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Critical Thinking: 'Mutual Caring', Frank Lake

The book we will be looking at is "*Mutual Caring*" by Frank Lake, edited by Dr. Stephen Maret. This book integrates the role Christ has as a crucified god and prenatal experiences. It dives into different instances of counseling where the main focus was the effect of prenatal experiences and feelings on the present-day lives of individuals.

The author, Frank Lake, was primarily a medical missionary in India with his wife, Sylvia. After one term of service in India, Lake took the role of a medical superintendent at the Vellore Christian Medical College in England. It was there that he discovered his calling and retrained in psychiatry. As time went on, he realized through various interactions with clergy, the lack of attention there was in the crossover between the domain of clerical work and psychological theory. Lake then created an organization called the Clinical Theology Association where there was the integration of theology and psychiatry. Through this work, he was able to write many books, including 'Mutual Caring'. In his last three books. Including this one, he tones in on the topic of 'maternal-fetal distress syndrome', which we will take a look at later on in our critical thinking process. Lake wrote this book in 1982 and passed away a month later. It is mentioned in the preface, written by Maret, and in the introduction, written by the author, of his dying condition and how it had affected his writings. Stephen Maret, who edited the book,

clarifies the importance Lake felt in writing this last book to tie up loose ends to his life's work of exploring the integration of pastoral work and psychiatric theories. It is almost as if he was on a gradual path to the creation of this book. It was through 'Mutual Caring' that the psychiatrist conveyed and communicated his direct thoughts on the understanding of the human formation and function in the first three months in the womb. As Maret mentioned in the preface, Lake tends to be single-minded and repetitive, the latter is thought to be due to his illness and how close he was to death. But throughout his book, he displays the time in the womb as very negative and traumatic. This is something we will take a closer look at later in this critical thinking paper. This book essentially includes a study examined by Lake. He observes a group of people through a workshop. It is in these groups where, according to the Lake, the subjects experience prenatal environments and experiences that might remind them of what their time in the womb might have been. They then write down or speak about what they felt and what thoughts were provoked. '*Mutual Caring*' is filled with biological examples to support the psychological impacts of prenatal experiences. Lake observes the presence of prenatal recollection through breathing exercises. This was interesting as breathing helps promote grounding and brain activity.

Later on in the book, in chapter 5 '*Transmarginal Mechanisms and the Roots of Affliction*', we read about the fetal rejection-displacement-containment defensive system. This essentially explained how many feelings of insecurities stem from the first trimester of pregnancy. A case called 'umbilical badness' explains to insecurities women have with their thighs (below where the umbilical cord scar) and men with their musculature. It is a reflection in the pelvic area from the recollection of prenatal experiences. Therefore, hypothetically, the feelings of insecurities are recollections of the time in the womb. Another example of the method

Lake uses in his book to gather recollections of prenatal experiences is through exploring the circumstances of the mother. In chapter 2 titled '*Developing Methodology*', he writes about going back to the recollection of the moment of conception. In this section, Lake explains how the mother's feelings about the conception moment and the man who was involved are reflected in the life of the subject. This can mean the thoughts or feelings she has about the man she is with, whether or not she feels comfortable with him, whether are there worries she has, or even the level of sexual arousal that can come into play. The thoughts she has about the possible conception have an impact as well. Her thoughts about her parents and their opinions, having a first child/another child, or possibly undergoing a miscarriage or accident are all feelings that can then be reflected in the subject's life, in the womb as well as an adult. We can go back as far as before conception to study how the mother can affect an individual's life and psychology. From this we can hypothesize if a traumatic instance occurs during conception such as a loss of interest during sexual intercourse, for example, will impact the mother's view of herself during pregnancy. This can then alter the environment of the womb and focus the mother on the child in her womb. Lake also writes about maternal availability and how the reaction of the mother to the presence of a developing human in her womb has consequential effects.

In Chapter 5, '*Transmarginal Mechanisms and the Roots of Affliction*', maternal availability is supported by references to the birth of Jesus in the Bible. This was one of the most fascinating connections I read in this book. Lake integrates moments in the Bible of Jesus' pre-birth and mentions the visit of Mary with her cousin Elizabeth. The angel visited Mary and foretold her pregnancy. This was a moment to prepare Mary for pregnancy and for her to have time to become maternally available. It is evidence of the integration of theology and (prenatal) psychology. The visit with Elizabeth was also an occasion for Mary to prepare herself

maternally. Additionally, movement in the womb is mentioned in Luke 1:41: “When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit”. The presence of movement in Elizabeth’s womb, recorded in the Bible, only proves the timeline of the beginning of human life in the womb. Even if this is divine intervention, this only proves that Elizabeth’s child was with the capacity to react when in the presence of the mother of God.

In my opinion, Frank Lake had a quite negative annotation of human existence in the womb. There were many occasions mentioned where the effects of the mother on the fetus were proven to cause significant trauma and not many where they were shown in a positive light. Lake strongly focuses on how the mother’s negative thoughts and feelings alter the environment of her womb. In chapter 3, “*The Experiment*”, he explains the four levels of fetal response. The third and fourth levels were what really caught my attention in view of the balance of the incongruent opinions he communicated; it really concentrated on the negative aspects. Typically when talking about the process of pregnancy, the most traumatic moment is the birth, when the baby leaves the safe, familiar womb and enters the unknown world. Yet, levels three and four were explained in a way where it was in response to highly negative stimuli. Level three is the inability to handle the coping response (level two) that is activated when the essential fetal needs are not met (ideal, level one). There is this perfect satisfaction and the consciousness of the care of the mother that provides them with feelings of warmth and ‘fetal joy’. From the beginning, the fetus has a prediction of what the mother thinks. This primal stage is ideal because the being is too small to be noticed. This is when is without anxiety or worry. It is actually in step two where the negativity starts. Meaning the fetus now feels the lack of love. It is fundamental to understand this lack and yearn as will develop into a loss of interest in life altogether. I found

this conclusion to be a bit extreme. Lake states: “When there is a failure to meet the essential fetal need for recognition [...], we observe that the fetus, having lost hope of the ‘ideal’, attempts to cope...”. He also describes how fear and loss turn into rage. There is a disconnection from life due to a lack of care or just simply a bad experience. This is fundamentally the primary example in life. It translates to other experiences in adult individuals. Being aware of the effect of these thoughts and feelings can be beneficial to assessing behavior in clergy members as well as dealing with religious attendees.

The author’s purpose for writing this book was to complete the integration of intrauterine experiences, his psychiatric perspective, and the theological. His purpose is also to create a space for a type of counseling that explores the prenatal aspects of life and how it affects Christian communities. There are many instances where mutual caring has been shown to create negative impacts in the church. This book helps to create that integration by providing an explanation that can be understood by those working or a part of the church. Lake uses examples, methods, and arguments that have a foundation in the Bible and are proven by either biological examples or biblical approaches. This makes it applicable to those whose thought processes are not necessarily psychologically based.

This can then prove to show how the act of caring for one another can be an essential source of support to someone in crisis. The concept of the four levels of fetal response provides clear support for that theory. Lake takes the worst-case scenario and provides examples of outcomes from a negative experience. I think that he strongly demonstrates how the environment and the level of care the mother has affects the fetus, whether it be positive or negative. The instance of prenatal psychology is fundamental to understanding the behavior of individuals throughout the entirety of their lives, from infancy to the elderly age.