

## *Eugene Peterson's Message: Part 2 (As Above, So Below)*

by Warren B. Smith

*"As above, so below; as below, so above." This maxim implies that the transcendent God beyond the physical universe and the immanent God within ourselves are one.<sup>1</sup>*

—Ronald S. Miller and the editors of *New Age Journal*

*As Above, So Below, 1992*

Eugene Peterson's *The Message* seems to be very important to Rick Warren. It is the first Bible version that he quotes in *The Purpose-Driven Life*. He cites it at the bottom of his dedication page. He cites it again on the page that precedes his first chapter. He uses quotes from *The Message* to open and close his first chapter. Five of the six scriptures that Rick Warren cites in his first chapter all come from *The Message*. Even the title of the first chapter, *"It All Starts with God,"* is taken from *The Message* paraphrase of *Colossians 1:16*, which appears right under the chapter heading.

*For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible.... everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him.<sup>2</sup>*

The King James Bible translates *Colossians 1:16* as follows:

*For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.*

It wasn't Peterson's use of the phrase *"got started"* instead of *"created,"* or even the word *"purpose"* that jumped out at me, as much as his use of the phrase *"above and below"* instead of *"heaven and earth."* When I was in the New Age, it was well understood that the words *"above and below"* had metaphysical/New Age connotations and were routinely substituted for *"heaven and earth."* In fact, the term *"as above, so below"* was a commonly accepted New Age phrase.

In reading through *The Message*, I discovered that Peterson had actually inserted the entire phrase *"as above, so below"* into his paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer. I compared Peterson's version of the Lord's Prayer with the King James translation of that same prayer (*Matthew 6:9-13*). Peterson had deliberately substituted *"as above, so below"* in place of *"in earth, as it is in heaven."*

In *Colossians 1:16*, Peterson again chose to use the terms *"above"* and *"below"* instead of the commonly accepted *"heaven"* and *"earth"* found in most Bible versions. The *"above"* and *"below"* in *Colossians 1:16* is an obvious derivative form of the *"as above, so below"* he had used previously in his paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer. This derivative form of the more complete phrase *"as above, so below"* is also common to the New Age.

The fact that this whole *"above"* and *"below"* issue was presenting itself on the first page of the first chapter of Rick Warren's book was unsettling. Was I reading too much into this? Was there some other reasonable explanation for Eugene Peterson's use of the term *"as above, so below"* in the Lord's Prayer and its derivative form in *Colossians 1:16*? Or can there even be a good reason for inserting an occultic New Age term into the middle of the Lord's Prayer?

# The Lord's Prayer

## The Message

Our Father in heaven.  
Reveal who you are.  
Set the world right;  
Do what's best—  
**as above, so below.**  
Keep us alive with three square meals.  
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.  
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.  
You're in charge!  
You can do anything you want!  
You're ablaze in beauty!  
Yes. Yes. Yes. <sup>3</sup>  
(Emphasis added)

## King James Bible

Our Father which art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done  
**in earth, as it is in heaven**  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil:  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory, for ever.  
Amen.  
(Emphasis added)

## Ancient Egypt and Oneness

Right about the time I was looking into Eugene Peterson's use of the term "*as above, so below*," I was at a book sale at our local library. Almost lost amongst some cookbooks and business manuals was a book written and published by the editors of the New Age Journal. It was entitled *As Above, So Below*. I picked it up and began reading. In the introduction the chief editor of the book, Ronald S. Miller, had written:

*Thousands of years ago in ancient Egypt, the great master alchemist Hermes Trismegistus, believed to be a contemporary of the Hebrew prophet Abraham, proclaimed this fundamental truth about the universe: "As above, so below; as below, so above." This maxim implies that the transcendent God beyond the physical universe and the immanent God within ourselves are one. Heaven and Earth, spirit and matter, the invisible and the visible worlds form a unity to which we are intimately linked.*<sup>4</sup>

He continued his explanation by quoting Sufi scholar Reshad Field.

*"As above, so below" means that the two worlds are instantaneously seen to be one when we realize our essential unity with God....The One and the many, time and eternity, are all One.*<sup>5</sup>  
(Ellipsis dots in original)

The New Age Journal editor went on to state that old forms of religion no longer serve people, and that the term "*as above, so below*" describes the "*emerging spirituality*" that is quickly moving onto the world's scene. He concluded his introduction to *As Above, So Below* by writing:

*The breadth of this exploration suggests that we are living in an age of spiritual reinvention, a transitional age that leaves the safety and security of the known to seek out the new, the untested, the possible.*<sup>6</sup>

Moving from the library book sale to the Internet, I put "*as above, so below*" into the Google search engine to see what would come up. There were countless references. The very first reference listed by Google for "*as above, so below*" read:

*This phrase comes from the beginning of The Emerald Tablet and embraces the entire system of traditional and modern magic which was inscribed upon the tablet in cryptic wording by Hermes Trismegistus. The significance of this phrase is that it is believed to hold the key to all mysteries. All systems of magic are claimed to function by this formula. "That which is above is the same as that which is below'....The universe is the same as God, God is the same as man..."<sup>7</sup>*

As I checked out the most popular websites for "as above, so below," each one described the term as having the same occultic, mystical, eastern, New Age, esoteric and magical sources. One site stated:

*This ancient phrase, "As above, so below" describes the Oneness of All That Is.<sup>8</sup>*

The phrase "AS ABOVE, SO BELOW" headlined a page from a Theosophical website containing "esoteric" teachings espoused by New Age matriarch Alice A. Bailey. A derivative form of the term—similar to Peterson's abbreviated use of "above and below" in *Colossians 1:16*—appeared on the website in a quote from Theosophy founder Helena Blavatsky's pioneering New Age work, *The Secret Doctrine*:

*Above, the Son is the whole KOSMOS;  
below, he is MANKIND.<sup>9</sup>*

To see if there was any other explanation for Peterson's use of this mystical New Age phrase, I put the term as above, so below along with the term Christianity into the search engine of the computer I was using. There were only seven immediate references. None of them had anything to do with biblical Christianity. The first reference was entitled "Mystical Christianity" and said:

*...to help the seeker of an inner spiritual path find resources to aid their spiritual journey towards a mystical and magical Christianity.<sup>10</sup>*

In all of my searching, I could find no good reason for Peterson using "as above, so below" in his paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer. Nor could I find any good reason for his use of the obvious "above and below" derivative in his *Colossians 1:16* paraphrase, which Rick Warren used at the very beginning of his book to initiate his readers into *The Purpose-Driven Life*.

## **So What?**

I guess if Rick Warren or anyone else says, "So what?" I would say, "So how come?" How come Eugene Peterson inserted a universally accepted, mystical New Age term right into the middle of the Lord's Prayer? And why does a derivative of the saying show up in his paraphrase of *Colossians 1:16*? Even if you thought there was some "good" reason for using the term "as above, so below," why would you? Why would you choose a term that so clearly has its origins in the magic of ancient Egypt and is so heavily identified today with the New Age and the New Spirituality?

"As above, so below" agrees with the "immanent" New Age view that God is not only outside of creation, but also within creation. It means that God is "in" everyone and everything. It perfectly denotes the New Age concept of "Oneness" and provides apparent support for the New Age contention that "We are all One."

## **Seeker Friendly?**

I tried to imagine what it would be like for a confused New Ager today coming into a Purpose-Driven Church that uses *The Message*, and finding this popular New Age phrase right in the middle of the Lord's Prayer. Or

what it would be like for that person to be handed a copy of Rick Warren's book, only to find an abbreviated form of this same New Age phrase as part of the lead-off scripture introducing them to *The Purpose-Driven Life*. This hardly seemed to be the way to introduce the Gospel of Jesus Christ to an unbelieving New Ager.

Rick Warren's reintroduction of *The Message* into my life only reinforced the concerns I had originally voiced on the radio when Peterson's book first came out. Why was Rick Warren so drawn to *The Message*? *The Message* not only obscured prophetic scriptures like *Matthew 24:3-5*, it also introduced paraphrased material like "as above, so below," which made it appear that some of the teachings of the Bible were "at One" with the teachings of the New Age.

In *Reinventing Jesus Christ: The New Gospel (now published as False Christ Coming)*, I had observed:

*And it is, indeed, very disturbing to see many Christian leaders today using many of the same words and expressions commonly used by their [New Age] "new gospel" counterparts.<sup>11</sup>*

*Unfortunately, undiscerning Christian leaders have not adequately exposed these [New Age] "new gospel" teachings and, as a result, the spirit behind the "new gospel" has entered the Church.<sup>12</sup>*

*Excerpted from Deceived On Purpose, pp. 29-35*

*Eugene Peterson's Message: Part 1 (My 1994 Warning)*

#### Endnotes

1. Ronald S. Miller and the Editors of New Age Journal, *As Above, So Below: Paths to Spiritual Renewal in Daily Life* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1992), p. xi.
2. Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here for?*, p. 17, citing Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary Language*, p. 415.
3. Peterson, *The Message*, pp. 21-22.
4. Miller et al., *As Above, So Below*, p. xi.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. xiv.
7. ([http://www.themystica.com/mystica/articles/a/below\\_above.html](http://www.themystica.com/mystica/articles/a/below_above.html)).
8. ([http://www.motherspeak.com/as\\_above\\_so\\_below.htm](http://www.motherspeak.com/as_above_so_below.htm)), p. 1.
9. Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, p. 160, quoted in "As Above, So Below" by Sri Raghavan Iyer, *Hermes*, April 1980, (<http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/AsAboveSoBelow.htm>), p. 1.
10. (<http://www.esotericchristian.com/home.html>).
11. Warren Smith, *Reinventing Jesus Christ: The New Gospel*, p. 68.
12. Ibid., p. 6.