INTERNATIONAL FRANCISCAN CONFERENCE – TOR

PROPOSITUM

November 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis,
Peace and all Good!

With the feast of our Seraphic Father St Francis this year, 2025, we have concluded the eighth centenary of the Canticle of Brother Sun and are moving towards the centenary of St Francis' Easter, which we will celebrate next year.
In this Propositum, we publish the last two contributions by Father David Couturier for the CFI-TOR 2025 General Assembly:

- *Repairing the World*, in which Couturier analysed how globalisation, technology, identity changes and geopolitics are reshaping the world at a dizzying pace. These anxieties are countered by the Franciscan vision of dynamic, mission-oriented institutions rooted in fraternity and ongoing conversion.

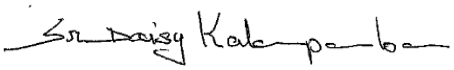
- *The problem of care in the contemporary world.* This new era of mission-based care requires a spirit of innovation, courage and deeply rooted faith. Looking to the future, we welcome the challenge of forming leaders who will not only carry on the Franciscan mission, but transform it, infusing it with new energy and love for the people they are called to serve.

Dear friends, in the world in which we live, let us pray unceasingly that the Queen of the Rosary may obtain from God the gift of lasting peace for every person, for every heart, for every people.

I wish you a pleasant read. In St Francis

With esteem and cordiality,

Sr. Daisy Kalamparamban
IFC-TOR President



SUMMARY

REPAIRING THE WORLD:
FRANCISCANS IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

David B. Couturier
OFM. Cap., PhD., DMin.
Associate Professor of Theology and Franciscan Studies
and Director of the Franciscan Institute
at St. Bonaventure University (USA)

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When Francis arrived in the public square in front of the Bishop's House in Assisi, he was wearing the finest clothes he had as the son of a wealthy cloth merchant. He had probably worn them often during his zestful adolescence when he was known as the *"King of the Revels"* due to his love for parties, fine clothes, and an extravagant lifestyle. Before this, he had gone to war for the good and glory of Assisi against its economic and imperial rival, Perugia. He had become a soldier to become famous and win the praise of his peers and the esteem and acceptance of Assisi's nobility. In his mind, he was destined for glory!

However, the Battle of Collestrada had been a disaster for him from the very start. It didn't take long for Francis to be captured and taken as a prisoner of war. He languished alone in a dark, dank, and dangerous underground cell. He stayed there for almost a year, waiting to be ransomed by his father. All the while, he became sicker and more tormented. When he was finally freed, he was a broken young man, suffering from malaria, malnutrition, and depression. With lots of time to think, he had become totally disillusioned by the violence and greed that obsessed his world, his town, his family, and even his church. Now, he roamed the caves and haunts around Assisi, seeking a new purpose for his life, for a meaning and glory that eluded him.

He finally found some solace when he stumbled into the

church of San Damiano, an old and decrepit church deep in the forest. There, he heard the voice of the crucifix telling him to "repair the church" since it was falling into ruins. Here is something that he could do, something that he wanted to do. Typical of the young man, he went at it full throttle. It was the first time he felt a bit of passion in years. Soon thereafter, he received a notice to appear at the Bishop's residence.

He had been summoned to the public square for a judicial proceeding by the Bishop of Assisi to answer a complaint from his father that he had stolen expensive cloth and sold a horse without authorization. He had used the sale to pay for masonry tools he needed to repair churches in the valley below Assisi. His father was furious. He wanted his son to focus on the family business and to stop muddling in the nonsense of heavenly voices and broken-down chapels. The years since his release from prison were agonizing both for his parents and Francis. They could not figure out what was wrong with him, and he couldn't explain it. Francis was wandering aimlessly, ending up in caves, spending days and nights alone, talking nonsense. Pietro had tried to beat some sense into Francis but to no avail. Pietro even imprisoned him while he was away on business. Nothing worked. The distance between him and his son had widened beyond rescue. The summons to appear before the bishop now made one thing clear to Francis. He could no longer continue as the son of Pietro Bernardone.[1]

And so, when he got to the public square, he immediately began to strip off all his clothes. When he was left standing there totally naked, he threw the expensive clothes at his father. He solemnly declared that he was done with his father, the family business, and all the greed and violence that fueled them. In an instant, by law, the act made him totally free and abjectly poor. He had lost his home, his support, his status, and all that came with them.

With nothing but borrowed rags to cover him, he went off alone into an unchartered future with nowhere to go. The Anglican theologian John Milbank captures the essence of the *novum* (newness) in Francis' dramatic break from family and society. He asks presciently: where does a man go when he has nowhere to go?

> For if there was a *novum* about Francis, then it concerned his revolutionary attempt more closely to follow Jesus and the apostles in their restoration of a paradisal life on earth as far as possible. For Francis this meant adoption of *altissima povertà*, the "most high poverty," refusing not just private property, like the traditional monastic orders, but even any notion of property shared in common. This refusal undergirded the new ideal of a mendicant, wandering, begging way of life, in which truly one became like the birds of the air and lilies of the field, trusting solely to the providence of the heavenly Father.[2]

The *novum*, or dramatically new, for Francis and soon his followers, was a trust that went beyond the law and even beyond the boundaries of culture. Having cast off his clothes in the town square, Francis aligned himself not with culture or some part thereof but with nature itself. When he leaves the public square, he does not search for a monastery, a desert hermitage, a radical community of rebels, or hermits. He goes immediately to nature, the vestige of God's image, to undergo a primal new birth and incarnation. In this way, without much thought, he starts a new "civilization of love" outside Assisi's conventions, customs, and laws. Milbank writes about Francis's radical step.

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[1] Volker Leppin, *Francis of Assisi: The Life of a Restless Saint* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2025), "Rupture," 13-56.
[2] John Milbank, "The Franciscan Conundrum," *Communio* 42 (Fall 2015): 466.

> First, he did not simply react against the new urban civilization by returning to the desert of the fields or fleeing to a monastic asylum. Rather, he did a new thing by fleeing to "everywhere," that is to say, to nature as such, rather than culture, and yet in such a way that his path of continuous flight now possibly passes through every street of every town.[3]

Thus, the poverty and emptiness of that initial moment were not primarily an ascetical exercise. They were not a negation that cancels culture, defeats enemies, builds defensive walls, or silences those who are wrong. Francis was not in flight to some other protected spaces, whether desert or monastery. His was not an escape from the "evils of mortality" or temptations of the flesh. In no sense was it a flight from the world at all.

As Milbank rightly understands, it is a flight into the relational space of "everywhere," where only domination and deprivation are excluded. As Francis first inscribes it, dispossession is the Franciscan key to freedom, where *use* trumps *ownership* so that relationships may thrive on service instead of control.[4] Francis gave up everything to have the one thing he wanted – Christ and those whom Christ loves. Francis emptied himself of everything he formerly owned or controlled to be grasped and held by the only love that could satisfy his heart, that of his Lord.

The question for our consideration now is: *how do we stand in the public square?* How do we, as Francis' distant sons and daughters, position ourselves to receive a calling from the Most High God? Surely, we know we cannot fabricate a voice from the crucifix. Though poor in the world, we have inherited so much

[3] Milbank, "The Franciscan Conundrum," 470.

[4] Willem Marie Speelman, "The Franciscan Usus Pauper as The Gateway Towards an Aesthetic Economy," *Franciscan Studies* 74 (2016), 185-205.

from the church's law and our orders' Constitutions. Where do we go from here? How do we start again, especially at our age and with all that we know about the dangers in the post-modern world all around us? What do we do with our present realities and obligations? We are not a 25-year-old Francis and surely not an 18-year-old Clare.

Wouldn't it be better and wiser simply to retreat into our convents and our offices and ignore what's going on in the streets and shops of our world? Staring out from the public square in today's world is anything but soothing. The public square has become polarized, with angry voices to the left and right of us. Issues are complicated. Solutions are costly. It would be nice to back away from the public square and find a comfortable and tasty gelateria nearby.

But Francis did not seclude us in monasteries and abbeys. I don't remember a gelateria on the grounds of the Porziuncola. Francis always invites us to walk with him through the public square so that we can do our part in repairing the world. To do this effectively, I will argue that we must be about three things: (1) giving honor to the grand impossibility of God, (2) practicing a contemplative gaze, and (3) acting with resilience and trust.

From the Public Square to the Repair of the World

When Francis left the public square, he had his freedom and nothing else. He had no family or friends, no home or social protection. The bishop gave him a blessing and the rags on his back, and that's it. But Francis realized he had something else he could not have imagined just weeks before. He had the embrace of the leper and the acceptance of a leper colony that he once found more disgusting than anything else in the world. He turned to them now for love and companionship. He followed the trail to the forests below Assisi and began to serve them, to bathe their wounds and tend to their disintegrating flesh. He intended to serve abandoned lepers and repair churches for the rest of his life. He had given up on status;

his life now was about the service of the outcast. He never imagined that he would repair anything besides his own soul with the mercy and compassion of Christ.

As we know, God always has grander plans for us than we expect of ourselves. This was certainly true of Francis. In time, he would gather brothers and sisters. They would travel to the farthest corners of the world, evangelizing with a simple belief that we are all brothers and sisters under one good and loving God. They would preach that we live in a cosmic communion, created in a blessed unity in diversity by a God who so loved the world that He gave His only Son to save us, even in its darkest times (John 3:16). Francis would become a man of social reconciliation and a brother of international compassion as he resolved social conflicts in Assisi and engaged in Christian-Islamic dialogue in Egypt with absolute humility and grace-filled acceptance.

What amazes me still about Francis of Assisi is the mobility of his compassion. From the moment he left the public square, he never stopped. His heart was always open, and his mind was always searching for ways to love and be kindhearted to anyone in need and willing to receive.

Sometimes, I wonder whether we too often stand paralyzed in the public square, not knowing where to turn and what to do. We, too, have given up everything and made the dramatic gesture of handing back to the world its standards of success and achievement. But we seem to look around and wonder what we can do now. We are so small, and the world is overwhelmed with problems that are massive in scope and range. How can we help? We are getting older, and the cost of living and aging is increasing. We can't build schools and hospitals anymore like generations of sisters and brothers once did. We can hardly sponsor the institutions we once staffed because vocations have stalled.

We stand in the public square and surmise there is nothing we can do now that we are old. And yet, with that, I can hear the older women in the Bible begin to laugh. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, is chuckling as she once did outside the tent when she heard the angel tell her husband that they would have a son in their very old age. She couldn't believe it! I hear Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah, howling at the suggestion that God cannot surprise the world anymore with women and men whom the world has marked off as impotent. She repeats sacred words with a smile, "Nothing is impossible with God."

Gazing from the Public Square: Holy Attentiveness

How do we look anew in the public square? How do we see opportunities amid the alienation, frustration, and mistrust of social issues today? We live in a dangerous world. I hate to admit and am ashamed to say that the new administration in my country makes it more dangerous by the day.

Months ago, the President of the United States humiliated President Volodymir Zelensky of Ukraine in the Oval Office. It was a shameful and ugly display of arrogance against a man who had been leading his country tirelessly through more than three years of war against an unjust aggressor. *NY Times* journalist David Brooks expressed sentiments that resonated with me. He said of the spectacle in the Oval Office:

> I was nauseated, just nauseated. All my life, I have had a certain idea of America, that we're a flawed country, but we're fundamentally a force for good in the world, that we defeated Soviet Union, we

> defeated fascism, we did the Marshall Plan, we did PEPFAR to help people live in Africa. And we make mistakes, Iraq, Vietnam, but they're usually mistakes out of stupidity, naivete and arrogance.
>
> They're not because we're ill-intentioned. What I have seen over the last six weeks is the United States behaving vilely, vilely to our friends in Canada and Mexico, vilely to our friends in Europe. And today was the bottom of the barrel, vilely to a man who is defending Western values, at great personal risk to him and his countrymen.
>
> Donald Trump believes in one thing. He believes that might makes right. And, in that, he agrees with Vladimir Putin that they are birds of a feather. And he and Vladimir Putin together are trying to create a world that's safe for gangsters, where ruthless people can thrive. And we saw the product of that effort today in the Oval Office.
>
> And I have — I first started thinking, is it — am I feeling grief? Am I feeling shock, like I'm in a hallucination? But I just think shame, moral shame. It's a moral injury to see the country you love behave in this way.[5]

These moments make many of us want to walk away from anything political. They are exhausting and exasperating. What's the use? The fact is that the world we live in is indeed dangerous. One can question whether it is more or less dangerous than that of the Caesars during Jesus' time or the violent spasms of war during the time of Francis. Either way, if we are to be about the repair of the world, we must have a methodology that will guide us securely through the challenges we face nowadays. It may surprise you that we will start our politics with contemplation and begin with (of all people) Clare of Assisi.

In her letter to Agnes of Prague, Clare of Assisi provides us with a fourfold method of contemplative discernment. In a world where the volume and velocity of change are exponential, it is important that we have a methodology that can slow us down, focus our attention, and shift our will to be integrity-minded.[6] A simple outline of Clare's gaze of contemplation will help:

Clare's Fourfold Gaze of Contemplation

1. **Gaze (Intuere)** – Fix your inner and outer eyes on Christ, especially on His humility and suffering. This is an intentional turning of one's vision toward the Crucified Lord.
2. **Consider (Considera)**—This stage involves Reflecting deeply on Christ's life, His passion, and His love for humanity. It involves meditating on the mystery of His sacrifice.
3. **Contemplate (Contempla)** – Move beyond thinking into a silent, loving union with Christ. This moment of deep spiritual connection allows His love to transform you.
4. **Imitate (Imita)**—Conform to Christ by living His example of humility, poverty, and love. For Clare, contemplation is never just an inward experience; it must be lived out.

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[5] David Brooks on Zelensky: Trump Is Behaving "Vilely" To A Man Who Is Defending Western Values, At Great Personal Risk, *Real Clear Politics*, March 1, 2025, David Brooks on Zelensky: Trump Is Behaving "Vilely" To A Man Who Is Defending Western Values, At Great Personal Risk | Video | RealClearPolitics.

[6] R.Kelly Crace and Robert Louis Crace, *Authentic Excellence: Flourishing and Resilience in a Relentless World* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 57-63.

Clare offers us a way to understand and make sense of the challenges in which we are living. She provides a method by which we can pierce through the enormous pride and glory that envelop the propaganda of our political discourse today. Clare's plan is to saturate the mind and heart with an alternate image of Christ's humility, passion, and love for humanity. Clare recommends that one begin decision-making not with a tally of achievements or failures but with an intentional focus on suffering and humility. Humility and suffering are the heart's method of opening our consciousness to deeper levels of empathy and compassion. Clare reminds us that her four steps of contemplation are not the only steps in a lengthy decision-making process. They are the first steps, the foundation of all Franciscan decision-making. We may call this "holy attentiveness" because it trains us to see opportunities that are resistant to inspection without the contemplation of the problems we face and the difficulties we endure.

In the last talk, you will remember that I suggested how modern politics is shifting the social world from under us. Let me briefly bring back what I said earlier this morning:

> Interestingly, the philosophical pessimists of the Enlightenment once posited an innate penchant for progress in the hearts of humankind. They once maintained that now that the mind was finally freed from religion's (supposed) follies, humanity could be about what they called "inevitable human progress." Then, when modernity's "progress" produced the bloodiest of centuries in human history (the twentieth) along with the terrifying capacity for nuclear annihilation, they abandoned progress and preached despair and alienation. And we see the sad and dangerous spectacle in our modern political climate today: the secular repair of the world is being abandoned to be replaced by hyper-nationalism, a

> resurgence of shameless greed, the abandonment of foreign aid programs, and the rise of authoritarian rule.[7] Contemporary politicians are abandoning the project to repair the world, a frightening feature of our postmodern mindset.[8]

The primary political agenda of our day is, therefore, not to save money or to protect our borders. It is to alienate us from the weak and vulnerable, to make us suspicious and distrustful of the sick and the poor, and thus reduce our need and willingness to help even during times of need. The agenda is to keep us mesmerized by the tricks and trades of the ultra-wealthy so that we will see them as our "friends" and ignore what Jesus said about the wealthy man. Namely, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:24, Mark 10:25, and Luke 18:2). This tactic of political distraction is becoming normative even in countries traditionally known for their foreign aid and international generosity. We can miss what is going on when we don't initiate and durably maintain practices of holy attentiveness centered, as Clare recommends, on Christ's suffering and love.

Without holy attentiveness, we will make decisions that instinctively avoid complicated feelings instead of managing those legitimate but difficult emotions. In Clare's taxonomy, it all begins with the gaze upon Christ's humility and suffering. Holy attentiveness helps us to see the poor and to ascertain the often invisible structural framework of justice that keeps poverty in its place. This is a point of clear differentiation between the "way of the world" and "the way of the kingdom." To protect justice, we must keep our eyes, minds, and hearts focused on the victims, the voiceless, and the vulnerable. It is in the nature of social sin to keep complicit customs, conventions and codes nearly or largely invisible. But there is a moment where holy attentiveness can expose and make visible the mystery of complicity. One thinks of Pontius Pilate at his moment of decision-making. He *turns away* from Christ and washes his hands of the entire matter. He ends the conversation; the dialogue is done; Pilate turns away, and Christ is condemned.

One of the great ministries of social justice in our time would be teaching citizens this method of contemplative and holy attentiveness. One of the greatest dangers the poor face is invisibility, significantly when that invisibility is politically manufactured or exacerbated. The world teaches us to look away from the suffering of others, to "mind our own business," to take care of our own, and then it demeans, degrades, and devalues those who are suffering. The greater the cost on the poor, the louder the disparagement. In that way, the poor suffer a double burden. First, there is the evil that afflicts, the pain that paralyzes, and then there are the slanders that blame and the aspersions that alienate.

Here is how Clare's contemplative gaze helps clear away the fog of false testimony and pierce the bubble of malignant propaganda. One sees this also in Mary's *Magnificat.* She exclaims:

> He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly.
> The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty.
> (Luke 1: 46-55.)

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[7] Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal* (W.W. Norton, 2010) and *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (Metropolitan Books, 2017).
[8] Richard R. John and Kim Phillips-Fein, *Capital Gains: Business and Politics in Twentieth-Century America* (University of Pennsylvania, 2017).

Mary sees through the propaganda of the Empire that oppresses her people. She knows what Yahweh has done and continues to do in history. She realizes it is not Caesar who brings "good news." It is God's "mercy from age to age" that now governs the world and brings shalom to the people. It is the contemplative gaze that can recognize the paradoxical intentionality of God that overrules and disrupts the political inclinations of the mighty in the world. They say that nothing good can come out of Nazareth (John 1:46). But goodness itself has arrived from there. He is Jesus the Nazarene.

If we want to repair the world, we cannot begin with political platforms. Yes, we will eventually assess them with the wisdom of serpents and the gentleness of doves (Matthew 10:16), the paradoxical intentionality format that contains God's justice and mercy. The serpent represents shrewdness, discernment, and strategic thinking. In contrast, the dove symbolizes purity, gentleness, and sincerity. Practically, it means being smart and aware of dangers without becoming deceitful or corrupt. It teaches prudence in dealing with challenges while maintaining a kind and upright character.

Thus far, we have seen that repairing the world in Franciscan terms requires a few things:

1. Disposession;
2. A flight into everywhere;
3. Standing in the Public square with humility and
4. With a holy attentiveness.

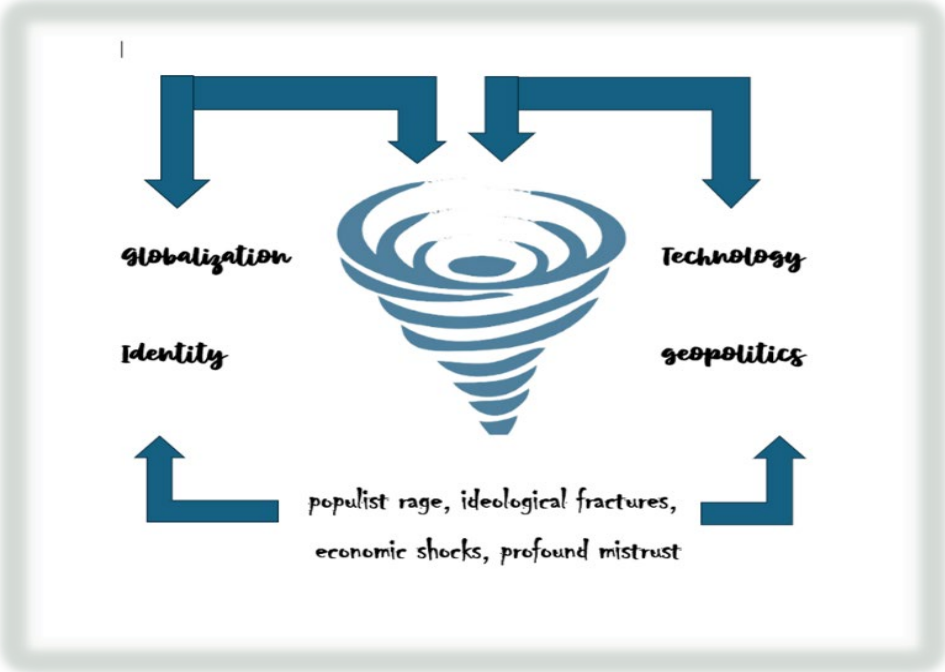
The Trends and Forces We Must Face as Religious in the Public Square

In this last section of my talk today, I want to speak about what we need to stand prophetically in the public square today. I want to discuss what we will likely see and experience when we look out from today's public square. I surmise that you are already familiar with these trends. You are probably experiencing them directly or indirectly, even if you have not named them before today. They are universal trends for everyone in the public square. If we are to repair the world with integrity and "wisdom with love," as St. Bonaventure reminds us, we must understand them well.

In his latest book, the journalist Fareed Zakaria identifies the four "revolutions" today that are producing profound disruptions and pervasive anxiety in every field of work and every aspect of culture: globalization, technology, identity, and geopolitics.[9] As we know, globalization is dramatically changing our world. One way of thinking is that globalization is the "compression of time and space" that allows us to transport products worldwide in hours or days. It allows us to travel to continents that once were largely unavailable to anyone except the most adventurous traders or missionaries. We can now instantly transport ideas, thoughts, voices, and images across the globe. Competitors for products used to be limited only to regional sales. Now, one can sit in any far-off part of the world and bargain with the best of them. I am the publisher of books and an academic journal for the Franciscan Institute in New York. My formatter for books and journals is an industrious and accomplished publications specialist in India. When I could not find a reliable and available formatter locally, I easily and speedily turned to India.

[9] Fareed Zakaria, *Age of Revolutions: Progress and Backlash from 1600 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2024).

While there are particular medical centers known for their exquisite research and medical specializations in places like New York, Boston, London, and Singapore, science is expanding globally. China is quickly becoming a leading player in technological advances in computers, microchips, medicine, and space technology. The advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) are mind-boggling. One day, I took a break from writing these talks and decided to find out how fast AI could translate one of the talks into French. It took about 15 or 20 seconds. Then, I politely asked AI if "she" could translate the same text into Italian. "She" did, and "she" did it quite well. (Honestly, I have no idea why I think of AI in feminine terms.)



The speed with which AI can locate and solve high-order problems is astounding. As a college professor, I can tell you that higher education is rapidly changing because of it. It is not simply a matter of catching students using AI to plagiarize; it's learning how to take advantage of matching AI's velocity with critical thinking and human judgment.

Two other forces are disrupting traditional modes of thinking and acting in the world: identity and geopolitics. Changes in medicine, biology, psychiatry, and neurosciences have produced new and complex understandings of human identity. We used to be able to rely on common sense to understand human sexuality and gender. Things have become more complicated, not because of resistance to religion or traditional morality but because science, with the aid of technology and the dialogue fostered by the dispersion of knowledge across the globe, has helped us to see dimensions of the human brain that we have never known before.

Finally, geopolitics has created new power centers worldwide. The two-empire model of the post-World War II era (with the Soviet Union and the United States controlling the world's economic norms) has collapsed. The recent alliance-building between Putin and Trump is again shifting the world order, with allies trying to discern the new economic and security patterns in this yet-to-be-secured network.

Zakaria's point is that all of this change is causing profound anxiety across the globe. It is not only the changes that are of concern but the volume and velocity of those changes in all areas of life simultaneously that worry the world. We don't know how to assimilate all of it.

Thomas Friedman says we are in an "age of accelerations."[10] According to Fareed Zacharia, reactions to these revolutions are populist rage, ideological fractures, economic shocks, and profound mistrust of almost every institution, including medicine, higher education, government, and religion.[11]

Zakaria writes:

> Since the sixteenth century, technological and economic change have produced enormous advances but also massive disruption. The disruption and the unequal distribution of its benefits stoke huge anxiety. Change and anxiety, in turn, leads to an identity revolution, with people searching for new meaning and community... Throughout this story, we will see two competing plotlines: liberalism, meaning progress, growth, disruption, *revolution in the sense of radical advance*, and illiberalism, standing for regression, restriction, nostalgia, *revolution in the sense of returning to the past*. That dual meaning of revolution endures to this day.[12]

We are having tremendous difficulty knowing how to navigate the changes and the emotions caused by the experience of them. We don't know how to turn in the public square: do we advance or retreat? Do we retreat on some and advance on others? How do we decide, especially when the issues seem so interconnected? How do we help one another deal with the consequences of these forces? How do we legislate and assess the morality of actions, especially when we cannot agree anymore on the difference between objective "truths" and "alternative facts?" Social justice is not as easy as it used to be.

We must resolve the dilemma before us in whatever role or position we stand in hospitals, education, social services, or religion, whether as students, professors, trustees, administrators, religious superiors, or staff.

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[10] Thomas L. Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016).

[11] David B. Couturier, "Trust and the Fraternal Economy: Efforts at Economic Reform in the Franciscan Tradition," in Aaron Gies and Benjamin Winters, eds., *Trust and the Franciscan Tradition* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2024)., forthcoming.

[12] Zakaria, 17.

There is no sitting on the sidelines regarding the current disruptions and the anxieties they produce worldwide. We need to take a stand. Is the time in which we live and work best understood as a time of *radical advance* or *radical return/retreat*? Do we promote post-Enlightenment progress and laissez-faire free markets and encourage uncritical pride in unfettered autonomy, individualism, freedom, and choice? Or do we "resist every resistance" of the Enlightenment and call for a return to the common good, a sense of order and stability, tradition, and authority? How do we educate and proceed in this "age of accelerations" (Friedman), where the volume and velocity of change challenge, question, or disrupt every policy, practice, procedure, or tradition?

How do we, as religious leaders, help our communities assimilate to the volume and velocity of change? Franciscan theology, emphasizing humility, fraternity, and ongoing conversion, offers a profoundly human and spiritual response to Zakaria's rapid changes and Friedman's "age of acceleration" forces. By integrating Franciscan values, we can foster resilience, compassion, justice, and communal well-being. We highlight six strategies that we can implement or reinforce in our communities.

A Franciscan Response to the Age of Accelerations

Friedman's Strategies	Franciscan Adaptation
Lifelong Learning and Adaptability	A commitment to continuous intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth, fostering adaptability through deep engagement with the Gospel. Franciscan theology emphasizes *ongoing conversion*, a continuous openness to transformation in light of the Gospel. Just as lifelong learning helps individuals stay relevant, Franciscan spirituality calls for an ever-deepening relationship with Christ and the world, fostering intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth.
Dynamic Institutions	Franciscan organizations prioritize mission-driven innovation, servant leadership, and flexibility to meet emerging societal needs. The emphasis turns to developing our Institutions as Communities of Service. – Instead of rigid structures, Franciscan institutions emphasize *servant leadership* and *mission-driven innovation*. Franciscan universities, hospitals, and ministries must remain flexible, prioritizing the needs of the marginalized and adapting their services in response to contemporary social and technological changes.

Friedman's Strategies	Franciscan Adaptation
Strong Communities	The Franciscan fraternity model fosters collaboration and shared responsibility in all our institutions, ensuring that communities collectively emphasize the common good. In contrast to an individualistic approach, Franciscans prioritize *fraternity*—living as a global family, where global change is navigated collectively rather than in isolation.
Embracing Ethical and Human Values	A Franciscan response evaluates the ethical implications of change, prioritizing human dignity, social justice, and care for creation through a model of integral ecology and fraternal relations. St. Francis modeled an integrated way of life, emphasizing relationships—with God, with others, and with creation. The Franciscan response to rapid change is not just adaptation but *discernment*: How do new technologies, economic systems, and policies uphold human dignity and care for creation?
Self-Motivation and Agency	Change is embraced as an opportunity for creative engagement with the world, guided by Gospel values and a commitment to social transformation. Rather than passively reacting to change, Franciscans embrace mission as a proactive response to the world's needs. This involves seeing new challenges as opportunities to witness to Gospel values in creative ways
Policy and Social Safety Nets	Beyond mitigating disruption, Franciscan thought calls for systemic reforms that uphold the dignity of the marginalized and promotethe common good. Franciscan communities advocate for peace and justice. Franciscan theology calls for *structural conversion*—transforming systems that create injustice. While Friedman suggests safety nets to mitigate disruption, Franciscans go further, advocating for systemic changes that prioritize the poor and marginalized.

Rather than simply helping individuals survive rapid change, Franciscan theology invites people to *transform the very nature of change itself*—guiding it toward greater justice, fraternity, and care for creation. By grounding adaptation in ***ongoing conversion, community, ethical discernment, and mission***, Franciscan wisdom offers a hopeful, countercultural response to Friedman's concerns and Zakaria's mega forces—one that is deeply needed in our accelerating world.

Conclusion: A Franciscan Response to the Age of Accelerations

In this *age of accelerations*, where technological advancements, globalization, identity shifts, and geopolitical upheavals create widespread anxiety, the Franciscan tradition offers a transformative response. While Thomas Friedman and other contemporary analysts like Fareed Zakaria identify the overwhelming velocity of change as a source of disruption, Franciscan theology reframes it as an opportunity for renewal, deepening human relationships, and fostering a just and compassionate world.

Rather than passively adapting to change, Franciscans embrace a model of *ongoing conversion*, continually responding to society's evolving needs with humility, creativity, and fraternity. The Franciscan tradition calls for dynamic institutions that serve as flexible communities of service rather than rigid bureaucracies. In contrast to hyper-individualism, the Franciscan fraternity promotes strong communities where change is navigated in solidarity rather than isolation. This perspective shifts the response to change from mere survival to meaningful transformation.

Ethically, Franciscans engage with change through the lens of integral ecology and right relationships, ensuring that technological and economic developments uphold human dignity and the well-being of creation. Furthermore, rather than retreating into institutional security, Franciscans see mission as a proactive engagement with the world, responding to social, economic, and political realities with a spirit of peace and justice.

Ultimately, the Franciscan vision goes beyond merely helping people manage change—it seeks to transform the very nature of change itself. By anchoring responses in humility, fraternity, contemplation, and mission, Franciscan wisdom provides a countercultural yet profoundly hopeful path in a world marked by uncertainty and upheaval. It reminds us that, like Francis standing naked in the public square, true freedom lies not in control but in radical trust, solidarity, and an unwavering commitment to the repair of the world.

Discussion Questions

1. Standing in the Public Square: The Franciscan Witness

Couturier highlights how Francis' radical dispossession and his entry into the public square signified a new way of being in the world—one that trusts fully in God and embraces the relational space of "everywhere."

- In today's world, how can we and our communities stand in the public square as authentic witnesses of Christ's love and justice?
- What does it mean for our congregations to embrace dispossession and radical trust in God, not only spiritually but also in practical decision-making?

2. Holy Attentiveness and the Contemplative Gaze

Drawing from Clare of Assisi, Couturier stresses the importance of a contemplative gaze—gazing upon Christ, considering His life, contemplating His love, and imitating His humility.

- How can we cultivate a deeper contemplative gaze in our leadership and decision-making?

- How might a commitment to "holy attentiveness" help us navigate the complexities of modern society and engage with global injustices more effectively?

3. A Franciscan Response to the "Age of Accelerations"

Couturier discusses how globalization, technology, identity shifts, and geopolitics are reshaping the world at an overwhelming pace. He contrasts the anxieties of these changes with the Franciscan vision of dynamic, mission-driven institutions rooted in fraternity and ongoing conversion.

- How can religious communities respond to these rapid changes with resilience, fraternity, and hope?
- What concrete steps can we take to ensure that our ministries remain adaptable yet deeply grounded in Franciscan values, particularly in a world increasingly shaped by individualism and political polarization?

REPAIRING THE HOUSE:
MISSION-BASED CARING IN A TIME OF ISOLATIONS

David B. Couturier
OFM. Cap., PhD., DMin.
Associate Professor of Theology and Franciscan Studies
and Director of the Franciscan Institute
at St. Bonaventure University (USA)

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Introduction: The Problem of Caring in the World Today

In the last presentation, I discussed a paradox concerning caring for the poor and vulnerable. The first side of the paradox was the intense and dramatic image of Francis leaving the public square and going to serve and reside with lepers in a colony below the town of Assisi. Francis was not dropping coins into the hands of a leper as he used to do or even kissing the disfigured hands of lepers, as he most recently started to do. He is now embracing their life and making his residence permanent among them. The shocking news for his family and friends is that he is moving in with the lepers.

Dramatic doesn't quite capture the extraordinary dislocation this presents from his previous lifestyle as the son of a wealthy merchant. Growing up in a Christian household, Francis and his family would have been quite aware (and frightened by) lepers. Their hideous disfigurement and putrid smell would have been well-known, as was the feeling of disgust that the adolescent Francis had to show whenever he came within two miles of the leper colony.

While Francis' family would have shunned lepers, they probably would have also done their Christian "duty" regarding lepers by sending food and goods to them through a third party. There would have been no direct contact or one-on-one conversations. Volker Leppin, in his newly translated biography of Francis, suggests that the Bernardone family's care for lepers was perfunctory.[13]

Francis' new care for lepers could not have been a more provocative repudiation of his father's commercial values. This side of the paradox gives us the image of a young man willing to care for lepers in the most personal and direct way possible.

There's another side to the paradox we've been discussing. It's about how our society, despite our Franciscan values, is increasingly devaluing care. On the one hand, care is at the core of our Franciscan calling. On the other, care is under severe threat in the minds, hearts, and pockets of the world today.

[13] Volker Leppin, *Francis of Assisi: The Life of a Restless Saint* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2025), 30-35.

Care is at the heart of what it means to be human, religious, and Franciscan. It expresses our interconnectedness, our responsibility to one another, and our shared vulnerability. Yet, care has become increasingly difficult to sustain in the modern world. Cultural, economic, and technological forces have eroded the deep, reciprocal relationships that foster genuine care. Instead, care is often reduced to a commodity, a duty, or an afterthought in societies prioritizing efficiency, individual success, and economic growth. The problem of caring in the contemporary world is experienced in the commodification of care, the rise of hyper-individualism, the effects of technological mediation, the role of economic and political barriers, and the moral and spiritual challenges that arise in a culture that often neglects its most vulnerable members , invoking a sense of moral duty and spiritual responsibility.

The Commodification of Care

In modern economies, care has been increasingly reduced to a transactional exchange.[14] Healthcare, childcare, elder care, and even education—areas that should be grounded in relationships of trust and mutual concern—are often treated as services to be bought and sold. This commodification creates several problems. First, it leads to the undervaluation of care work, both financially and socially. Nurses, teachers, caregivers, and social workers—those whose professions are most dedicated to care—are often underpaid,

[14] Giroux, Henry A. *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*. Haymarket Books, 2014; Ingersoll, Richard M., Lisa Merrill, and Daniel Stuckey. "Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force." *Consortium for Policy Research in Education*, 2018; Kalleberg, Arne L. *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*. Polity Press, 2018; Levinson, Meira. *No Citizen Left Behind*. Harvard University Press, 2012; Relman, Arnold S. *A Second Opinion: Rescuing America's Health Care*. PublicAffairs, 2007; Rosenthal, Elisabeth. *An American Sickness: How Healthcare Became Big Business and How You Can Take It Back*. Penguin Books, 2017. Shanafelt, Tait D., and John H. Noseworthy. "Executive Leadership and Physician Well-being." *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* 92, no. 1 (2017): 129–146.

overworked, and given little institutional support. Their work is seen as a necessity but not a priority, reflecting a broader societal failure to recognize the inherent dignity of care.[15]

Second, the commodification of care creates inequalities. Those who can afford high-quality care services receive them, while those who cannot are left with inadequate or inaccessible options. Older people, people with disabilities, and children from low-income families often suffer the most in this system. Care becomes not a universal right but a privilege, deepening social divisions and marginalizing those most in need.

Hyper-Individualism and the Decline of Communal Bonds

Another significant challenge for care in the modern world is the rise of hyper-individualism. Many societies today emphasize personal achievement, self-sufficiency, and independence over communal responsibility. The idea of the 'self-made' individual, who rises to success without the need for others, dominates cultural narratives. This worldview erodes the structures that sustain care, such as family networks, religious communities, and local support systems.[16]

Despite its promise of connectivity, social media often reinforces individualism rather than genuine community. Online interactions, though convenient, lack the depth, vulnerability, and mutual presence required for genuine care. As a result, loneliness and social isolation are rising, particularly among the elderly and young

[15] Baines, D. and Armstrong, P., 2019. Non-job work/unpaid caring: Gendered industrial relations in long-term care. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *26*(7), pp.934-947; leksandar Džakula et al., "Fragmentation, Dehumanization, Commodification: Crisis of Medicine," *Croatian Medical Journal*, June 2023, Volume 64, Issue 3, on pages 231-239; Bernd, J., Abu-Salma, R. and Frik, A., 2020. {Bystanders'} Privacy: The Perspectives of Nannies on Smart Home Surveillance. In *10th USENIX Workshop on Free and Open Communications on the Internet (FOCI 20)*.
Brush, B.L. and Vasupuram, R., 2006. Nurses, nannies and caring work: importation, visibility and marketability. *Nursing Inquiry*, *13*(3), pp.181-185; Cherrier, H. and Murray, J.B., 2004. The sociology of consumption: the hidden facet of marketing. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *20*(5-6), pp.509-525.

[16] Gina Gustavsson, "The Problem of Individualism: Examining the Relations Between Self-Reliance, Autonomy and Civic Virtues," *Dissertation Plan*, Uppsala University, 2007; "Hyperindividualism, Extreme Consumerism, and Social Isolationism," *Fooyin Journal of Health Sciences* 2 (2010): 41-47; Ananda Majumdar, "Hyper Individualism is the Process of Hyper Culture: A Sign of Uncertainty," *Istanbul International Modern Scientific Research Congress*, Proceedings, 191-195; Ashley Humphrey and Ana-Maria Bliuc, "Western Individualism and the Psychological Wellbeing of Young People: A Systematic Review of Their Associations," *Youth* 2, no. 1 (2022): 1-11.

adults.[17] Without strong communal bonds, care becomes more challenging to sustain, leading to an epidemic of neglect and emotional disconnection.

Technological Mediation of Human Relationships

Technology has reshaped how we care for one another, sometimes for the better, but often at a cost. While advancements in telemedicine, digital communication, and artificial intelligence have improved access to care, they have also introduced new challenges. Automated systems, data-driven decision-making, and digital platforms frequently replace human interaction with efficiency-oriented algorithms.

One consequence of this shift is the depersonalization of care. Physicians can often spend more time interacting with electronic medical records than their patients in healthcare settings. The emphasis on measurable outcomes and cost-effectiveness can overshadow care's personal and relational aspects. Similarly, in education, online learning tools, though helpful, cannot replace the mentorship, presence, and guidance that teachers provide in person.[18]

Furthermore, the increasing reliance on digital solutions risks widening disparities in care. Those who lack access to technology—whether due to poverty, age, or disability—are often left behind. The challenge is integrating technology to enhance rather than replace genuine human connection.

Political and Economic Barriers to a Culture of Care

Modern economies prioritize market growth and efficiency over human well-being. This economic model has significant consequences for the structures of care. Many policies treat care as a financial burden rather than a social good. Paid parental leave, elder care support, and mental health services are often inadequate, reflecting an approach that values productivity more than human dignity.

Additionally, care work is disproportionately performed by women and marginalized communities, socially stigmatized with inadequate compensation or recognition. This dynamic reflects a broader failure to distribute care responsibilities equitably. Instead of being a shared societal commitment, care is frequently relegated to those with the least power to demand fair conditions or remuneration.[19]

A more just society would recognize care as an essential part of human flourishing, not as an economic cost to be minimized. This requires rethinking labor policies, healthcare systems, and social support structures to ensure that care is valued, accessible, and fairly distributed. Although Franciscans could become a more robust social advocacy network, we remain highly provincial and congregational in our actions.

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[17] Vivek Murthy, Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community (2023).

[18] Michael Arnold, Ian Kerridge, and Wendy Lipworth, "Accelerating the De-Personalization of Medicine," *The American Journal of Bioethics* 20, no. 7 (2020): 4-11; Megan A. Moreno et al., "Zoomed Out: Digital Media Use and Depersonalization Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Scientific Reports* 12, no. 1 (2022): 43-73; Nathaniel M. Robbins and J. Andrew Cook, "The Dangers of Depersonalization in Catholic Health Care," *Theological Studies* 83, no. 2 (2022): 377-394.

[19] Osypuk TL, Joshi P, Geronimo K, Acevedo-Garcia D. Do Social and Economic Policies Influence Health? A Review. Curr Epidemiol Rep. 2014 Sep 1;1(3):149-164; Corscadden, L., Levesque, J.F., Lewis, V. *et al.* Factors associated with multiple barriers to access to primary care: an international analysis. *Int J Equity Health* 17, 28 (2018).

Focusing on "the international compassion of Christ" could galvanize the efforts of even small congregations to make a difference in the care of the poor and vulnerable.

Moral and Spiritual Dimensions of the Care Crisis

Beyond its economic and social dimensions, the crisis of care is also a moral and spiritual issue. Pope Francis has frequently warned against the "throwaway culture," in which the most vulnerable—especially the elderly, the sick, and the poor—are treated as burdens rather than as persons of dignity.[20] This cultural attitude fosters indifference, where care is no longer seen as a moral obligation but as an optional act of charity.

From a Franciscan perspective, mission-based caring expresses love, humility, and solidarity. St. Francis of Assisi and St. Clare of Assisi embodied a radical commitment to care, embracing the poor, the sick, and the outcast not out of obligation but out of a recognition of shared humanity as sisters and brothers under a good and gracious God. This tradition challenges modern societies to move beyond transactional models of care and to cultivate a transformative ethic of deep, personal commitment to others.[21]

Theologically, the Christian understanding of care is rooted in the Incarnation—God's act of coming to dwell among humanity in Jesus Christ. Jesus' ministry was marked by care that went beyond social norms, embracing lepers, sinners, and the marginalized. In a world that often distances itself from the suffering of others, this example calls for a reexamination of how care is practiced today.

A Way Forward: Restoring an Ethos of Care

Addressing the crisis of care requires both structural and cultural changes. On a practical level, societies must invest in policies that support caregivers, promote equitable access to care, and resist the commodification of essential human services. Educational institutions, faith communities, religious orders, and civic organizations must actively cultivate cultures of care where mutual responsibility and compassion are at the center of their mission.

On a deeper level, restoring an ethos of care requires a shift in values. This means resisting the forces of hyper-individualism, reclaiming the importance of community, and recognizing that care is not a burden but a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human. It involves fostering habits of presence, attentiveness, and solidarity—habits that sustain relationships of genuine care in an often-indifferent world.

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[20] Lucia Ann Silecchia, Laudato Si' and the Tragedy of the "Throwaway Culture," CUA COLUMBUS SCH. OF LAW LEGAL STUD. RESEARCH PAPER No. 2017-2 (2017).

[21] Keaton A. Fletcher, PhD1, Alan Friedman, MA2, and Giovanni Piedimonte, MD, FAAP, FCCP Transformational and Transactional Leadership in Healthcare Seen Through the Lens of Pediatrics *The Journal of Pediatrics* 204 (2019): 7-9; Al-Rjoub S, Alsharawneh A, Alhawajreh MJ, Othman EH. Exploring the Impact of Transformational and Transactional Style of Leadership on Nursing Care Performance and Patient Outcomes. J Healthc Leadersh. 2024 Dec 27;16:557-568;.

In the words of Pope Francis, "The great destitution in the world today is the lack of love."[22] The crisis of care in the modern world is, at its core, a crisis of love—a failure to see and respond to the dignity of others. Overcoming this crisis requires a renewed commitment to care, not driven by profit or obligation but by a recognition of our shared humanity.

Building Contemplative Communities of Care

The trajectory of our discussions this week brings us to our central thesis: that in a complex world of accelerations at every level and in all parts of our lives, whether we live in the North or South, whether in the East or the West, Franciscan communities are needed as contemplative communities of care in an ever-more-isolated, individualistic, disenchanted, and transactional world.

What does it mean "to care?" What does it mean for religious communities to care for one another and the world practically and concretely? Has your community audited its level of care? Does it know how and whether its methods of care are practical and efficient? Does care apply only to the infirmed? Does it apply realistically and supportively to those who continue to work? Do superiors and ministers in our friaries and convents receive adequate care? Are we too busy or distracted to care appropriately? These are difficult questions. But the crisis of alienation and the epidemic of loneliness in our societies warrant another look.

Another step is now required for the moral transformation of our religious institutions. We must decide to be a caring society and form caring institutions because truth-telling has helped us become aware of our vulnerability and dependency and led us to responsiveness and responsibility.[23] Our intent will no longer be primarily to become quasi- "profit centers" but, rather, centers of caring and compassion. This may sound soft, but that is only because we have often downplayed and dismissed care's importance and critical centrality in our personal and social lives. We have privatized caring from our public consciousness, so there is only room for profit-making in the public square.

Research has been building on the need to take caring in all dimensions of our lives more seriously and centrally. As Joan Tronto, one of caring's most intense and accomplished researchers, notes:

> Indeed, concerns about care permeate our daily lives, the institutions in the modern marketplace, and the corridors of government. Because we tend to follow the traditional division of the world into public and private spheres and think of caring as an aspect of private life, care is usually associated with household activities. As a result, caring is significantly undervalued in our culture- in the assumption that caring is somehow "women's work," in perceptions of caring occupations, in the wages and salaries paid to workers engaged in provision of care, in the assumption that care is menial. One of the central tasks for people interested in care is to change the overall public value

[22] Pope Francis, Lent 2014: He became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich (cf. 2 Cor 8:9)

[23] The "ethics of caring" that we will introduce is a forty-year old discipline that has been become a broad, global, "polyphonic" industry of scholarly work and practical applications, using disciplines such as political theory, developmental psychology, women's studies, law, moral theology, and philosophy in three waves, with applications for fields as diverse as education, nursing, medical ethics, and post-colonialism, and social policy in parts of the world as diverse as South Korea, Brazil, South Africa, Japan, France, Canada, Italy, the United States and Germany. Already back in 2007, Michael Slote called the expansion of literature and the directions the ethics of care was taking was like a "wildfire." For a comprehensive review of agreements and disagreements in this wide field, see: F. Vosman, A. Baart & J. Hoffman (eds), *The Ethics of Care: the State of the Art* (Leuven: Peeters, 2020), especially the article by Frans Vosman, "The Disenchantment of Care Ethics. A Critical Cartography," 17-66.

> associated with care. When our public values and priorities reflect care's role in our lives, our world will be organized quite differently.[24]

Tronto has defined an ethic of caring in this way:

> An ethic of care is an approach to personal, social, moral, and political life that starts from the reality that all human beings need, receive, and give care to others. Care relationships among humans are part of what marks us as human beings. We are always interdependent beings.[25]

Our economy is not yet built on the principles and logic of caring. Joan Tronto is a political scientist who has written extensively on caring over the past twenty-five years, arguing for such a switch.[26]

She defines caring as:

> A species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.[27]

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[24] Joan C. Tronto, "An Ethics of Care," *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging*, (Fall 1998), 22: 3, *Ethics and Aging: Bringing the Issues Home* (Fall 1998), 16.

[25] Interview with Joan C. Tronto (August 4, 2009) accessed at: https://ethicsofcare.org/joan-tronto/.

[26] We choose the work of Tronto as our point of discussion, because she is the leading theorist of the second of three waves in the development of the ethics of care. She takes up the initial insights of Carol Gilligan (*In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development,* 1982*)* and builds the framework from which all other second and third wave theorists dialogue. According to Koggle and Orme, it is because of Tronto's turn toward the political that the application of care ethics "now extends from the moral to the political realm, from personal to public relationships, from the local to the global, from feminine to feminist virtues and values, and from issues of gender to issues of power and oppression more generally." Christine Koggle, Christine, and Joan Orme (eds.). 2010b. "Care Ethics: New Theories and Applications." Special Issue, *Ethics and Social Welfare* 42 (2010), 109–114. For an overview of Tronto's status in the field, see: Olena Havkinsky, "Re-Thinking Care Ethics: On the Promise and the Potential of an Intersectional Analysis," *American Political Science Review* 108:2 (May, 2014), 252-264 and Gert Olthuis, et al. *Moral Boundaries Redrawn: The Significance of Joan Tronto's Argument for Political Theory, Professional Ethics, and Care as Practice. Ethics of Care, Volume 3* (Leuven: Peeters, 2014).

[27] Joan C. Tronto, "An Ethics of Care," 16.

Tronto has provided a five-phase process of caring:

1. **Caring about**. The first stage of caring concerns the dynamics of becoming aware of and paying attention to the needs for caring. Genuine care requires attentiveness to the signals of the need for care, listening, and being present as fully as possible. Tronto indicates that this "intentional presence" means:

   > "Being able to perceive needs in self and others and to perceive them with as little distortion as possible, which could be said to be a moral or ethical quality." [28]

2. **Caring for**. "Caring for" is the phase in caring when an individual or a group assumes responsibility to meet needs that have been identified. It is not enough to see the need for care; people have to take responsibility to meet the need. This includes the dynamics of essential planning: organizing, budgeting, managing, and monitoring resources and personnel. The moral dimension of *caring for* is assuming and taking responsibilities, duties, and obligations seriously. It is also the zone where the power dynamics of caring become involved: for example, how do individuals get the "attention" of caregivers, the providers of care (the medical establishment, the insurance companies, and its decision-makers)? How do we get a bureaucracy to take our calls and listen attentively and accurately to what we are saying?

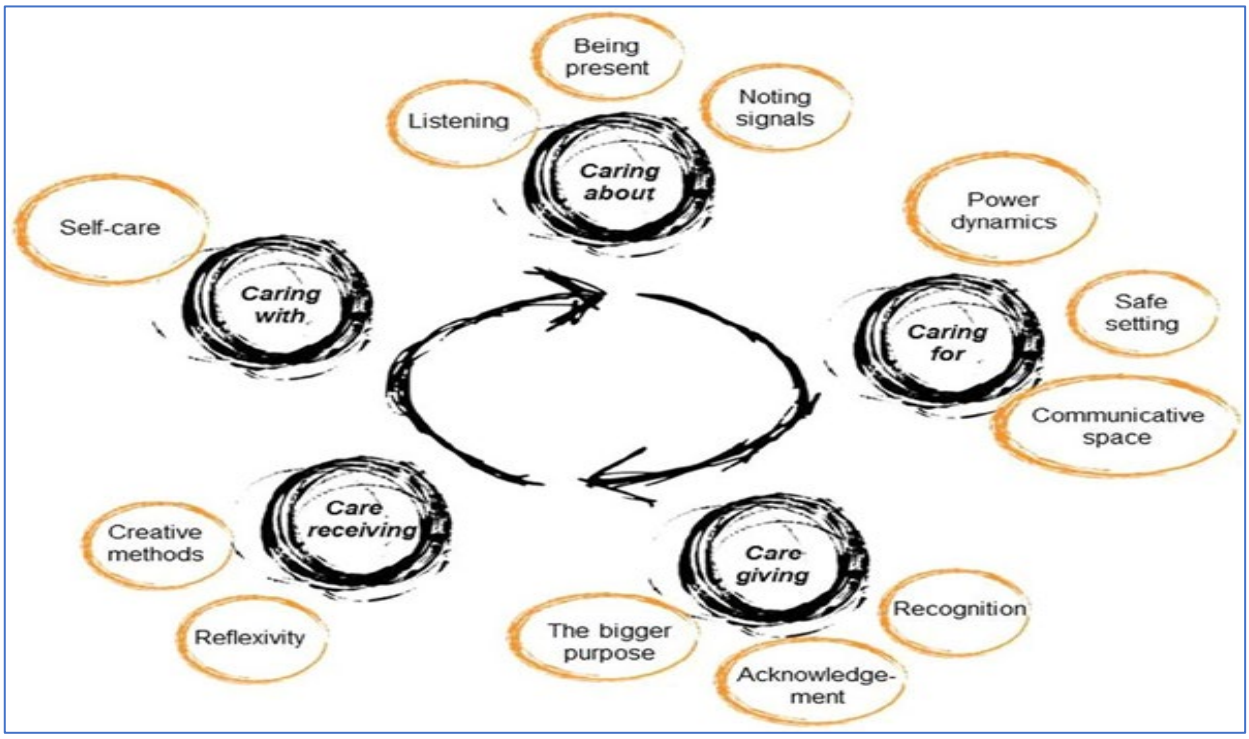

Figure 1
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323803748_Ethics_of_care_in_participatory_health_research_mutual_responsibility_in_collaboration_with_co-researchers

3. **Caregiving**. This third phase involves the actual material meeting of the caring need. It involves the exact and accurate knowledge of how to care appropriately for this person or group. It involves tasks, roles, and authorization. This is the dimension of competence, which, as we have seen, is a critical ingredient of building trust. In Tronto's theorizing, incompetent care is not only a technical problem,

[28] Joan Tronto, Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging, Fall 1998, Vol. 22, No. 3, Ethics and Aging: Bringing the Issues Home (Fall 1998), pp. 15-20.

a matter of technical efficiencies, it is also a profoundly moral one, as institutions and individuals broker the differences (sometimes unconscious) between tasks assigned and tasks accomplished, roles offered, and roles assumed, authorization provided and authorization withheld.[29]

4. **Care receiving.** Tronto explores the fourth phase in her moral theory of caring. This phase considers the response of the thing, person, or group that received the caregiving. At this step, specific questions arise, such as whether needs have been met. Has caregiving been successful, or has it failed? How has the person or group received the care given? This phase asks whether the needs have been met, whether the caregiving was successful, and what the response to the care that has been given is. Tronto treats the complexity of "responsiveness" and how critical this phase is for proper treatment since the reception of care is always a distinct, unique, and personal event, one that can open up new opportunities and needs for caring:

> Responsiveness is complex because it shares the moral burden among the person, thing, or group that has received the care, but it also involves the moral attention of the ones who are doing the caring work and those who are responsible for care. In a way, since any single act of care may alter the situation and produce new needs for care, the caring process in this way comes full circle, with responsiveness requiring more attentiveness.[30]

5. **Caring with:** Tronto added a fifth stage to the process of caring, which is the act of caring with. What Tronto means by this term is the need for caregivers to be profoundly self-reflexive and context-responsive. Here, caregivers and care-receivers understand the broader contexts, challenges, debates, and fault lines in the grand scheme of things. Put more succinctly, here, we recognize that our acts of caring are developed or diminished within larger webs of caring (or non-caring) systems in our democracies.[31] Our nations are supposed to be the "containers of care." Here, "markets" meet "state" in the awareness, attention, and responsiveness to need, locally, nationally, and now, as our recent pandemic reminds us, globally. It is here precisely that the virtue of caring intersects with solidarity and trust, as Tronto suggests:

> When care is responded to, through care-receiving, and new needs are identified, we return to the first phase and begin again. When over time, people come to expect that there will be such ongoing engagement in care processes with others, then we have arrived at "caring with." The virtues of such caring with are trust and solidarity. Trust builds as people realize that they can rely upon others to participate in their care and care activities. Solidarity forms when citizens come to understand that they are better off engaged in such processes of care together rather than alone. How would caring democracies approach the problems of care deficits? Surely, it would not be acceptable to pass them along to the most vulnerable. Nor would allowing the importation of care labor to solve care deficits work. From this perspective the hypocrisy of allowing care workers to enter the state in order to provide care work takes on a different meaning.[32]

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[29] J. Krantz and M. Maltz, "A Framework for Consulting to Role," *Consulting Psychology Journal* 49:2 (1997), 137-151.
[30] Tronto, "Ethic of Caring," 17.
[31] Daniel J. Daly, *The Structures of Virtue and Vice* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021).
[32] Joan C. Tronto, "Democratic Caring and Global Responsibilities for Care "A Paper prepared for Presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Hollywood, CA, 28-30 March 2013, accessed at: http://www.wpsanet.org/papers/docs/Tronto%20WPSA%20paper%202013.pdf.

A Vision for Pastoral Care in the 21st Century

In today's world, pastoral formation is no longer just about preparing a workforce for ministry—it is about shaping compassionate, caring, visionary leaders who can bring the Gospel to life in a rapidly changing society. While past generations were trained to defend the faith and support immigrant communities facing hardship, our mission of pastoral care has expanded. Today, we are called to form leaders who can inspire, heal, and build vibrant communities of faith and service.

Modern pastoral formation goes beyond acquiring degrees or learning specific ministerial tasks; it is about developing the heart, mind, and spirit to serve with wisdom, humility, and courage. Rooted in biblical inspiration and the church's rich tradition of pastoral care, this formation nurtures emotional intelligence, resilience, and a deep commitment to human dignity. It challenges future leaders to be agents of healing and unity, responding to the needs of the church and society with creativity and faith.

The goal of mission-based caring today is to cultivate religious who:

- **Share a compelling vision** of faith, articulating the church's mission and their community's founding charism.
- **Lead with collaboration and purpose**, fostering partnerships that enhance mission effectiveness.
- **Empower others**, building a culture of mutual support and pastoral care, especially in challenging times.
- **Navigate conflict with grace and wisdom**, transforming division into opportunities for growth and reconciliation.
- **Create spaces of encounter**, gathering people in prayer, service, learning, and dialogue to deepen faith and solidarity.

This new era of mission-based caring calls for a spirit of innovation, courage, and deep-rooted faith. As we move forward, we embrace the challenge of forming leaders who will not only carry on the Franciscan mission but also transform it with renewed energy and love for the people they serve.

Due to the increasing commodification of care and the emergence of transactional care forms, congregational leaders must evaluate care levels within their communities. Below is a form that can help reveal an individual's "autobiography of care," which outlines their development in understanding and practicing pastoral care.

Questions to Assess Operative Theologies of Caring

Personal conversion

A. What jobs have you held and what levels of responsibility have you had in previous school or work situations?
B. How have you volunteered?
C. What is your personal philosophy about caring, charity and justice? How have you tried to live out that personal philosophy? What successes have you experienced, and what obstacles have you encountered in living out your personal mission of caring?
D. What Scriptural passages mean the most to you when thinking about service, ministry and leadership in the church?
E. How would you rate yourself as a leader in your parish community and among your circle of friends?
F. What personal skills and traits do you have that could be built upon to help you become a leader in the community? What challenges or traits might work against this development?
G. How do you manage your time and stress?

Interpersonal conversion

A. What were your family's rules about such things as volunteering and "giving back" to society?
B. What kind of volunteer work did your mother, father, grandparents and siblings undertake? Who do you consider your models for service in society and in the church?
C. How did you spend spring break in college? How did your friends volunteer and give back to society in high school, in college and after college?
D. What groups or teams did you belong to during your high school and college years (and beyond)? What was your role in these different groups?

Ecclesial conversion

A. How did the parish in which you grew up learn about and care for the needs of the community and the poor?
B. How did your parish develop leadership in the congregation? How does the parish state and act out its mission in the neighborhood?

Structural conversion

A. How did your family, friends and parish understand and discuss injustice in the world?
B. What have you learned about your obligations and capacity to make a difference in the world?
C. Have you participated in any organizations that seek to eradicate poverty, promote life or seek social change according to the social teachings of the church?
D. How do you understand the church's mission in the world today?

Figure 2 David B. Couturier, OFM Cap., "Helping Serious Discerners Prepare for Pastoral Formation," *Horizons* 33:4 (2008), 10-16.

Conclusion: Embracing a Future of Mission-Based Caring

Throughout this essay, we have explored the challenges and opportunities surrounding care in the modern world. The commodification of care, the rise of hyper-individualism, and the increasing reliance on technological mediation all present obstacles to fostering authentic relationships of care. Economic and political structures often prioritize efficiency and profit over human dignity, while moral and spiritual apathy threatens the very foundations of compassion and solidarity. Yet, despite these challenges, the Franciscan tradition—and the broader Christian call to care—offers a countercultural response that reaffirms the necessity of profound, intentional, and transformative care.

Mission-based caring is not a passive ideal but an active commitment. It requires attentiveness to the needs of others, a willingness to assume responsibility, and a dedication to forming communities where trust, solidarity, and compassion flourish. Inspired by St. Francis and St. Clare, we are reminded that proper care is not merely transactional but relational, not simply efficient but deeply human. In a world increasingly marked by isolation and detachment, we are called to be contemplative communities of care—places where people are indeed seen, valued, and supported.

Let this be an encouragement: though restoring an ethos of care is complex, it is also profoundly rewarding. Every act of care, no matter how small, contributes to building a more just, compassionate, and loving world. As Pope Francis reminds us, *"The great destitution in the world today is the lack of love."* Let us then be bearers of love, healers of division, and builders of communities where mission-based caring is not just a principle but a way of life.

Discussion Questions:

1. Rediscovering Mission-Based Caring in Religious Life

Couturier argues that care has been commodified, devalued, and overshadowed by hyper-individualism and economic priorities. At the same time, he calls for religious communities to reclaim their role as "contemplative communities of care."

- How can religious congregations re-center mission-based caring in their communities and ministries?
- What steps can we take to ensure that care—both within our communities and in our outreach—is not reduced to a transactional service but remains deeply relational and transformative?

2. Addressing the Crisis of Care in a Changing World

The modern world presents new challenges to authentic care, including economic disparities, the impact of technology on human relationships, and the growing culture of isolation.

- What are the biggest obstacles your congregation faces in sustaining a culture of care?
- How can we respond as religious leaders to the growing global "crisis of care" in ways that uphold human dignity, Franciscan values, and the common good?

3. Forming Future Leaders for a Culture of Care

Couturier emphasizes the importance of forming leaders who embody compassion, mission, and care, rather than simply training professionals for ministry.

- How can we shape formation programs that prepare religious leaders to be agents of healing, solidarity, and pastoral care?
- In what ways can we integrate "holy attentiveness" and "caring with" into the structures of our congregations so that they foster ongoing renewal rather than institutional maintenance?

English Groups

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