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Families in our times

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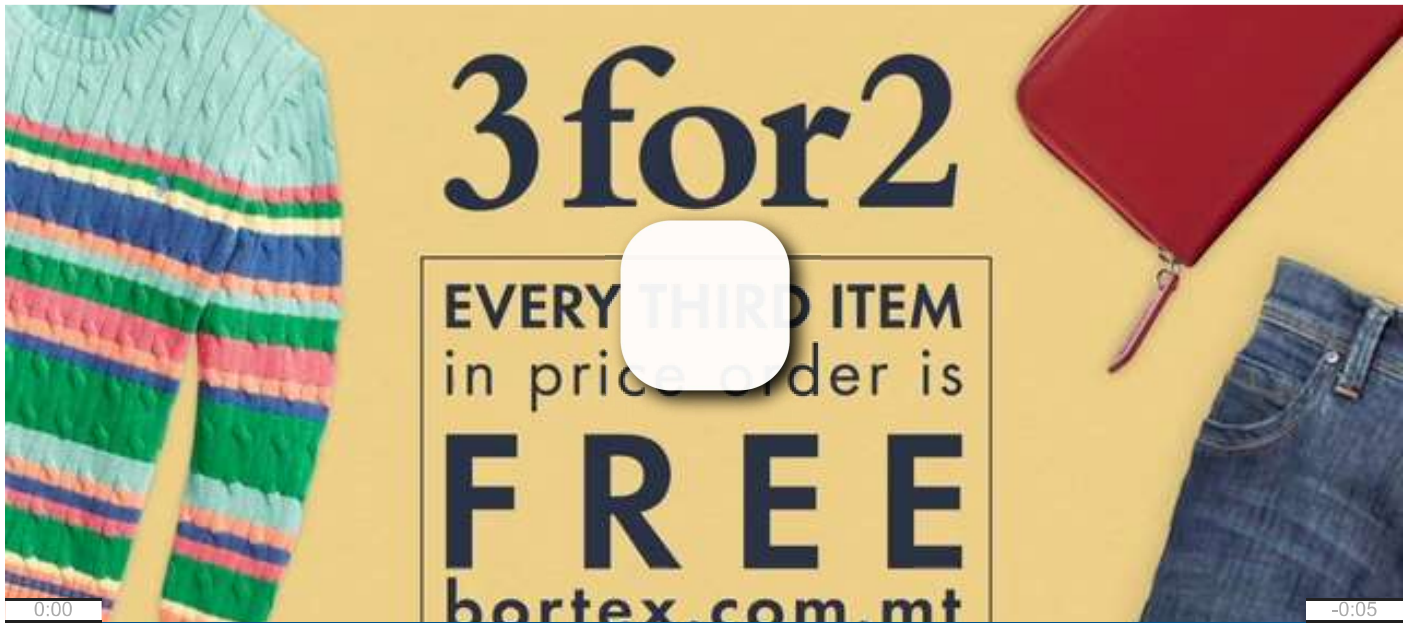


Pope Francis recently said that same-sex couples should be allowed to enter into civil unions. Presumably, this led to a myriad of reactions both within the Catholic Church in particular and the public sphere in general.

Conservatives and liberals may have opposing views about this statement, though it is pertinent to open up a discussion that there were conservative politicians - such as David Cameron during his stint as Prime Minister - who were in favour of such unions.

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Some may argue that the Pope's statement was made in a documentary and does not present any significant change in Church doctrine, which, in turn requires a thorough internal process of deliberation.

In this article I will not discuss the theological merits of the Pope's position, especially since I am not qualified to do so. What I will be discussing are some sociological observations related to this matter.

I wish to begin with a recent article in Time Magazine by Susan Golombok, Professor of Family Research and Director of the Centre for Family Research at the University of Cambridge, whose four decades' worth of research on different family forms has contributed to the understanding of child development within family life.

Through her evidence-based research, Golombok engages the popular idea that the greater the difference from the traditional family, the greater the perceived risk of psychological harm to the child.

In her words, "this is wrong. I can say this definitively because I've been studying different family forms for more than 40 years, analysing families with lesbian mothers, gay fathers, transgender parents, single mothers by choice, and families created by egg donation, sperm donation, embryo donation and surrogacy, and all my research points to one conclusion: What matters most for children is not the make-up of a family. What matters most is the quality of relationships within it, the support of their wider community and the attitudes of the society in which they live."

One should not read Golombok's findings as some debunking of traditional family forms. What she found is that alternative family forms can flourish just as much as traditional ones, depending on various factors.

open : same time, however, such families may face stigma and discrimination both formally, fo

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