Opinion
Vatican



by NCR Staff

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Last month, Pope Francis said that couples who choose pets over having children are "selfish." In a commentary for NCR, contributor Flora x. Tang writes that Francis' comments are not just about pets. "Rather, in a seemingly anti-pet statement, the Catholic Church's narrow view on reproduction and marriage is again reinforced by a pope who himself is outspoken about gender equality and LGBT inclusion. Following are comments from NCR readers responding to the article. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

The article by Flora x. Tang is a brilliant piece of work illustrating some of the margins outside the mainstream, which are easily overlooked. Thank you for your work.

RICHARD SCHOLTZ

Redondo Beach, California



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The article makes many good points. It shows the trouble Pope Francis can get into by making broad-brush statements. There are always exceptions to the rule — though the church's black and white view of the world often doesn't have this in its vocabulary because it follows an ancient disproven definition of natural law.

It might be helpful to take Francis' comment in context. Years ago, he said spouses should take responsibility for the number of children they have to not "breed like rabbits." Is Francis' comment a balance between eight children where the mother's life is a risk in another pregnancy and none?

We know, like the natural law definition the church clings to, the clergy doesn't have all the answers while possessing its fair share of human foibles. Francis seems to be the last person we'd expect as a pastor to be intentionally hurtful. Given this, we should try to understand if his broad-brush comment applies to us. Dissecting every off-the-cuff general statement Francis or anyone in a leadership role is fruitless.

However, the author makes a good point about the "vocation" of parenthood and marriage. Not every spouse should be a parent. Not every single person should not be a parent. Clergy and religious have adopted children as have single laypeople. There's no textbook definition of who will be a successful parent.

MICHAEL J. McDERMOTT

Tyler, Texas

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Flora x. Tang's objections to Pope Francis' statement about the selfishness of couples valuing pets above children evidences a fundamental misunderstanding of the societal importance of marriage.

The notion of marriage as merely a romantic alliance between people is a novelty corrosive not just to families but to the broader society. Marriage vows are offered by one spouse to the other but their implications stretch to all of us. They cause society to extend legal benefits to the couple, benefits that are aimed at promoting the rearing of children and providing stability to the family and the society.

However much we value our pets, we achieve no benefit extending to "pet parents" the benefits we give to the parents of humans. Why would any couple not seeking to avail themselves of the benefits designed for childrearing want to subject their relationship to government regulation?

DAVID G. SMITH

Hanover, Pennsylvania

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The contributing opinion by Flora x. Tang reflects a shallow understanding of the church's teaching of gospel of life and the theology of the body.

I am disappointed that a piece that lacks such a depth of understanding of church teaching was published by NCR.

Tang's article merely attempts to protest the pope drawing attention to the fact that those who might substitute pets, to "complete" their family are selfish and do not remain open to new life within marriage.

His point is valid.

KAREN PAYNE

Lexington, Kentucky

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