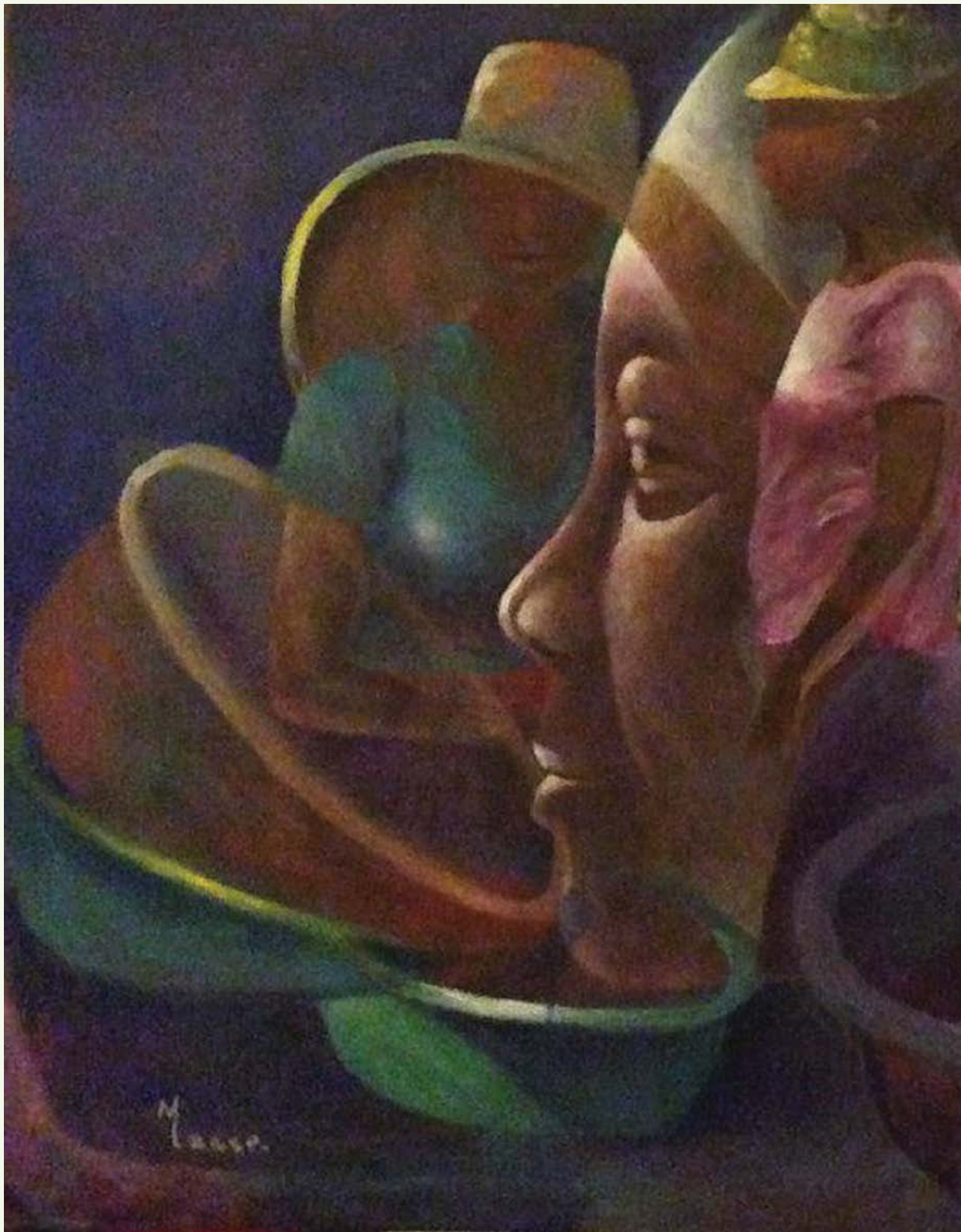
splintering the inheritance. My mother used to tell how, when I was born, the midwife held me up and said, "Poor little thing, you get nothing but the garden!" As it turned out, because of our family's expulsion, I didn't even get the garden.

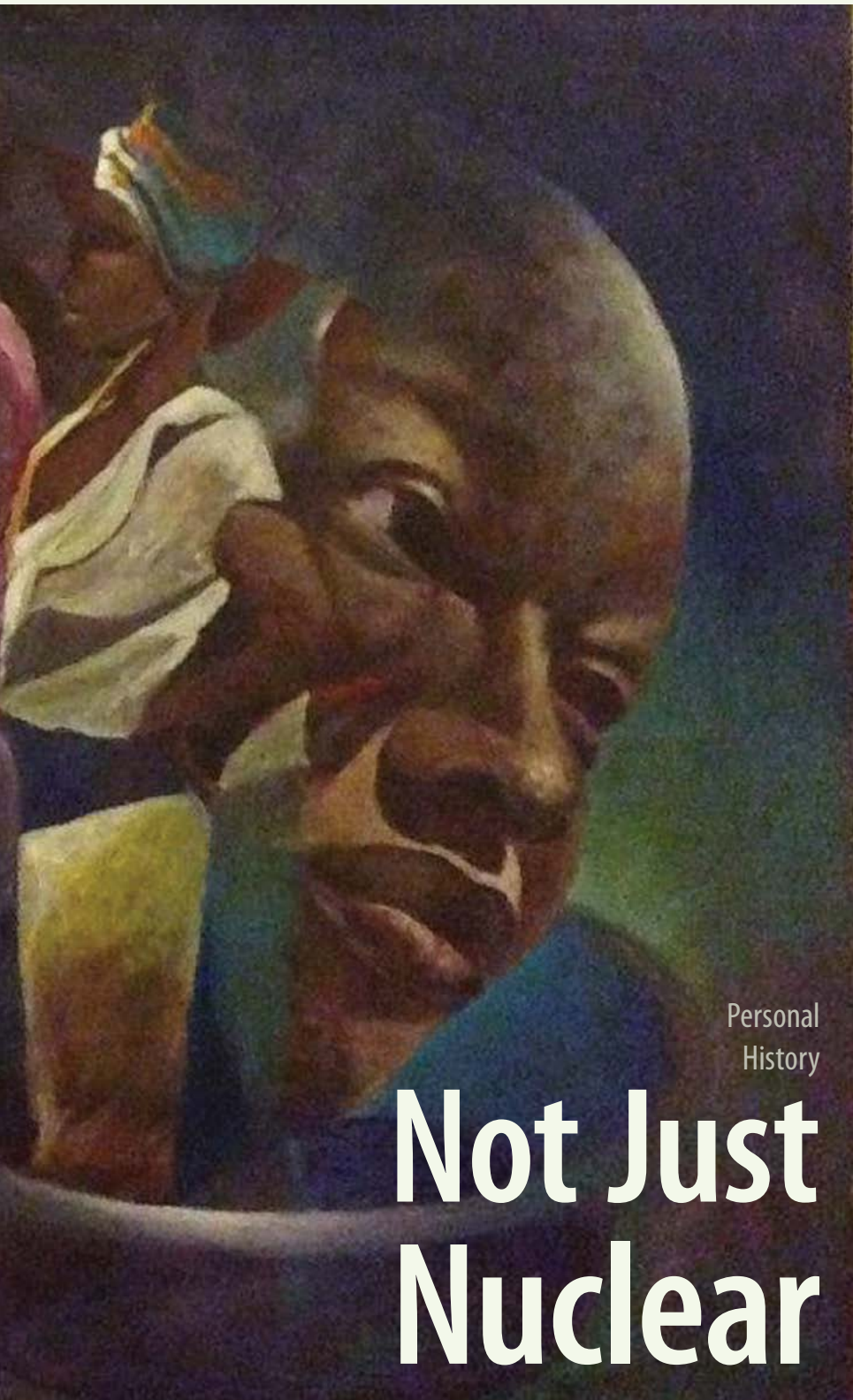
Still, from early on, I was interested in my family history. I discovered that the great careers of members of the Schönborn family were always in the Church. I had no way of knowing that I would become the eighth bishop and the third cardinal in our family's history.

These ancestors did not always act in accordance with our contemporary values. This past summer, around the world we saw monuments toppled because of the sins of the supposed heroes of the past. How do you view this?

I'll answer by giving examples from my own family. The first bishop in the family was Johann Philipp Schönborn, who in the 1600s served as

Christoph Schönborn, OP, is a friar, theologian, and the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna. Kim Comer is editor of Plough's German-language edition.





Personal
History

Not Just Nuclear

Families are
elders long
buried and
generations
yet unborn.

**Edwidge
Danticat**



Above: The author in 1973, age four, with the uncle and aunt who raised her

Previous spread: Massé Mansour, *Untitled*, acrylic, 2017

SOMETIMES I THINK my mother and father are parenting me from the grave. A few weeks ago, I dreamt that I was pushing a mini-hatchback up a steep hill, with my mom and dad on either side of me, helping. In the dream, both my parents are the ages they were when they died: my father sixty-nine and my mother eighty-four years old. After Sisyphean effort was exerted toward getting the car to the top of the hill, the three of us celebrated by contemplating the magnificent view of a beautiful green meadow below.

It was close to the sixth anniversary of my mother's death and I often found myself grieving for her in my dreams. The Sisyphean twist, though, was new. Though Sisyphus, the dishonorable king of Corinth, twice cheated

death, it turned out that he couldn't cheat life. The punishment for all his murdering and angering the gods was being condemned, day after day, to roll a boulder up a hill, only to have it constantly roll down again.

The day after I had this dream, my seventy-eight-year-old uncle, my father's younger brother, wandered out of his house in the early morning hours, alone and bewildered. A neighbor spotted him and alerted my cousin, his daughter. Suddenly – perhaps not so suddenly – he was living, it seemed, the same day over and over again. My uncle's past and present seemed to have merged. The future was blurred, or had possibly faded altogether. An entire segment of our family history, of which only he had been the caretaker, was no longer available, to us or to him.

Growing up in a multigenerational Haitian family, I never thought of it as “nuclear.” For all the term's other meanings, either relating to atoms or energy generation, or even war, when applied to families it seemed limiting. My parents and uncle agreed. Families, they believed, expand like ripples in a pond. Besides, migration forces you to remake your family as well as yourself. Family is not only made up of your living relatives either. It is elders long buried and generations yet unborn, with stories as bridges, and dreams as potential portals.

The idea of my parents communicating from a great distance is not new to me. When my mother and father moved to the United States from Haiti in the 1970s, both to escape a brutal dictatorship and to look for work, they left me and my younger brother behind, in the care of another uncle and his wife. From the time I was four till I was twelve, my parents and I communicated via letters, a weekly phone

Edwidge Danticat is the author of many books, including, most recently, Everything Inside: Stories (Knopf, 2019).



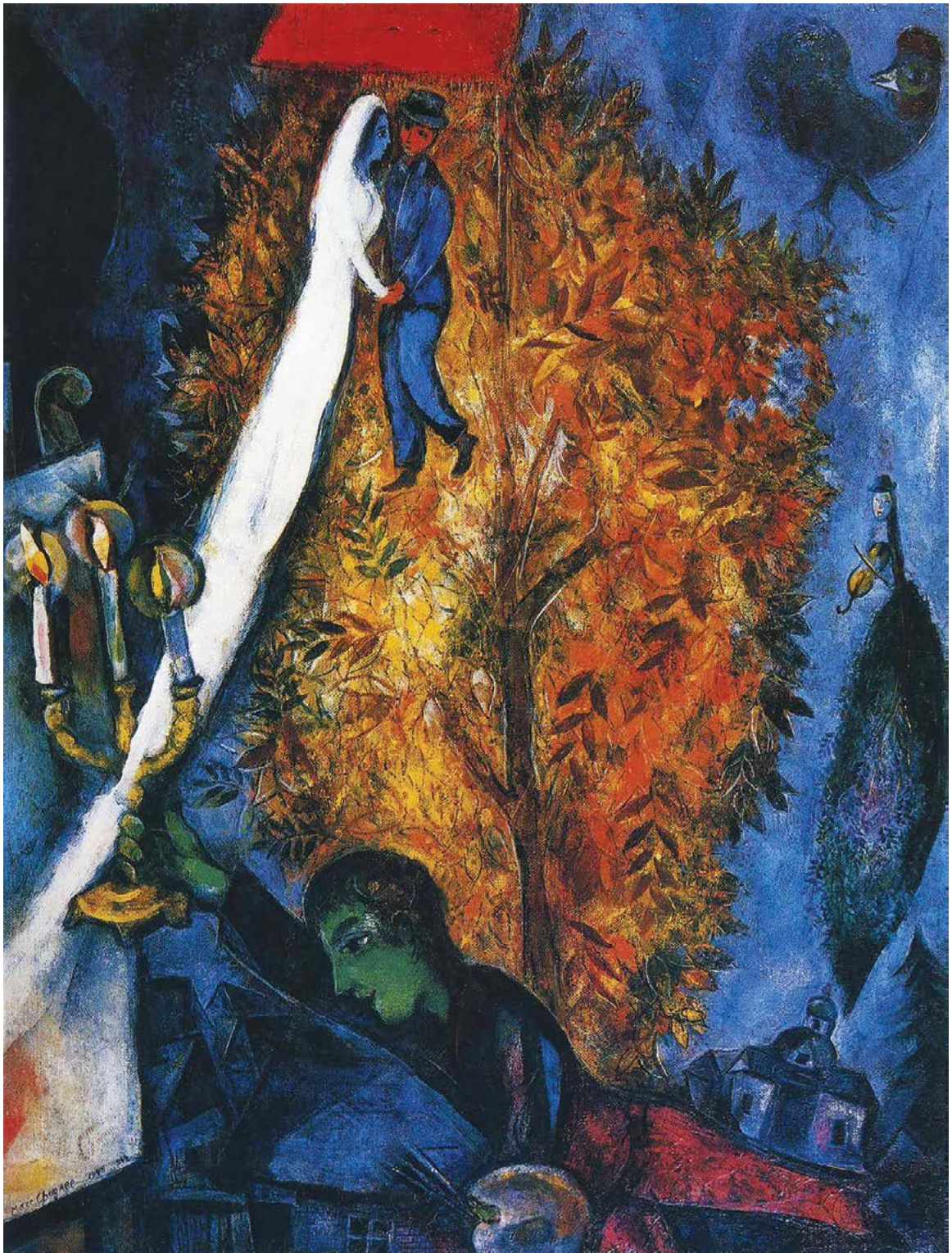
call, and cassette tapes carried by friends and acquaintances between Brooklyn and Port-au-Prince. I was one of half a dozen children whom my aunt and uncle cared for while our parents were working in other countries. This is what family was supposed to do, to help with things you couldn't always do on your own, including raising your children. This is what many families are still doing: while mothers and fathers are incarcerated, or held in immigration detention centers, or fighting opioid or other addictions, family members fill the gap.

Family, as my now-silenced uncle used to say, is whoever is left when everyone else is gone. It is whoever is cleaning up at the end of the party or the funeral repast. It is that person whose one nod might comfort you more than hundreds of words from someone else. Family members share and carry your memories with you.

I feel an immeasurable sense of loss when I think of how family members are disappearing from my uncle's mind. Day by day he has fewer and fewer faces left on which to project his lifetime of memories. I keep wondering if he dreams, and what he might be dreaming about. His own dead parents and siblings? His childhood home in the mountains of southern Haiti? His years spent as a factory worker, cab driver, and car-service owner in New York City? His five sons and daughters? The Bible verses he has recited throughout his life? The final years he'd imagined as a proud grandfather embraced by a large brood of grandchildren, possibly even great-grandchildren?

Perhaps his dreams are vivid, like movies of his own making, but he's probably also experienced hallucinations and night terrors. Like a lot of dementia patients, he might also be

Massé Mansour, *Uncertainties*, acrylic, 2017



Marc Chagall, *The Tree of Life*, 1948



The Beautiful Institution

The Story of Marriage in Seven Key Moments

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

WANT TO BEGIN by telling the story of the most beautiful idea in the history of civilization: the idea of the love that brings new life into the world. There are of course many ways of telling the story, and this is just one. But to me it is a story of seven key moments, each of them surprising and unexpected.



The first, according to a recent press report, took place in a lake in Scotland 385 million years ago.

It was then, according to this new discovery, that two fish came together to perform the first instance of sexual reproduction known to science. Until then all life had propagated itself asexually, by cell division,

budding, fragmentation or parthenogenesis, all of which are far simpler and more economical than the division of life into male and female, each with a different role in creating and sustaining life.

When we consider, even in the animal kingdom, how much effort and energy the coming together of male and female takes, in terms of displays, courtship rituals, rivalries, and violence, it is astonishing that sexual reproduction ever happened at all. Biologists are still not quite sure why it did – some say to offer protection against parasites, or immunities against disease. Others say it's simply that the meeting of opposites generates diversity.

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But one way or another, the fish in Scotland discovered something new and beautiful that's been copied ever since by virtually all advanced forms of life. Life begins when male and female meet and embrace.



The second unexpected development was the unique challenge posed to *Homo sapiens* by two factors: we stood upright, which constricted the female pelvis, and we had bigger brains – a 300 percent increase – which meant larger heads. The result was that human babies had to be born more prematurely than any other species, and so needed parental protection for much longer. This made parenting more demanding among humans than any other species, the work of two people rather than one.

Hence the phenomenon, very rare among mammals, of human pair bonding, unlike other species where the male contribution tends to end with the act of impregnation. Among most primates, fathers don't even recognize their children, let alone care for them. Elsewhere in the animal kingdom motherhood is almost universal but fatherhood is rare. So what emerged along with the human person was the union of the biological mother and father to care for their child. Thus far nature, but then came culture, and the third surprise.

It seems that among hunter-gatherers, pair bonding was the norm. Then came agriculture, and economic surplus, and cities and civilization, and for the first time sharp inequalities began to emerge between rich and poor, powerful and powerless. The great

ziggurats of Mesopotamia and pyramids of ancient Egypt, with their broad bases and narrow tops, were monumental statements in stone of hierarchical societies in which the few had power over the many. And the most obvious expression of power among alpha males, of whatever group, is to dominate access to fertile mates and thus maximize the handing on of genes to the next generation.

Hence polygamy, which exists in 95 percent of mammal species and 75 percent of cultures known to anthropology.

Polygamy is the ultimate expression of inequality because it means that many males never get the chance to have a wife and child. And sexual envy has been, throughout history, among animals as well as humans, a prime driver of violence.

That is what makes the first chapter of Genesis so revolutionary with its statement that every human being, regardless of class, color, culture, or creed, is in the image and likeness of God himself. We know that in the ancient world it was rulers, kings, emperors, and pharaohs who were held to be in the image of God. So what Genesis was saying was that we are all royalty. We each have equal dignity in the kingdom of faith under the sovereignty of God.

From this it follows that we each have an equal right to form a marriage and have children, which is why, regardless of how we read the story of Adam and Eve – and there are differences between Jewish and Christian readings – the norm presupposed by that story is: one woman, one man. Or as the Bible itself says: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

Monogamy did not immediately become the norm, even within the world of the Bible.

From monogamy the rich and powerful lose and the poor and powerless gain.



Little Women, Rebel Angels

Louisa May Alcott and Simone de Beauvoir

MARY TOWNSEND

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR was not born an atheist; rather, she became one. In an inversion of Pascal's Wager, the idea of any bargain with God seemed to her to be petty and beside the point. In her 1958 autobiography, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, she writes: "I could not admit any kind of compromise argument with heaven. However little you withheld from him, it would be too much if God existed; and however little you gave him, it would be too much again if he did

not exist." The logic of all or nothing was the only logic that satisfied.

Born in 1908, Beauvoir grew up in the thick emotive haze of leftover nineteenth-century French Catholicism, carried into pre-war France. She was educated in the same sort of immersive religiosity that provided plenty of opportunities for spiritual heroism from very young girls in particular, the same sort of upbringing that produced Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower, who aspired to

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