

# **The Fathers of Mercy**

## **Statement on the Dangers of the Book: *The Healing of Families* by Fr. Yozefu-B. Ssemakula**

### **Why are we writing?**

The Fathers of Mercy are a religious community of Catholic priests who are missionary preachers based in Kentucky. Our charism is to bring the Mercy of God to all men and women through the preaching of parish missions and retreats, and the staffing of parishes in rural or neglected areas. Since our religious charism is focused on the Infinite Mercy of God, we believe very strongly in the power of God's Mercy to heal the wounds of every person who turns to Him – wounds that stem from our personal sins, and sometimes from sins committed against us.

Our Lord Jesus Christ wants to heal our wounds, especially those spiritual and emotional wounds which would prevent us from obeying the Lord's Two Great Commandments: Love God with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. There are times Our Lord chooses to heal the physical wounds in our lives – wounds that stem from accidents or illnesses (physical and psychological). Because of the close relationship between the Mercy of God and spiritual and emotional healing, a number of our priests are involved in various kinds of healing ministries: the Institute of the Holy Spirit; post-abortion healing (Rachel's Vineyard retreats); the Catholic Charismatic Renewal; healing of troubled and broken marriages (Retrouvaille and The Alexander House Apostolate); and Yes, the Fathers of Mercy, from experience, do believe that God does Heal. It is due to our intense interest in healing that the book *The Healing of Families: How to Pray Effectively for Those Stubborn Personal and Familial Problems* by Fr. Yozefu-B. Ssemakula came to our attention.

### **Our Concerns about *The Healing of Families*:**

Various clergy and laypersons who we know have either read this book, or have attended seminars conducted by Fr. Ssemakula. There are reports of great physical, emotional and spiritual healings in their families; despite the many healings reported, many concerns about theological contradictions and new spiritual teaching in the book have also been expressed. Because of their reports, we decided to take a closer look at the book. Our primary concerns, stated as simply as possible, are the following:

1. A theological and spiritual work, like *The Healing of Families*, written by a Catholic priest, should not be published without ecclesiastical approbation.
  - Fr. Ssemakula's work was reviewed and rejected for Church approval. Bishop Parkes' official statement: <http://www.ptdiocese.org/documents/Bishop/Ssemakula.pdf>. Despite the rejection due to theological errors, he still published it.
  - Fr. Ssemakula told attendees at the '*clergy only conference*' in February of 2014, that his bishop had told him "there was no need for an imprimatur," and there were [other] bishops who have offered him an imprimatur on his book. This was a misrepresentation of the truth; no imprimatur can be granted while there are theological errors. His book and ministry is currently under review once more by the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee.

2. There are serious problems with the way in which God is portrayed, making Him into a helpless nice guy who is outmaneuvered by Satan. He seems to be portrayed as having two distinct wills, which is theologically erroneous. This is a caricature of the God whom we worship as Catholic Christians.
3. The reckless use of absolute terms, when speaking about God and Satan, breaks from the Mystery of God and the angelic realm; reducing healing to a mechanical system of “saying the right prayers.”
4. This book overemphasizes physical healing, thereby leaving the most important kind of healing – spiritual healing – in a secondary position.
5. In the book there is a seriously diminished idea of the mission of Jesus Christ – that He came mainly to heal – when, in fact, He came to suffer and die to save us from sin and from eternal death. Jesus worked healings to prepare the people for His spiritual mission as Redeemer.
6. This diminished understanding of the mission of Jesus Christ leads to serious problems with the book's presentation of human suffering. This book presents suffering as almost always unnecessary, and therefore wasted, and that it is outside of God's will for us. It fails to acknowledge the great good that God can do in our lives through sufferings. In essence, there is a radical misconception of the Cross of Jesus Christ in this book, and with it, an implicit denial of the importance of the cross in our lives as Christians.
  - This book presents sufferings as coming (almost always) from the machinations of the Evil One, and therefore, outside of the realm of Divine Providence (God's plan for our eternal happiness in heaven). It also asserts that REAL suffering is reserved exclusively for the saints alone; a direct contradiction to the Doctrine of Redemptive Suffering.
  - Fr. Ssemakula lists Pope St. John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris: On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering* as a recommended book for further reading; yet, this book cannot be reconciled with the teaching of that Apostolic Letter, especially when it comes to the significance and necessity of the Cross in the life of each and every individual Christian.
7. Fr. Ssemakula's book makes the following statements: “Now, that suffering [of Jesus Christ] was willed by neither the Father nor the Son. What the Father willed was to save the world, not the death of His Son.” “He did not come to die, but to save, and ended up dying....” These statements are absolutely contrary to the Biblical prophecies of the Redemption being brought about through the suffering and death of the Messiah, and to the constant tradition of the Church and her saints.
8. This book presents a distorted picture of our chief enemy – Satan/Lucifer/The Devil – giving him powers and “rights” that he does not possess, and at the same time, presenting him as desiring only to wreck havoc, pain and sufferings upon us (in this life), when in fact, Satan's true goal is our spiritual destruction by sin and eternal damnation.
9. This book misrepresents the fact that God sometimes punishes us in this world, asserting rather that all evils/sufferings are “consequence[s] of sins.” This is clearly contrary to Scripture and Tradition, in which God uses sufferings to bring us back to Himself (our

conversion), to correct our faults and free us from the effects of our sins (purification), and to unite us more closely to Himself in His Passion and Death (sanctification).

10. This book speaks often, in a denigrating tone, of the “Old Testament mind” when speaking of persons who believe that God punishes us for sin in this world. We find this to be disrespectful to the inspired writings of the Old Testament and misleading as to the inspired teaching within those writings.
11. This book is replete with “proof-texting” – a serious misuse of Sacred Scripture in which passages are taken out of context in order to “prove” a point which is not supported by the clear meaning of the Scripture passages. There is also a severe lack of reference to the Catechism, Church Fathers, or the Saints.
12. Much of the “theology” of this book is based on a proof-texting of Hosea 4:6. This misquoted passage is used to teach the “system” that the book asserts was designed by God (for our blessing), but has been hijacked by Satan (who uses it to cause pain and suffering). The book purports to teach its readers how to use this system to overcome the power of Satan. This is all based on a misreading of Scripture.
13. The theology in this book resembles several ancient heresies:
  - Gnosticism – it teaches a “system” that nobody in the history of the Church knew until Fr. Ssemakula began his teaching, because “the world was not ready for it until now.”
  - Manicheanism – Satan is so powerful that even Almighty God is helpless to free us from his power (God is left “wringing his hands”).
  - Pelagianism – the power to be free from Satan is in our hands, not in the free grace of Almighty God.
14. In this book, Fr. Ssemakula makes an explicit assertion that one does not need faith to benefit from the “Family Healing Prayer Service” – *Just say the prayers, even without having any faith, and you will be healed.* Taking this statement literally, this is a form of “superstition.” This is contrary to the teaching and the constant tradition of our Christian Faith. Our spiritual tradition has always recognized the necessity of at least minimal faith in a person who is using prayer, a sacramental or a sacrament. The more faith that one has, the more one will be receptive to the graces that God wishes to give. Any person using the “Family Healing Prayer Service” should do so with faith in the power of God to heal, and openness to the fact that God might not answer according to our wishes, but He will answer our prayers in accordance with what He knows is best for us.
15. This book treats power and authority, which has been given to certain persons by Almighty God, as if they are intrinsic to the person and can be exercised apart from and contrary to the will of God Himself. So God is left “wringing his hands” at how His ministers abuse the power that He has given them. Nonsense.
16. This book's teaching on the “access points” by which Satan can get into our lives scarcely mentions the most common access point – our personal sins.
17. The statement that “our most important and fundamental choices in life are made for us by others” is contrary to sound logic and the meaning of the words. If *choices are made*

by others, they are, by definition, not our choices, and are not the result of the use of our free will. We believe that Fr. Ssemakula's position would be better stated if he were to say that many of the most powerful influences that affect our lives are from decisions that were made by other persons during our formation (when we were children or teenagers). Such influences can have direct and extremely negative effects on us: poor catechetical teaching can lead to a malformation of a person's moral compass; alcoholism in a family can have serious effects on a person's emotional and psychological formation. There can also be a diabolic spirit of addiction that *might* exist in the family that *might* add further complications as one struggles to turn away from particular habits of sin. God can, in fact, heal both the emotional/psychological wounds and free one from the influences of the Evil One that seek to spiritually “infect” our wounds and keep them from healing.

18. The power of “Name of Jesus” is taught in a way that is clearly superstitious. There are instances in the Acts of the Apostles (19:11-16) in which the name of Jesus was used in the same way – much to the detriment of those who did so.
19. The book claims that if you “pray in the right way” you will be healed. This is in direct opposition to St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7, who prayed three times to be delivered from the “thorn in his side,” and our Lord did not deliver or heal him. Paul’s lack of healing was not due to *praying wrong*, rather because God’s Grace was enough.
20. In the appendix, Fr. Ssemakula states that a priest cannot use the imprecatory prayer of Leo XIII without permission from his bishop, but that it CAN be used by the lay faithful because they have authority in their families. This is in direct contradiction to Church teaching. In 1985, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, gave the Church’s official clarification on the matter: “... ***it is not even licit that the faithful use the formula of exorcism against Satan and the fallen angels, extracted from the one published by order of the Supreme Pontiff Leo XIII, and even less that they use the integral text of this exorcism.***”

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19850924\\_exorcism\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19850924_exorcism_en.html)

This is a clear example of how flawed Fr. Ssemakula’s teaching on authority is; his teaching on the individual’s authority to directly address the devil goes too far and potentially puts souls in serious harm’s way.

## **What about Healings that People have received?**

We know that some people have received a variety of healings – even miraculous ones – after having followed the method taught in the book *The Healing of Families*. We do not doubt it. Yet our theological concerns with this book, and our pastoral concerns that stem from its clearly flawed teaching (such as the possibility of despair when a suffering person does not receive healing, as promised by the book, and who therefore concludes that “God must not love me” or “I am doomed to damnation because God did not heal me of these bonds of Satan”), have led us to write this warning against this book and its teaching. “*But don't the healings prove that the book is true?*” some might ask. **No, results does not equal right.** Here are a few reasons:

1. God can work miracles whenever He chooses, and when a person prays with faith, and asks that God heal him *if it is for his true benefit – his eternal salvation* – then sometimes

God will heal that person. Sometimes, God says “No” because He knows that this sharing in the Cross is more beneficial to the person's eternal salvation.

2. Charismatic gifts (special gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the up-building of the Church and the good of human persons) are not evidence of either the holiness of the person who exercises the gift, nor of the theological accuracy of that person's understanding of his gift. Fr. Ssemakula may have a true charism of healing, but that does not mean that his teaching about healing is theologically accurate.
3. The theology of the program is flawed, but the substantial reality of praying for healing is part of the Truth of our Catholic Faith. He said *ask, seek and knock* (Mat 7:7); He gave the power of healing and deliverance to His disciples (Lk 10:1-20). So anytime we turn to our Lord, however imperfect it might be, He is there to receive us. There are many who reject the notion of healing, unless it is done by a saint or approved Marian apparition site. To reject the truth that God does heal through various people or instruments is just as dangerous and reckless as saying He always heals.

### **Why Does This Program Work? Some of the Reasons ...**

Mainly, because God is a Merciful and Loving God. He has seen the good will and desire of the participants of this program who sought to turn away from Satan and evil and to turn towards Him with the desire to know him better, love him better, to follow him better, and to receive his gifts.

1. This program calls Families together, to examine their lives and pray. The mere fact that this program is bringing families together in prayer, towards Christ, is in itself enough to move God to Mercy.
2. Forgiveness: It is a call address to any unforgiveness and to recognize any childhood trauma in one's life and to *choose to forgive*. Spiritual writers tell us that unforgiveness is the single greatest obstacle to growth in the spiritual life and to any form of healing.
3. Purification and Conversion: The program includes a call to break any unhealthy relationships in one's life (with people, TV, internet, etc.) – to turn away from anything that explicitly or implicitly glamorizes evil.
4. This program helps a person to identify and remove any occult practices from their lives. It rightly exposes things such as yoga, reiki, enneagram, Harry Potter, and other things as occult and harmful to souls. Removing the diabolic from one's life is enough to create results on its own. The problem, as listed above, is that Fr. Ssemakula goes too far and makes many theological errors in relation to understanding the occult.
5. It has helped people to turn towards God and ask Him to heal the “bondage” that might exist in their families.
6. Another reason why “it works” is due to the para-liturgy. Not because of the specific prayers in the book, but because a person or family spends a significant amount of time in spiritual preparation. The detailed six page, double column, personal inventory could easily double as an examination for a general confession (one priest reported he spent in excess of four hours prayerfully examining himself). Thus prepared, families come

together, in Christ's name, in the presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament for about 90 minutes, renounce their sinfulness, and ask for God's healing and mercy.

### **Healing Inventory:**

<http://fathersofmercy.com/wp-content/uploads/Healing-Inventory.pdf>

In terms of *why this program works*, at a very superficial level, these principles listed above are in keeping with good Catholic thought and teaching. Fr. Ssemakula is not totally wrong in his presentation and there are elements of Truth with a capital "T" found here. These are some of the reasons why we feel this book and program has produced such notable results.

### **Conclusion:**

While recognizing tremendous good that has resulted from the use of the Healing of Families book and program, the Fathers of Mercy have grave reservations regarding the tremendous theological errors, philosophical contradictions, and logical fallacies within the book and presented at the conferences. There has been much effort given to "working around" these errors and utilizing the program in its present form; however the errors are just too numerous and, in parts, dangerous to souls. For this reason we cannot recommend this book or program and in conscience must warn souls of the dangers it presents.

### **Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Quote "The Pure Cross Vs. Impure Cross":**

"Any cross would be easy to bear if we could only tailor it to fit ourselves. Our Lord's cross was not made by Him, but for Him. Crosses and burdens are thrust upon us. Our acceptance makes them personal. Our Lord even said that there would be at least seven crosses a week: Take up your cross daily and follow Me.' Crosses are of two kinds: pure ones, which come from the outside, such as pain, persecution, and ridicule; and inner, or impure crosses, which come as the result of our sins, such as sadness, despair, and unhappiness. These latter crosses can be avoided. They are made by contradicting the will of God. The vertical bar of the cross stands for God's will; the horizontal bar stands for our wills. When one crosses the other, we have the cross. Our Lord never promised that we would be without a cross; He only promised that we would never be overcome by it. St. Peter so loved the cross, that when the time came for his execution he asked to be crucified upside down. May He who was found guilty of no other crime than that of the excess of love, make us hate the load of sin that made His cross. The whole cross borne in union with His will and following in His footsteps is easier to bear than the splinters against which we rebel." -from *The Fifteen Mysteries*

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