

**Perspectives on Worship, Law and Faith:
The Old Testament Speaks Today by C.Van Dam.
Pro Ecclesia Publishers,
P.O. Box 198, Kelmscott, Western Australia 6991.
2000. Paperback, 111 pp.
Reviewed by Johan D.Tangelder.**

In 1999 Dr. Cornelis Van Dam, Professor of Old Testament at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario, and his wife visited the Free Reformed Churches in Australia and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. These two denominations have special ties with the Theological College as they send students there to prepare for the ministry. To bring the work of the college to its supporting constituencies, Van Dam addressed congregations and Office Bearers' conferences. He also spoke at a public meeting of a students' club on Faith and Reason.

Van Dam's first three lectures clearly show the relevance of the Old Testament legislation for today. In the first lecture, What is Worship? he points out that in a culture where God is marginalized and there is no holy fear, we do well to emphasize the sovereignty and holiness of God. Christians must not lose their sense of awe and wonder at being in the presence of God as they come together for worship. Seeker services are not Biblical, according to Van Dam. We do not worship to evangelize.

He says, "Worship must never cater to the needs of the unregenerate so he feels comfortable, for the unregenerate's greatest need is to be confronted by the awesome holiness and greatness of God." In public worship we meet God in Christ, anticipating that glorious worship that is awaiting the children of God. And Van Dam rightly reminds us of the need for proper preparation for the Sunday, a custom, which was once common in Reformed circles. It means that "as people of God we will spend the Saturday evening differently than the world does." In true Reformed style Van Dam also notes that worship covers all of life. Our Sunday worship must spill over into a week of service.

The second Lecture, Clean and Unclean, shows that the truth and substance of the Gospel are embedded in the Old Testament laws and that the New Testament gospel is rooted in the Old Testament. What defines uncleanness and thus sin and death today is whatever separates us from the living God of salvation. Van Dam observes that parents and office bearers must teach clearly the distinction between clean and unclean to our children and each other. The object of godly training of our children is not to burden them down with rule upon rule but to help them mature in Christ.

In his third lecture, Where is the Old Testament deacon? Van Dam discusses our obligations to the poor - not only within the church, but the poor in general. He notes the identity of the poor, how the poor are helped, and how the New Testament applies Old Testament laws. What is the role of the deacons toward the poor? The deaconate as we know it is not found in the Old Testament. But the absence of deacons in the Old Testament has a powerful lesson in more than one way for us today. First, it underlines the primary responsibility of the congregation for the poor. Second, when the church was

no longer identified with a single nation and circumstances changed, Christ gave us the office of deacon.

Deacons are to do more than to distribute money when needed. They should be involved in preventive ministry as well. Van Dam also offers practical advice for today's deacons.

In his speech, Faith and Reason, Van Dam shows how faith and reason relate to each other, how our mind should be moulded by the Word of God. He acknowledges his indebtedness to the philosopher/theologian Dr. Cornelius Van Til who stressed that without any argument with anyone our basic presupposition is the existence of God. In our work as students and scholars, we try to think God's thoughts after Him. A Christian student then has to privilege to explore God's world, His handwork, and His domain.

Those who treat their faith with seriousness, and who long for a sense of God's glory and greatness in Sunday worship and in their engagement with a world adrift from God, will find this slender book a blessing. It provides a much-needed corrective to muddled theological thinking about worship and practical Christianity, which needs to be heard.