

MUTUAL CARING.

FRANK LAKE.

“Mutual Caring” was the last book that Frank Lake wrote. It’s a practical guide to integrated counselling and the summary of Frank Lake’s life-long research. For most, me included, it’s not an easy reading. Some of the ideas are well-presented while others are quite vague and hard to grasp.

Frank Lake, being a pioneer in the field of prenatal psychology, became one of the first scholars who drew a parallel between the intrauterine life of a fetus and future psychological well-being of a person. Frank Lake conducted extensive research that included the data from twelve hundred participants collected during four years of studies. The goal of the study was to recover the memories from the earliest childhood possible, particularly the time when a person was not even considered human by many. Frank Lake and his followers worked on identifying specific psychosomatic patterns of distress that, based on the research hypothesis, could be traced back to the first twelve weeks after conception. The data collected through the observation and verbal reports proved the possibility of reliving prenatal experiences. During the workshops the participants were subjected to different techniques including relaxation, guided fantasy, deep breathing that allowed them to remember their near birth experience. The methodology of Lake’s research raises a lot of questions since the data collected would not survive testing by commonly accepted scientific method. Although, if we take into consideration the null hypothesis that would state that there is no connection between the prenatal life experience and future psychological well-being of a person, Frank Lake’s research data showed that it

couldn't be true. Some may question how the workshops were organized, since the first phase of the therapy included studying stage-by-stage development of a fetus in the womb, that alone might give the participants the exact image or particular experience to look for and could result in the data created by participants' imagination.

Based on the observations and verbal reports Frank Lake distinguished a short stage of a "blastocyst" that happens prior to the establishment of the umbilical circulation between a mother and a fetus. This "blastocyst" stage is characterized by the experience of non-attachment when a fertilized ovum travels on its own. In the book Frank Lake provides examples from the participants that some of them could recall the experience of that absolute freedom, and even provided some feedback about the emotional states of the parents during conception. This part is very questionable since these responses could have been biased by the knowledge of the family history or simply by the participants' imagination. It's hard to believe that we can have any memories of something from the time when we didn't really exist.

Once the connection between the fetus and the mother's uterus is established the phenomenon of the "umbilical affect" becomes an issue to consider. Lake distinguished 3 possible manifestations of the "umbilical affect" - positive, negative and strongly negative. Positive affect is characterized by the positive flow from the mother, when the future child is accepted and given all the nutrients to develop. Negative affect is defined by less than ideal conditions for the development of a fetus when a future baby and his/her needs are not recognized. Strongly negative affect can cause M-FDS and is characterized by physical and mental suffering that a mother shares with a fetus through the blood flow.

Lake distinguishes 4 variations of fetal response – ideal, coping, opposition and transmarginal stress. The ideal fetal response happens when all the needs of a fetus are fulfilled and its' surroundings are positive. A fetus goes into coping when the maternal affect flow is less than ideal but still tolerable. Fetal opposition is caused by the maternal resentment and distress that is transmitted to the fetus through the blood flow. According to Lake transmarginal stress is the type of fetal response that is defined by crossing the level of tolerable pains and going further when a fetus cannot deal with its' suffering and turns into self-destructive mode. This part of Frank Lake's theory is easy to agree with, especially after taking this Prenatal Psychology course. Our life starts a long time before we come into contact with other human beings and fetal life on its' own is full of events. The connection between the mother and the fetus is strong and undeniable, thus, the life of a human being in the womb can be good and bad based on this primary link. Frank Lake states that negative umbilical affect can be manifested via many physiological outcomes such as pain in the limbs (particularly in legs), skin diseases, chest pains and other conditions. So, the mother's womb, that is designed to help and care for the fetus can also be deadly poisonous. As a perfect pregnancy, Frank Lake refers to the Blessed Mother Mary's experience and shows the importance of the first trimester and the need for support and care during these three months.

When Frank Lake talks about therapy and psychological help, he emphasizes the importance of going back to the roots of the ongoing problem. For him, once started from the very beginning, the source of the affliction can be identified, relieved, and fixed. I personally believe in this part, and I think it works not only through the mother's acceptance of the future child but also through the woman's life experience. My mother was pregnant with my younger sister when my

grandfather died, and that experience was very traumatic for, what now seems obvious, for both of them. When my sister was born, she cried a lot, couldn't sleep and even as years passed, she still has many emotional problems. My mother always said that the two of us were completely different babies, where I was always very calm and happy, and my sister seemed to always be distressed. If we apply Frank Lake theory, the mother's stress affected the baby.

The healing technic that lays in the center of Frank Lake integrational approach emphasizes God's love that can fix everything that's broken. In a case of a traumatic prenatal experience it makes perfect sense, since even not accepted and hated by the mother a future child is surrounded by the divine love of God. The experience of the cold womb is very traumatic to a fetus and can cause life-long consequences, but once we change the focus and start looking for what else is there, and who else is there it can slowly change our perspective and make us feel better about ourselves. Frank Lake states what is called exorcise and meant to cast the evil can be achieved by taking care of that inner child, that thinks that he/she is not loved and not accepted. This inner resistance can be illuminated by the recognition of the love of God, that can heal the pain and change the whole world. This idea resonates to me on a very deep level, because I use the same strategy throughout all my life, because even in the darkest time I still feel that I'm loved and cared for. To see the good in life all we need is to take a deep breath and feel this warmth that makes everything feel better.

A big part of "Mutual Caring" is about counselling and integration. First of all, the very title of the book says a lot about the purpose of the book. Professional help, according to Lake, has to be genuine and deeply caring. It's hard to disagree with this since this is what all of us are hoping for when we look for help. Yes, drugs can bring some relief of anxiety and can be

considered a success when only this particular problem is targeted, but getting rid of the symptom does not mean that the problem is resolved. The alternative offered by Frank Lake is about understanding the very essence of humanity and how we are supposed to function. It's not always the medical matter of physical pain but more of suffering of a soul. Frank Lake talks about six attributes of effective counselling - empathy, respect, genuisness, concreteness, confrontation and immediacy. I don't think I'd be able to understand how these can benefit a professional if I haven't read the whole book, but now it seems clear that the process of healing is always mutual, and when one sets a goal to help another, it goes both ways. The search for the inconsistencies in others results in deep self-analysis.

"Mutual Caring" book is perfect for the end of this course. It makes us think... I don't think I grasped 100% of what I read but for sure I got some kind of understanding of what Frank Lake was talking about. Some of his ideas and theories are hard to agree with while others make us reconsider what we think we know. God gave us our lives and every moment of our existence makes sense. For many, whatever they cannot see doesn't count as life, which is so wrong! We are what we are, as meant by our creator, from the moment of conception. The miracle of life happens and that's where it all begins. With the help of all the modern technology, we have a much better understanding of what is going on in the womb, we are able to see that we are as human before we are born as years after. Frank Lake didn't have all the resources to further investigate his theory but, surely, started this movement in the right direction. It was a great pleasure to become familiar with his work.

P.S

Dr. Maret! Thank you so much for this course! I definitely joined the pro-life movement.