



SAME-SEX MARRIAGES
ARE GETTING THE
FRENCH IN A FLUSTER

MATRIMONIAL DISPUTE

RECENT EVENTS HAVE PAVED THE WAY FOR THE FRENCH ‘MARRIAGE FOR EVERYONE’ BILL. PRESIDENT FRANÇOIS HOLLANDE’S MINISTERIAL TEAM RECENTLY APPROVED THE LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL FOR SAME-SEX MARRIAGES, AND PARLIAMENT LOOKS LIKELY TO FOLLOW SUIT IN JANUARY. BUT UNTIL THE FIRST MARRIED GAY COUPLE IS WRITTEN INTO THE REGISTER, FRENCH REACTIONARIES WILL HAVE THEIR BANNERS AT THE READY.

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“Do we want a nation full of gays? That would be really stupid, as it would mean there would be nobody left here in ten years’ time.” Eighty-seven-year-old right-wing conservative senator Serge Dassault lashed out big time on the day that the cabinet approved the gay marriage legislative proposal. “Homosexuality is a danger to the nation. It brings an end to the concept of family and the development and upbringing of children. It is one of the reasons behind the downfall of the Greek nation.” President Hollande says that the introduction of same-sex marriages signifies “progress for society as a whole”, but that society is itself rather divided about *le mariage pour tous*. His Parti Socialiste has the parliament majority required to push through the plan, but there is



disharmony within his own ranks, for instance about whether this legal amendment will also provide lesbian couples with the right to medical assistance to enable fertilisation. According to opinion polls, around 60% of French nationals are currently in favour of marriage between two men or women. That percentage was higher by several percent in 2011, but still up on the mid-1990s, when it was hovering around the 50% mark. Adoption, which, within the same law, will also become a possibility for same-sex couples, remains a

thorny issue, with only 52% of the population being in favour. *Mate* spoke to six men about their opinions regarding this change, which is rousing considerable emotion in France. Gays are picking up on homophobia, conservatism and plain ignorance on the part of their fellow countrymen and women. Opponents of same-sex marriage seem to be especially het up about children who in the eyes of the law will not have a ‘father’ and ‘mother’, but ‘parent A’ and ‘parent B’.

“I THOUGHT I COULD COUNT ON MORE RESPECT IN THE LAND OF FREEDOM, EQUALITY AND FRATERNITY.”

Bob Franke (48), a Dutchman living in Paris and manager at the Eiffel Tower.

“Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette were guillotined hundreds of years ago, but in terms of protocol, traditions and formalities, France has barely moved on from the 18th century. Some proceed with a lot more difficulty here, and that can be quite exhausting for a down-to-earth Dutchman. I was born and raised in the Netherlands, but have been living in Paris for over 20 years. It’s just

as well, because people living in large cities are more open-minded than they are in the countryside. My friends are open-minded, but sometimes at a dinner, or if I get together with a crowd of people for drinks, I’m confronted by prejudice of some sort. When I told a colleague recently that I was in favour of same-sex marriage and adoption, his words were: ‘my esteem for you has diminished.’ I’m pleased that the first steps have been taken towards allowing same-sex marriages, and that there will be equal rights for everyone soon. Years ago, when two men or two

women weren’t even permitted to enter into a civil partnership, there was a definite sense of discrimination, as gays and lesbians were also disadvantaged from a tax perspective back then. I have been in a relationship with a Frenchman for a year now. We’ve talked about getting married, but we could quite possibly go over to Holland to do it. We would also like children and are already looking into the possibilities of adoption and surrogate mothers. I completely disagree with psychologists who say that a child needs a father and a mother – after all, things don’t al-

ways work out between heterosexual couples either. A child needs to be loved and raised in a good way, that is what’s most important. I don’t care how other people view homosexuality. I have been surprised, however, at the intensity of the discussions in France, especially the fierce reaction by the Church, and the extreme right-wing Front National. I had also expected that the debate would feature more respect for gays than seems to be the case. Isn’t that a value entrenched in the French motto ‘freedom, equality and fraternity’?”

“A MARRIAGE BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN STOPPED BEING THE NORM A LONG TIME AGO.”

Gilles Wullus (43), editor-in-chief of gay magazine *Têtu*.

“In the weeks prior to the Council of Ministers going over the legislative proposal for same-sex marriage, the papers here were filled with gays, which I think is a good thing, because their increased visibility will help to attain acceptance of same-sex marriage. I recently read that one-third of practising Catholics are in favour, which I found a staggeringly high number. In 2012 the debate is no longer about the acceptance of gays, but the acceptance of gay couples and of adoption. At the moment it’s virtually impossible to be considered for a French adoption child if



you are gay or a lesbian. You stand some chance as a bachelor, but your partner is not eligible for custody: that’s only possible if you are married. Moreover, the preference is for heterosexual couples. Many men go to the United States or the Ukraine to find a surrogate mother, while women go to Belgian clinics for artificial insemination. The plan will most probably be approved by parliament in January. It’s about time the family law was updated. A marriage between a

man and a woman stopped being the norm a long time ago. There are already a large number of gay couples that have children, and there are a huge number of blended families, and a large number of couples who are sharing their lives without a marriage certificate. Some of those opposed claim that a marriage between two men or two women is unnatural. That’s just rubbish. After all, isn’t marriage itself a human invention? You can’t say out loud that you are anti-gay, but I

think that basic homophobia is at the root of all the opposition against ‘marriage for everyone’. There are also still people living in total ignorance here in France. For instance, I recently spoke to a right-wing conservative politician who claimed with a straight face that there wasn’t a single gay among the delegates in his constituency. That’s statistically impossible. Some French people still think that all gays are dressed in pink thongs on their way to Gay Pride.”

“FRENCH SOCIETY IS SEXIST, STEEPED IN MACHISMO AND IS STILL STRONGLY INFLUENCED BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH”

“TWO MEN CANNOT IMITATE A MOTHER AND FATHER.”

Pierre Lévy-Soussan (51), psychoanalyst and adoption expert.

“A child who doesn’t grow up amongst his own mother and father should still have the idea that he could have been born to his adoptive parents. That fantasy is key to the bonding process with the parents, and should not be taken away from the child. A black child understands of course that he could not have come from a white mother and father, but the conception could

have taken place nevertheless. In the centre where I work, I also speak to heterosexuals who want to link up with a sperm donor. If I notice that the woman feels she is cheating on her husband because of the insemination, or that the man feels that it will not fully be his child, then the whole thing would be called off if it were left to me to decide. The lack of conviction that it is 100% their child is fatal. Two men or two women cannot have a baby, and children know that all too well. I recently had two men with adoption problems in my practice, who were confronted with a tricky question by their son, who wanted to know why they actually were having sex with one another, if they were not able to make children that way...

Technically speaking, I’m against the legislative proposal that enables same-sex marriage, because it also means that the words ‘mother’ and ‘father’ will be scrapped due to the law, and replaced by ‘parent A’ and ‘parent B’. The assumption that two men or two women can imitate a father and mother isn’t correct. A child growing up with two women actually needs that asymmetry: I live with my mother and her girlfriend. I get labelled homophobic or conservative; for me this is a technical issue – after all I conduct screenings for gay couples who wish to adopt! I’m not saying that two men or two women are incapable of giving love or raising a child, but it does make adoption a great deal more complicated.”



“I WOULD LIKE *THE RIGHT* NOT TO GET MARRIED.”

Bruno Julliard (31), educational advisor to the mayor of Paris on behalf of the Parti Socialiste.

“The Parti Socialiste is pro same-sex marriage, because the party believes in equality for every individual. All people, whatever their sexual preference, should have the same rights. In my case, I do not wish to get married at all,

but I would like *the right* not to get married. At the present time, 63% of the French are in favour of marriages for everyone, but there have been some exhausting discussions in the lead-up to it. French society is sexist, steeped in machismo and is still strongly influenced by the Catholic Church. The man, who is traditionally the head of the family, plays a large

role within that. The fact is that the debate on same-sex marriage has been completely politicised. Nicolas Sarkozy closed the door on the *mariage gay* with quite some force during the election campaign, because he knew it would draw votes from his conservative supporters. He wasn’t at all against it personally. I feel he wasn’t very brave in his handling of that, he could

have actually played something of a trailblazer in that sense if he’d wanted to. I wonder whether the mayors that are now claiming that they will refuse to marry gays and lesbians, will actually carry that out in practice. I’m quite confident that it will no longer be an issue in five years’ time. We are involved in a moral revolution right now, and things can change quickly.”



“THE CHURCH IS AFRAID OF THIS EVOLUTION.”

Patrick Sanguinetti (51), chairman of ‘David et Jonathan’; an association for Christian gays and lesbians.

“In Leviticus, the Jewish book of law, homosexuality is forbidden. But you can’t live according to what it states in the Bible, or you’d be allowed to kill your neighbour if you found him working on the Sabbath. The biblical tale of David and Jonathan seems a reference to

homosexuality more than anything: when Jonathan is killed by the Philistines, David mourns: ‘your love was more important to me than the love of women’. I had not expected the sheer ferocity displayed by the Church in the discussion concerning same-sex marriage. For instance, Philippe Barbarin, the Archbishop of Lyon, said that homosexuality opens the door to incest and polygamy. What a dreadful insinuation. Why would the Church react so strongly? I

think they are simply scared of this evolution. The Church is hypocritical too. I know enough clergymen who in a one-to-one situation say that they have no problems with homosexuality. They are not able to say anything like that in public though, because there would be retaliations. Many priests are themselves gay. The Church knows they are living together, and doesn’t forbid it – as long as they are discreet about it.

Everyone in my parish of Sainte-Marie in Paris knows that I am gay. I go there together with my boyfriend, and there’s no fuss made about it at all. But when we wanted to take our gay church group to a convent for a spiritual retreat, we were refused. We were okay if we visited as individuals, but as a group of 30 we were quite recognisable as gays, and that apparently could have been annoying to some people. Things like that make me incredibly angry.”

“MANY PRIESTS ARE THEMSELVES GAY. THE CHURCH KNOWS THEY ARE LIVING TOGETHER, AND DOESN’T FORBID IT”

“YOU SIMPLY CANNOT CHIP AWAY AT THE UNION BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN.”

Philippe Gosselin (46), member of parliament for the centre-right party UMP, Mayor of Remilly-sur-Lozon and spokesman of the ‘Mayors for the rights of the child movement’.

“Marriage is a union between a man and a woman. There is more to it than just love: a man and a woman complement each other, their union is an institution, this joint unit forms one of the founda-

tions upon which the house of the republic is built. I feel you simply cannot chip away at that. A child can only come forth from the union between a man and a woman. Therefore, I am against allowing all kinds of other methods that are implemented to enable a gay couple to have a child. The fact that there are options available, for instance by asking a sperm donor, doesn’t mean that law should just allow it all to happen. I especially object to surrogate mothers, because surely a woman isn’t just some kind of baby machine! The main concern for the ‘Mayors for the rights of the child movement’ is that couples that want a child at any cost forego the rights of the child itself in doing so; turning it into the right to have a child. I’m not

saying that two men or two women cannot raise a child, but I do feel that a child needs a father and a mother. My mother was adopted, and has always wondered why she was given away and why she was even conceived in the first place. Adoption is hard enough as it is, and if a child ends up with two mothers or two fathers, you’re just making things extra complicated. I think it’s awful when my movement is portrayed as an anti-homosexual group. I’m against a marriage between two people of the same gender, but I do feel that gays and lesbians who enter into a registered partnership should be given the same legal and fiscal rights as heterosexuals who are married.”■

