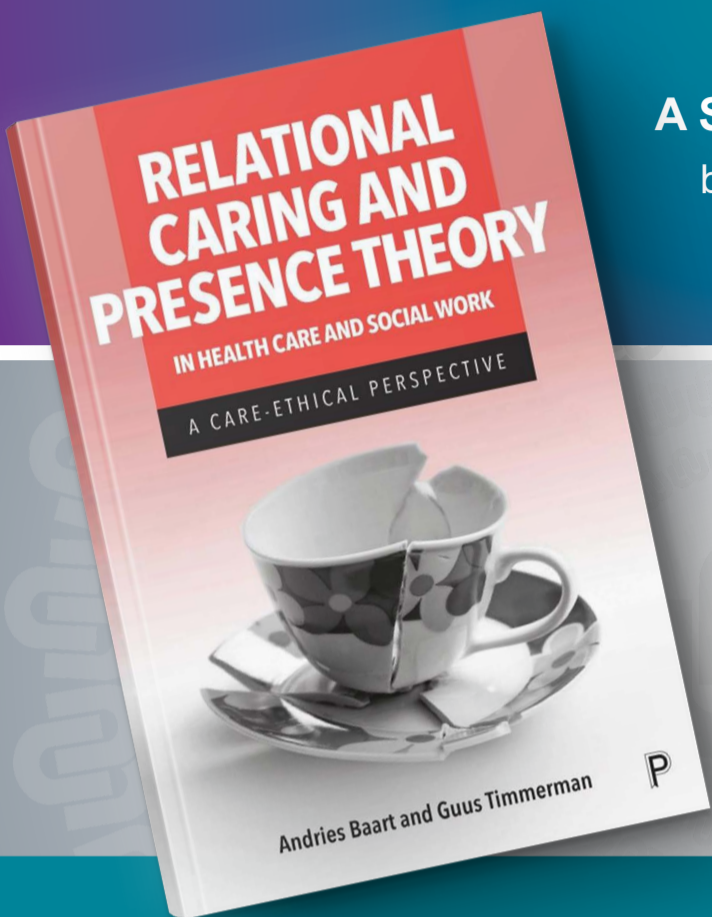




BOOK LAUNCH



RELATIONAL CARING: A Soft Voice in Transforming Society

by Andries Baart and Guus Timmerman



5 May 2025
10:00 (SAST)



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Authors:

Andries Baart studied andragogy, specialized as a practical theologian and obtained his doctorate in philosophy. He has been a professor at the Catholic Theological University in Utrecht from 1991 to 2006. Since 2007, he has held the chair of Presence and Care, initially at Tilburg University and later at the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht. From 2015 to the present, he has been affiliated with North-West University in South Africa as a professor by special appointment. From 2018-2023, he was affiliated with the psychiatry department of UMC Utrecht as a visiting professor. From 2007-2023, he works with and from the Stichting Presentie (Presence Foundation). He is the intellectual father of the presence theory and conducts research in the broad field of care, welfare and services, particularly for socially vulnerable people. He publishes with Guus Timmerman on care ethics, research methodology and presence.

Guus Timmerman, PhD, had worked as a care ethicist and qualitative researcher at the Presence Foundation in The Netherlands since 2014. He publishes on relational caring and presence in healthcare and social work and on the methodology of qualitative research. He collaborated with the Caring Presence group of Emmerentia du Plessis and the Studying Well research group of Karina Mostert of the North-West University. Together with Andries Baart, he published 'Relational Caring and Presence Theory in Health Care and Social Work: A Care-Ethical Perspective' (Policy Press, 2025). His current research is on narrative accountability: giving insight to relevant interlocutors through stories.



Book: Relational caring: a soft voice in transforming society

The newly published book *Relational Caring and Presence Theory in Health Care and Social Work: A Care-Ethical Perspective* addresses a deep and widespread sense of dissatisfaction, felt not only by the public but also by professionals across various sectors. In healthcare, social services, education, housing, psychiatry, youth care, and even public administration, systems frequently fail to address the issues relevant to the affected stakeholders.

As a result, a growing divide has emerged—between competent professionals and managers on one hand, and the lived experiences of patients, clients, students, and residents with their needs, concerns, and aspirations on the other. Similarly, a gap exists between the institutional logic of organisations—with their administrative and quality control systems—and the everyday practice and practical wisdom of frontline professionals. These gaps have led to an increase in disconnected competencies, bureaucratic inefficiencies, institutional detachment, mismatches, and mistrust. Decades of relentless reforms since the 1980s have failed to address these fundamental issues, often perpetuating rather than resolving them. People—whether as citizens or professionals—increasingly feel unseen. This growing sense of alienation fuels distrust towards fellow citizens, dissatisfaction in the workplace, and susceptibility to populist rhetoric.

The book argues that no form of care, assistance, or support can function without a relational foundation—without which, those seeking help are at risk of feeling abandoned. This very experience of exclusion is at the heart of global discontent. Furthermore, when professionals are denied the opportunity to practise relational caring, they become vulnerable to job dissatisfaction and burnout.

The book explores these themes through the lens of the presence theory and approach, closely linked to the political dimension of care ethics. It draws on a strong empirical foundation and an inductive approach to conceptualisation. The practices it advocates are grounded in careful, patient observation and interpretation. While much of the qualitative research informing the book has been conducted in the Netherlands, its insights are internationally relevant.

At this book launch, one of the authors, Andries Baart, will present key chapters from the book, followed by responses and critical comments by Emmerentia du Plessis and Rayne Stroebel, both involved in education, training, research, and practice.