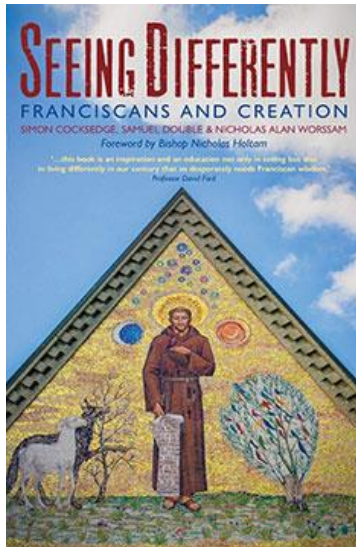


Can St. Francis Help You See Things Differently?

By Sister Louise Bernier

Would life on earth change if we could see differently? To see differently is to engage in transformative gazing. But how do I come to see differently?

A musician like a violinist or pianist might talk about a piece of music “getting into their fingers.” How do I get seeing things differently into my being? Three Anglican Franciscan Friars, Simon Cocksedge, Samuel Double, and Nicholas Alan Worsam, explore that question in *Seeing Differently: Franciscans and Creation*, a 204-page paperback.



The print is a little small and there are no pictures, but this book is chock full of examples of seeing everything—especially creation—differently. It would be healthy food for our C.A.R.E. Committee and for sisters and associates who are attending to their messaging.

The authors reflect on a wide range of Franciscan theology about creation and incarnation, from Saints Francis and Bonaventure to Duns Scotus and others. For example, they describe Francis’ growth in understanding of “rebuild my church” beyond a single building to mean the infrastructure of the institutional Church and finally to rebuilding Mother Earth.

Is there a difference between how I value components of creation – worms, rocks, cats – and how I value humans? Seeing creation differently and acting on what I see moves creation forward. Does this not call for a close engagement with ongoing creation? In this light, the incarnation of Jesus is not a rescue mission; rather, it is the continuation of creation which is, of course, on our ‘to do’ list.

Our vows also can be seen differently. Obedience can be understood not as a top-down mode of action; rather it is a reciprocal honoring of each other. Obedience and reconciliation, for example, also apply to our relationship with Mother Earth. Poverty has more to do with possessing and owning than it has to do with how we use and take care of things.

Further, because Francis saw the intersections of his culture differently, he was the founder of a new way of living the spiritual life. We are living at a similar crossroads today, and this is our task as well.

What is becoming clear to me is that seeing differently is refreshing. The book includes an awesome chapter full of background on Francis and the Cantic of the Creatures.

While reading it, I was very mindful of Sister Theophane Hytrek and her musical setting of the canticle. I wondered to myself if our Archives hold her reflections on this work.

There are lots of stories of Francis and animals, like the wolf of Gubbio. Some sources claim that many of these stories are apocryphal. But whether or not they happened is not important. The fact that folklore attributed to Francis a special relationship to creation bears witness to how ordinary people learned to see differently.

I get tired of hearing the “same old same old,” and I do begin to miss the message today! But to see the same thing differently? That becomes insightful and prophetic, and this brief book pours out example after example of this. That is how I am learning to increase my own ability to see differently.

Did I read every word in this book? Truthfully, no. There were parts about Angela of Foligno, for example, that I found to be too dark, so I skipped over them. I am not ready for them until I see aspects of myself differently. I can always return to Angela when I am ready. While the book is gently written, the authors mean business!

I take delight in seeing creation differently, because this reveals our Creator. As I see my Creator differently, I see other aspects of living differently and mindfully. This book is an awesome read, down to the very last ink spot!

Seeing Differently: Franciscans and Creation, by Simon Cocksedge, Samuel Double, and Nicholas Alan Worssam. Canterbury Press, Norwich. \$16.95. Available in print and as an e-book.