

EUGENE PETERSON AND “THE MESSAGE”

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Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: Some of the information below might be over-the-head of many readers. For those more inclined to embrace the big picture, suffice it to say the evidence given by David Cloud is compelling in showing that the Message Bible is not a translation of the inspired texts of the Prophets and Apostles. It is not the Bible, it is a false teaching which will corrupt the faith of many. We will not be teaching from the Message Bible in this church, and we warn people not to use it. We also warn people to avoid the books and teachings of those who embrace the Message Bible, since they are also corrupted and have no fear of God in leading people astray.

1 Tim 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, (NKJ)

Eugene Peterson (1932-) was for many years James M. Houston Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College. He also served for 35 years as founding pastor of Christ Our King Presbyterian Church in Bel Air, Maryland. Today he is retired and lives in Montana.

The New Testament portion of *The Message* was published in 1993 and the complete Bible in 2002. It is called a "translational-paraphrase" and is said to "unfold like a gripping novel." It was translated by Peterson and reviewed by 21 "consultants" from the following schools: Denver Seminary (Robert Alden), Dallas Theological Seminary (Darrell Bock and Donald Glenn), Fuller Theological Seminary (Donald Hagner), Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Trinity Episcopal School, North Park Theological Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Richard Averbeck), Columbia Bible College, Criswell College (Lamar Cooper), Westminster Theological Seminary (Peter Enns), Bethel Seminary (Duane Garrett), Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Paul R. House), Covenant Theological Seminary, Westmont College, Wesley Biblical Seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary, Moody Bible Institute (John H. Walton), Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and Gordon College (Marvin Wilson).

The Message is widely recommended by well-known Christian leaders. In keeping with his love for every new translation and paraphrase to appear since the Revised Standard Version, Billy Graham printed his own edition of "*The Message: New Testament*." Warren Wiersbe says, "*The Message* is the boldest and most provocative rendering of the New Testament I've ever read." Jack Hayford says, "*The Message* is certainly destined to become a devotional classic --not to mention a powerful pastoral tool." Rick Warren loves *The Message* and quotes it frequently, five times in the first chapter of *The Purpose-Driven Life*. J.I. Packer says, "In this crowded world of Bible versions, Eugene Peterson's blend of accurate scholarship and vivid idiom make this rendering both distinctive and distinguished. *The Message* catches the logical flow, personal energy, and imaginative overtones of the original very well indeed." CCM artist Michael Card says, "Peterson's translation transforms the eye into an ear, opening the door of the New Testament wider than perhaps it has ever been opened." Leighton Ford says, "*The Message* will help many to transfer God's eternal truths to their contemporary lives." Joni Earckson Tada says, "WOW! What a treasure *The Message* is. I am going to carry it with me. This is a treasure that I will want to use wherever I am." *The Message* is also recommended by Amy Grant, Benny Hinn, Bill Hybels, Bill and Gloria Gaither, Chuck Swindoll, Toby of DC Talk, Gary Smalley, Gordon Fee, Gordon MacDonald, Jerry Jenkins, John Maxwell, Joyce Meyer, Kenneth Copeland, Max Lucado, Michael W. Smith, Newsboys, Phil Driscoll, Rebecca St. James, Rod Parsley, Stuart and Jill Briscoe, Tony Campolo, Bono of U2, Vernon Grounds, to name a few. (This information was gathered from the NAVPress web site.)

The Message sold 100,000 copies just in the first four months following its summer 1993 release. Peterson's doctrine of inspiration, in practice at least, is weak in the extreme. The first evidence of this is the way he handles God's Words. You will see what I mean by that. It is impossible to be serious about the doctrine of verbal inspiration when you handle the words of Scripture the way Peterson does. Further, in his introduction to the book of Revelation he describes the apostle John as "a poet, fond of metaphor and symbol, image and allusion..." This implies that John is the actual author of Revelation, which he was not.

Peterson told *Christianity Today* that a major turning point in his ministry was a lecture by Paul Tournier sponsored by the liberal *Christian Century* magazine and held at John Hopkins Hospital in Chicago ("Books & Culture Corner: The Contemplative Christian," by Nathan Bierma, *Christianity Today* web site, Sept. 29, 2003). In his 1973 Masters Thesis "Paul Tournier's Universalism," Daniel Musick warned: "Paul Tournier was an unrestricted universalist. His writings, personal correspondence with him, and interviews with many who knew him support this conclusion. An analysis of his soteriology over 35 years of writing reveals a transition from reformed roots to an unbiblical, neo-orthodox perspective influenced by

Emil Brunner and Karl Barth."

Peterson is on the Board of Reference for the international ecumenical organization Renovare (pronounced Ren-o-var-ay, which is Latin meaning "to make new spiritually"), founded by Richard Foster. At its October 1991 meeting in Pasadena, Foster praised Pope John Paul II and called for unity in the Body of Christ through the "five streams of Christianity: the contemplative, holiness, charismatic, social justice and evangelical" (CIB Bulletin, December 1991). Foster advocates the practices of Catholic mystics and "the integration of psychology and theology." In his book entitled *Prayer*, Foster draws material from Julian of Norwich, Thomas Merton, Bernard of Clairvaux, Madame Guyon, Teresa of Avila, even St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. Renovare promotes guided imagery, visualization, centering prayer, astral projection, Zen meditation, and Jungian psychology (Calvary Contender, Feb. 15, 1998).

Along the same line, notice the heroes of the faith that Peterson quotes in the article "*Spirit Quest*" (which is a Native American Indian term for seeking intimacy with and revelation from their pagan spirits): "Single-minded, persevering faithfulness confirms the authenticity of our spirituality. The ancestors we look to for encouragement in this business -- Augustine of Hippo and Julian of Norwich, ... Teresa of Avila -- didn't flit. They stayed" (Christianity Today, Nov. 8, 1993). Augustine, Julian, and Teresa had authentic spirituality? Julian of Norwich said, "God showed me that sin need be no shame to man but can even be worthwhile" (quoted by Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend*, p. 146). Julian also said, "God is really our Mother as he is our Father," and called Christ "Mother Jesus." Augustine was the father of a-millennialism, taught that the sacraments are the means of saving grace, was one of the fathers of infant baptism, claiming that baptism takes away the child's sin, taught that Mary did not commit sin and promoted prayers to her, believed in purgatory and the veneration of relics, accepted the doctrine of celibacy for "priests," and laid the foundation for the inquisition, to name a few of his heresies. Teresa of Avila was probably demon possessed; she levitated and made strange noises deep in her throat, experienced terrifying visions and voices, and held to Rome's sacramental gospel that works are required for salvation.

Peterson was Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College, and it is obvious that he has been influenced deeply by the Catholic and modernistic "spirituality" he has immersed himself in for so many decades. Regent College's bookstore features many works by Catholic mystics, such as those already named, and by modernists. I have visited this bookstore many times, and there is no warning whatsoever in regard to these books.

The mystical "spirituality" that is so popular in evangelical and charismatic circles today is a yearning for an experiential relationship with God that

downplays the role [of] faith and Scripture and that exalts "transcendental" experiences that lift the individual from the earthly mundane into a higher "spiritual" plane. Biblical prayer is talking with God; mystical spirituality prayer is meditation and "centering" and other such things. Biblical Christianity is a patient walk of faith; mystical spirituality is more a flight of fancy. Biblical study is analyzing and meditating upon the literal truth of the Scripture; mystical spirituality focuses on a "deeper meaning"; it is more allegorical and "transcendental" than literal.

Peterson defines spirituality as "a fusion of intimacy and transcendence" ("*Spirit Quest*," Christianity Today, Nov. 8, 1993). This confuses the sensual intimacy of earthly relationships with the spiritual intimacy the believer has in this life with God.

It is not surprising that Peterson's translation has a New-Agey flavor to it. He even uses the term "as above, so below," which is a New Age expression for the unity of God and man, Heaven and earth. In the book *As Above, So Below*, Ronald Miller and the editors of the New Age Journal say, "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" (quoted from Warren Smith, *Deceived on Purpose: The New Age Implications of the Purpose-Driven Church*, Ravenna, Ohio: ConsciencePress, 2004).

In light of this, consider the following quotations from Peterson's *The Message*:

Matthew 6:9-13 -- "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!"

Here is what the actual scriptures teach (using the New King James translation): Matt 6:9-13 "In this manner, therefore, pray: our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (NKJ)

Also consider the following quotations from Peterson's *The Message*:

Colossians 1:16 -- "For everything, absolutely everything, ABOVE AND BELOW, visible and invisible ... everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him."

CONSIDER SOME OTHER EXAMPLES OF THE AMAZING LIBERTIES THAT EUGENE PETERSON TAKES WITH THE WORDS OF GOD:

Matthew 5:3 KJV "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." **MESSAGE:** "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule."

Comment: Being poor in spirit is to be at the end of your rope? Then vast numbers of unsaved people are candidates for heaven on this basis.

Matthew 5:8 KJV "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

MESSAGE: "You're blessed when you get your inside world, your mind and heart, put right. Then you can see God in the outside world."

Comment: This must be transcendental, because it doesn't make any non-transcendental sense.

Matthew 5:14 KJV "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid."

MESSAGE: "Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world."

Comment: "God-colors"? I didn't even learn about God-colors when I was a member of Parmahansa Yogananda's Self-Realization Fellowship Society before I was saved!

Matthew 5:43 KJV "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy."

MESSAGE: "Jesus said, You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.'"

Comment: The Lord Jesus was not quoting the Mosaic Law; He was referring to the teaching of the Pharisees who had perverted the Law. The

Law of God did not command, "Hate your enemy."

Matthew 9:34 KJV *"But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils."*

MESSAGE: *"The Pharisees were left sputtering, 'Hocus Pocus. It's nothing but Hocus Pocus.'"*

Comment: This is clearly a "translational-paraphrase."

Matt. 11:28-30 KJV *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

MESSAGE: *"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me --watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you."*

Comment: The Message sounds like an iron television tonic commercial here!

Matthew 28:19 KJV *"...baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:"*

MESSAGE: *"...baptism in the three-fold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."*

Comment: *The Message* gives an Anti-Trinitarian, Jesus-only spin to this verse, which teaching claims that God is not three Persons in one Godhead, but that He simply manifests Himself in three ways.

John 1:18 KJV *"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."*

MESSAGE: *"No one has ever seen God, not so much of aglimpse. This one-of-a-kind God-expression, who exists at the veryheart of the Father, has made him plain as day."*

Comment: To translate "the only begotten Son" as "this one-of-a-kind God-expression" is not only heretical; it is absurd.

John 3:5 KJV "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

MESSAGE: "Jesus said, You're not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation--the 'wind hovering over the water' creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life--it's not possible to enter God's kingdom."

Comment: Peterson's "translation" gives the baptismal regenerationists the best support they have ever had. The Roman Catholics who write to debate me would love this version.

John 10:30 KJV "I and my Father are one."

MESSAGE: "I and the Father are one heart and mind."

Comment: To add to the words of Christ in this strange manner, it truly appears that Peterson has no fear of God.

Romans 8:11 KJV "...he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."

MESSAGE: "...he'll do the same thing in you that he did in Jesus, bringing you alive to himself."

Comment: Peterson spiritualizes Christ's resurrection here.

Romans 8:35 KJV "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

MESSAGE: "Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture."

Comment: Revelation 22:18-19 should cause Peterson (and everyone who approved *The Message*) to lose a lot of sleep.

Philippians 2:12 KJV "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, workout your own salvation with fear and

trembling."

MESSAGE: *"Be energetic in your life of salvation, reverent and sensitive before God. That energy is God's energy, an energy deep within you, God himself willing and working at what will give him the most pleasure."*

Comment: This is another New-Agey, heretical spin to the Scriptures.

Colossians 2:10 KJV *"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

MESSAGE: *"You don't need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the universe without him..."*

Comment: What? And this mess was reviewed by 21scholars and approved by the likes of J.I. Packer?

1 Peter 3:1 KJV *"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives."*

MESSAGE: *"The same goes for you wives: Be good wives to your husbands, responsive to their needs..."*

Comment: Peterson has done away with wifely subjection. Do we have the "feminist version" here?

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