

DAVIS, LANTA. *BECOMING BY BEHOLDING: THE POWER OF THE IMAGINATION IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION*. GRAND RAPIDS: BAKER ACADEMIC, 2024. 197 PP. \$27.99.

Becoming by Beholding, by Lanta Davis, implores readers to correct malformed imaginations and be formed into the likeness of Christ by beholding him through ancient iconography, God's creation, intentionally curated ecclesiastic spaces, and Scripture meditation. Empowered with thorough research on the human tendency to imitate that which the eyes regularly behold, Davis has written to expose readers to a broader variety of ways in which to behold Jesus. The Bible characterizes Jesus's image as the ultimate goal of sanctification, or spiritual formation; as he is imagined anew, the mind is unlocked, the heart consumes him, and the person becomes like him.

Davis organizes this work into three parts: (1) *orthodoxy*, on forming right beliefs by beholding Jesus in iconography and creation; (2) *orthopraxy*, on forming right practices in our use of sacred architecture and interaction with Scripture; and (3) *orthopathy*, on forming moral character by avoiding the evil of sin and becoming good.

The icon *Jesus the Pantocrator*—one of the oldest surviving icons, currently adorning St. Catherine's Monastery in Egypt—is introduced in chapter 1, and pictured in chapter 3. Davis uses this icon to take the beholder on a journey of deeper acquaintance with the Incarnate Word. The Pantocrator depicts a Savior who sees and knows all, but whose mercy, empathy, and desire for relationship surpasses His eye of judgment. He is God and man. He holds the Word and is the Word. According to Davis, icons act as windows that are not worshiped, yet possess a strange kind of beauty that grips the human heart, and “do not wish to show us ourselves, but to point us beyond” (16).

In chapter 2, Davis challenges readers to read the creation account in full context and consider a gardener's approach to creation, instead of the mindset of power and control. Davis states that gardeners always have the long-term flourishing of the whole space in mind—their tending and keeping aims toward overall health. Davis tells heart-warming stories of zookeepers and saints of old who tamed wild animals. She then indulges in the pictography of bestiaries to capture the love and companionship humans and animals were made to share. Humans were made to function interdependently with creation—whether we are breathing, swimming, or

cooking, we need the earth and the earth needs us to till and nurture it. Conclusively, Davis suggests all is not lost—she states mankind can take responsibility and move toward being better stewards until Jesus renews the broken fellowship of Eden and gives her back to us through his coming.

Davis appeals to logic in chapter 3 by asking, “If a person’s home and the way in which they decorate gives one a sense of their interests and personal values, why wouldn’t God’s ‘house’ also reflect His story, His people, His nature?” Davis invites readers on a visual tour of the breathtaking Chartres Cathedral of France and asks them to consider how the weekly worship space provides “spatial discipleship” or a “geography for the soul” (59). Davis confronts the theatre-style church started by evangelists like Charles Finney, who, though well-intentioned, have gradually moved architectural trends from sacred- to entertainment-style settings. Spaces suited for a message and medium of entertainment have conditioned congregants to feel entitled to receive something stimulating, lest they be disappointed in their worship experience. Contrarily, sacred architecture “attempts to orient the soul through the body” (69) and intimately connects the spiritual and physical orientations. Davis exposes readers to the beauty of worship spaces that enliven the soul and invite the believer into the Living Stone—spaces that remind us of the “already but not yet” of this pilgrimage. Ultimately, Davis champions worship spaces that use colors, symbols, shapes, lighting, and material that embody the Christian story and navigate the heart toward Christ.

Chapter 4 explores formational Scripture engagement through meditation, recitation, and imaginative contemplation and prayer. Davis admonishes the reader to avoid common, tempting practices of consumer reading (cherry-picking “exciting” or “powerful” passages), reading pragmatically to form our opinions about current events, or as mere study for the mind. Finally, Davis presents the Prayer of Ignatia, which calls the reader to imaginatively read and pray Scripture.

In the final two chapters of the book, Dante’s *Inferno* and the Four Lady Virtues are juxtaposed to emphasize overcoming evil with good when growing in Christ-like character. The satirical literature of Dante’s *Inferno* guides the reader on a tour of hell. Then, virtues like temperance, humility, charity, meekness, chastity, and zeal replace the vices of gluttony, pride, envy, lust, and slothfulness. Davis challenges believers to battle sin with goodness so that like the golden specks of a mosaic, we shine with the glimmer of the golden city of Heaven, renewed daily and formed into

Christ's likeness.

Davis's *Becoming by Beholding* is a phenomenal resource—well researched, creative, saturated in Scripture, and useful to Christian leaders, biblical counselors, and teachers in the academy and in churches. Davis's work speaks to believers who never look up to face God's handiwork, never gaze out through the windows of icons, and never delve into the pages of Scripture eager to see the strange and beautiful face of Christ. Davis's vivid descriptors, poetic language, and thoughtful use of humor have most certainly produced a work that will spur readers toward a fuller life of worship and holiness.

Chloe Bonner