

Sisters of St. Elizabeth of Hungary

January 21, 1989

Lou Sullivan
[REDACTED] Haight St. # [REDACTED]
San Francisco, CA 94117

Dear Lou:

Two things of importance.

If you have not heard, Zelda Suplee passed away this week. I'm not sure of all the details, but apparently it was a heart attack. Her life was one of service to the gender-conflicted, and I'm sure your readers would like to know about her life in a future issue of FTM. Paul Walker was very close to her, as was Reed Erickson. Perhaps that can give you background material for a tribute to her life.

Second, I've enclosed an article of possible interest to your readers.

May the Lord Jesus hold you in the palm of His hand, Lou, and give you the grace to be faithful, joyful, and at peace.

In His lovingkindness,

Sr. Mary Elizabeth, SSE
Sr. Mary Elizabeth, n/SSE

ME:jc

THE CHURCH AND THE TRANSSEXUAL: CAN THE CHURCH CHANGE?

By: Sr. Mary Elizabeth, n/SSE¹

Recently a friend showed me a portion of an interview with Sy Rogers, about his "transsexual" experience, that took place on the 700 Club. While I did not see the entire interview, what I did see prompts me to respond.

Mr. Rogers is very much on point when he speaks of God's desire for us--i.e. "God wants our lives to revolve around Him. He wants to be number one in our hearts, over our own wants and desires."

We accept the love God offers by making an act of faith and flinging oneself on His mercy, for it is repentance and faith in Jesus Christ that shall save us, not deeds of the law. The real son of Abraham is not a man racially descended from Him but one who, no matter his race, makes the same surrender of faith to God.

The catch-22, and I believe Mr. Rogers addressed it very well, are the demands placed on us following our surrender to God; a new standard of moral purity, a new kindness, a new service, a new forgiveness, as He invites us into knowledge and receives us into mystery. Our response requires much courage, trust, and commitment to accept newly perceived truths no matter what the cost.

Hannah Hurnard perhaps says it best. "As we surrender ourselves to

Him, we--as Christians--learn, in theory at least, that there are no second causes, that even the most unjust and cruel things, as well as all seemingly pointless and undeserved sufferings, have been permitted by God as a glorious opportunity for us to react to them in such a way that our Lord and Savior is able to produce in us, little by little, His own lovely character. To learn this requires us to accept, day by day, the actual conditions and tests permitted by Him, by a continually repeated laying down of our own will and acceptance of His will."

"Every acceptance of His will becomes an altar of sacrifice, and every such surrender and abandonment of ourselves to His will is a means of furthering us to the High Places to which He desires to bring every one of us." He has made us for Himself, so that He can exist through us. His gift to us was life. Our gift to Him is making the most of that life, of His gift.

On the other hand, I believe Mr. Rogers may have erred in part when he attempted to address the biological and psychosocial issues related to transsexualism and to describe the transsexual as a "man made woman," for we are, in fact, all "man made men, or man made women," insofar as our *assigned* birth sex is the result of nothing more than a physician's brief glance at our genitals at birth.

¹Sr. Mary Elizabeth is the Executive Director of J2CP Information Services, Director of Administrative Services, Gender Dysphoria Program of Orange County, Inc., and a novice member of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth of Hungary.

Zoological, as well cross cultural studies have shown that gender identification goes far beyond the reproductive function. In fact, our identity as male or female is the *end product* of the interaction between many moral, biological and social variables.

Robert Oliver, M.D. pointed out in 1972 that "moral sanctioning by the medieval church exalted celibacy and virginity, and meted out cruel penalties to enforce its taboos. Rules of procreativity evolved during this time period about the nature of man and woman, as well as the basic principle that gonadal sex *only* can serve as a valid criterion in determining gender identity."

Moral aspects of gender identity came into play because of the radical remedies suggested for treating *transsexuals*--*i.e.* hormonal and surgical sex reassignment. The threat to us comes, as Sister Joanne Madigan, SJ, points out when ". . . sex, sexuality, and the idea of maleness and femaleness become unintelligible, once they are divorced from the idea of reproduction."

The problem for society comes in defining *proper* or *true* sex. Father Curren addressed this problem in an early letter to a "transsexual"--*i.e.* "The basic problem from the moral and ethical viewpoint is the question of determining the proper sex of the individual."

Our confusion in differentiating *proper* or *true* sex is based on several factors. First, sex can be defined by several biological--*i.e.* chromosomes, gonads, external genitalia, internal reproductive organs other than gonads, hormones, and secondary sex characteristics--and sociological--*i.e.* sex of rearing and assumed sex--criteria.

Gender assignment based on all sex determining criteria being in accord would be ludicrous. As Oliver points out, "[a] hermaphrodite's identity would be ambiguous and Joan of Arc would be classified as a transvestite. Likewise, a

simple majority of agreeing factors would be grossly inaccurate, since this would require *each* factor to have equal significance--*e.g.* The chromosome test would place the person raised, characterized, and genitalized as a male in a classification of a female (*pseudo-hermaphrodite*)."

Second, sex and gender have come to mean the same thing. Charles Prince has argued, however, that sex and gender are *not* the same thing. He points out that "[w]e are born into a society that is highly polarized and highly stereotyped, not only into male and female, but into man and woman. Man and male, female and woman are considered synonymous pairs of words for the same thing. They are inseparable. But it is not so. Sex and gender are *not* the same thing." Money and Hampson have shown this in their studies of pseudohermaphrodites, in that these children tend to grow up in their *assigned* sex rather than their *genetic* sex.

Third, is the controversy that surrounds the term *transsexual*. Meyer has pointed out that the issues become "even more confused because the term transsexualism has come to encompass a variety of conditions that under other circumstances might be labelled extremely effeminate homosexuality, transvestism (particularly conscience-ridden transvestism), schizoid or borderline personality disorder, polymorphous perverse psychopathy, as well as individuals who apparently have manifested lifelong cross gender drives. The point is that the label 'transsexual' has come to cover such a 'multitude of sins' that all one knows when the term appears in the literature is that the patient has presented requesting sex reassignment surgery and labelled himself as transsexual, and the physician has accepted that self diagnosis."

If we can't separate, as well as define, sex and gender, how can we differentiate transsexualism from the multitude of psychopathologies that exist in our complex society? And, if trained

and highly educated medical and scientific personnel cannot agree on how to define sex and gender, how can we expect laypersons such as Mr. Rogers or the show's host to define them?

I have spent the past 13 years working with pseudo-transsexuals and transsexuals. I have met very few transsexuals. I have met thousands of very confused, emotionally disabled pseudo-transsexuals, each seeking to alleviate their pain and suffering through self-diagnosis and the fantasy that they are a woman trapped in a man's body. These individuals reject psychotherapy, seeing their problem as physical and the solution as surgical, not psychiatric.

These same individuals often shop for a therapist that will tell them what they want to hear. They seek out self-help groups where untrained, often self-diagnosed pseudo-transsexuals, will make them "queen for a day", confirming their self-diagnosis and overlooking the severe psychopathology that often accompanies the self-diagnosed individual.

Who is to blame? I believe we are to blame, for we leave the gender-conflicted individual few, if any, options. We condemn and reject them, making them uncomfortable and unwelcome in God's house. We condemn and reject the professionals attempting to treat them. A 1984 letter of Mr. Rogers, for example, reaches out in love, then condemns and rejects--i.e. "Please don't feel you need to write back a lengthy rebuttal and justification." Dialog is necessary if we are to help them resolve their conflict and win them to Jesus. Silence and the absence of any open discussion only allows prejudice and unfounded fears to flourish, often leading to serious persecution and injustices, rather than healing.

I believe that a great duty falls upon us all. We are called to be bearers of God's forgiveness, to be the instrument of His love, to be active in compassion. God moves in His own mys-

terious ways, but a great deal of the time He moves through us. And it is because we are not there that so many do not believe in God's love.

It is time we--the Church--individually and corporately, publicly and privately, sit down with these people, and the professionals attempting to treat them, and talk in an atmosphere characterized by enlightenment and compassion, not ignorance and invective.

It is time we all experience the great characteristic of God . . . His love for saint and sinner alike. It is time we all learn to forgive as God forgives, to love as God loves, and to serve as our Lord Jesus served.

May the Lord Jesus hold each of you in the palm of His hand, and give you the grace to be faithful, joyful, and at peace.