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## BLOOD AND LIFE: Sermons on the Old Testament By Michael Kasting

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**BLOOD AND LIFE: Sermons on the Old Testament.** By Michael Kasting.

Rosow: BLOOD AND LIFE  
Morgan Hill, CA: Bookstand Publishing, 2013. 275 pages. Paper. \$15.00.

Another book of sermons? Well, yes—and no. Yes in a quantitative sense. But most certainly no in a qualitative sense. *Blood and Life* is not just “another” book of sermons in the negative sense that the word “another” sometimes conveys. Although the successful sale of sermon books is often by grace rather than by merit, Pastor Kasting’s collection of thirty-one sermons should be a successful publication on the basis of its merits. This book is extraordinarily good—and, above all, unique—in a number of ways.

“Let me count the ways” (at least some of them).

Pastor Kasting demonstrates a superb mastery of effective literary techniques in his writing. Take, for example, his use of the frame (or bookend) device in his wedding sermon on Jeremiah 29:11. That sermon is framed by a reference at the beginning to the author viewing his daughter’s marriage “with a father’s eyes” and a reference at the very end to God’s viewing the same marriage also “with a [F]ather’s eyes.” The author revels in paradox: the wetness of the Red Sea as a locale for a miraculous dry path for the Israelites to escape the pursuing Egyptians and a dry rock in the arid desert as a miraculous source

for water to slake the Israelites' thirst. God transforms wet into dry and dry into wet! Sharp contrast (as well as paradox) characterizes the juxtaposition of Moses's Old Testament prohibition not to drink the blood of sacrificed animals with Christ's New Testament invitation "Drink of it [the blood of Christ], all of you." One sermon, both in its title and its content, puns on the words "holy" and "wholly." There are striking coinages: "put on your Isaiah 53 glasses," "America's plastic trinity: Visa, Master Card, and American Express," and the author's nomination of Nathan for "Best Supporting Actor" in his dramatic confrontation of King David for his adultery. Pastor Kasting uses refrains to conform to the homiletical dictum to hammer a point home to his audience: "Choose Whom You Will Serve" in his sermon on Joshua 24:14-15; "All For You" in his sermon on Ruth's loyalty to her mother-in-law; Christ's love "keeps on ticking" (like the Timex watch in John Cameron Swayze's familiar commercial) even though Christ (like the same watch) "takes a [continual] licking." In addition to these literary techniques, homiletical virtues that are more customary, such as illustrations and visual aids, abound.

The foregoing examples document the commendation "extraordinarily good" in my opening paragraph. Buttressing the commendation "unique" in the same paragraph is the format Pastor Kasting uses for all thirty-one sermons, brief paragraphs of symmetrically indented lines, a format borrowed, as the author acknowledges, from Peter Marshall. Pastor Kasting has a tremendous feel for the rhythms of word arrangement, and his format accentuates

those rhythms. His practice is a sort of visual punctuation. The main function of periods, commas, colons, semicolons, dashes, and ellipses is to help the reader (and the hearer too) to negotiate more easily the sequential and hierarchical relationships of the preacher's ideas. But who, besides a proofreader, consciously notices punctuation marks, helpful as they are? Pastor Kasting's use of the Peter Marshall format makes these sequential and hierarchical relationships visible, vivid, and alluring. For a change—a rare change indeed—the written sermon has as much appeal to the reader as the oral sermon has to the hearer. That is the unique feature of the author's sermon methodology!

Unique also is Pastor Kasting's way of achieving textual preaching. To be sure, he preaches all or most of the Scriptural text's content in his sermons. We expect that. While such treatment of the biblical text is certainly a virtue, it is not automatically a virtue. Who of us hasn't heard so called textual sermons that not only exhaust the text but exhaust the listener as well? But Pastor Kasting has another way of making his sermons textual, and that is phrasing his law and, especially, his gospel in the very language of the text. The sermon on Jonah illustrates this law: "On Judgment Day *there will be no ships to Tarshish. No place at all to hide.*" Gospel: "Jesus endured *the worst storm*, the darkness at noon that came as He hung on the cross . . . Jesus *went down, not merely into a fish*, but into the very jaws of death, of the grave, of hell itself to rescue and reclaim us" (emphasis mine).

All of the above homiletical virtues, desirable as they are, are but "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal without

love”—God’s love in Jesus Christ, what we call the gospel. And here is where Pastor Kasting excels. The gospel is the obvious goal and climax of every one of his thirty-one sermons. And that

gospel is present quantitatively and qualitatively; it is abundant and fresh. In a sermon involving mountains, the author moves from Mt. Townsend in Washington State to the biblical Mt. Sinai to Mt. Nebo

to the Mount of Transfiguration to *Mt. Calvary*. In a sermon involving trees

he moves from the Giant Sequoias of Washington to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to the oaks of Mamre to the tree on which Absalom was caught by his hair to *the tree of the cross*. His approach to the gospel often resembles the gospel-handle technique that I have taught my homiletics classes for many years, that is, using the non-gospel language of a biblical text as a way of connecting to other biblical passages where the same (or similar) language is used in a gospel sense, in addition often describing that gospel creatively in the non-gospel language of his selected text. (He does this despite the fact that he was never a student in my homiletics class!). In at least three instances he produces genuine Gospel handles. In a sermon on Esther he uses the non-Gospel language “for such a time as this” as a bridge to the Gospel of Christ’s birth in “the fullness of time” in Galatians. Pastor Kasting connects Micah’s desperate effort to get right with God by offering to sacrifice his firstborn to the fact that God indeed sacrificed his firstborn Son on a cross

to make us right with God. The Jews’ fanatical self-imposed curse that Jesus’s blood be on them and their children becomes in Kasting’s skillful treatment an ironic link to the truth that Jesus’s blood

AND LIFE and on our children in a blessed saving sense. Kasting’s sermons do more than delight—they are “the power of God for our salvation.”

I sometimes quip to my homiletics students, “Anyone can write an occasional good sermon; the trick is to write a good sermon time after time.” Pastor Kasting has done so thirty-one times in *Blood and Life!*

Francis C. Rossow