

Why Peter Thiel Fears Global Integration: The Antichrist, the Restrainer, and the New World Order

Part One: A Theological Analysis for Political Scientists¹

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We are living through *apocalyptic* times, in both the popular and the technical senses of that word. What the Abrahamic traditions call “the signs of the times” now present themselves as a secular inventory of existential threats to global civilization, the nation-state, and American democracy.

In popular usage, *apocalypse* means mass destruction and possibly the end of the world. Theologically, it means revelation, unveiling, disclosure, the pulling back of a curtain. An apocalyptic moment is not necessarily a catastrophe. It is a critical moment when the shape of

¹ My intention is to offer a Part II of this study—a constructive counterproposal drawn from the Christian tradition that Thiel invokes, tentatively entitled: “A Theological Proposal for Building the ‘Beloved Community’ at Global Scale.”

things becomes visible—when we are standing not at the end of the world but at the edge of the present order, on the hinge of history between what is passing and what is being revealed. *Eschatology*, the related discipline, is the study of endings and beginnings, of last things and first things. Something ends. Something new begins. What that means is the work of *discernment*.

In the socio-political context that concerns this Forum—the long argument over whether and how humanity should integrate its governance—one question is worth sustained attention. What has tech-libertarian and billionaire Peter Thiel “revealed” about the end-times, and why are religious leaders and political scientists taking note?

Thiel is a technology entrepreneur and investor, a co-founder of PayPal and of Palantir Technologies, an early backer of the current Vice President, and by most reckonings one of the most consequential private citizens in the United States. Beginning in September 2025 at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco and continuing through a series in Paris and then in Rome in March 2026—he delivered a repeating four-part lecture series on the Antichrist.² The lectures were invitation-only, closed to press, and off the record. Recordings have leaked to the *Washington Post*, the *Guardian*, and Religion News Service. And the argument they contain is, in substance, a sustained theological case against the project the World Government Research Network (WGRN) exists to examine.

Thiel’s argument in summary form runs like this: Humanity faces genuine catastrophic risks. The liberal remedy for those risks is binding global coordination and authority. He assumes this means an authoritarian, one-world governance. This would be disastrous because the entity would have no outside or transcendent accountability and no exit. For Thiel, the unchecked authority of global governance is the spirit and system of the “Antichrist” of Christian tradition. The alternative to it is “Armageddon”—a biblical symbol for civilizational collapse and the end of the world as we know it. Between these two “beasts” of the apocalypse, something important “restrains” them. That which restrains the dual forces of dominion or destruction, in Thiel’s telling, has been traditional institutions (including churches) and American economic power. But now the only thing that can restrain those forces is a new technocracy—unimpeded, self-regulated, technological acceleration in the hands of a trusted few. Failing that, there may be a survivalist escape hatch for some.

Of particular interest for WGRN readership: why is a rich and famous libertarian like Thiel, who warns so urgently against concentrated power and rejects coordinated governance, so willing to sacrifice freedom and democracy and promote a new technocracy in the hands of a few powerful men? And why does he use biblical language, apocalyptic symbols, and secrecy to do it?

² The San Francisco series began at the Commonwealth Club in September 2025; subsequent iterations were delivered in Paris and, in March 2026, in Rome, where four sessions were held in a palazzo near St. Peter’s. See Nicole Winfield, Associated Press, 13 March 2026; Crispian Balmer, Reuters, 15 March 2026; and CNN coverage of the Rome series, 16 March 2026.

I write as a historical theologian rather than a political scientist, and I should disclose my own formation. I grew up Evangelical, in churches where the Last Days arrived with Bible charts and prophetic timelines, where the “ten horns” of Daniel’s fourth beast were a ten-nation confederacy reconstituting the Roman Empire, and where the coming world government was ruled by the “Beast” of the Book of Revelation. After putting away childish things—and some genuinely horrid dreams—I went to Yale Divinity School and Drew University and became a scholar of apocalyptic eschatology. My 1997 dissertation was a theological case study of popular apocalyptic interpretations of Chernobyl, the world’s worst nuclear disaster, in Belarus and Ukraine.³ That work has shaped everything I have to say here, because I think that ordinary citizens living in the Chernobyl-contaminated zone in Belarus and Ukraine—and now surviving the battlefields—have more to teach us about surviving a catastrophe than escaping to a private compound in New Zealand or a fortified bunker in Nebraska.

This essay expands and substantially revises my earlier op-ed, “Antichrist or Armageddon? Peter Thiel Rethinks Apocalypse from Silicon Valley,” published in Religion News Service in September 2025.⁴ What follows is a work of theological translation for political scientists who may be baffled by the biblical vocabulary and symbols. Thiel is making a political argument in a theological language—*apocalypse*, *antichrist*, *katechon*, *rapture*, *Armageddon*—that most political scientists have never learned and that, in my experience, most churchgoers could not define either. Before the argument can be evaluated, the vocabulary and scenarios must be read in two registers at once: socially and theologically.

I proceed in seven movements. First, the threats Thiel concedes and answers. Second, a theological glossary of terms and symbols necessary for cross-disciplinary translation. Third, the system itself, quoted and decoded. Fourth, the structural identity between the evangelical Rapture and the technologist’s escape hatch. Fifth, why this argument is being made in biblical language. Sixth, why it is being made in secret and behind closed doors. Seventh, a summary and its implications for theologians, political scientists, and the rest of us.

I. The Threats Thiel Answers

Thiel’s eschatology is neither frivolous nor free-floating. It is a serious and potentially consequential response to a specific and increasingly standard inventory of catastrophic risk. He does not deny these dangers; his quarrel is with the alternatives.

The inventory runs roughly as follows:

³ Related work appears in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements* (2000) and *The World After Chernobyl: Social Impact and Christian Response* (Crossroad monograph series, 1998).

⁴ Michael J. Christensen, “Antichrist or Armageddon? Peter Thiel rethinks apocalypse from Silicon Valley,” Religion News Service, 9 September 2025. <https://religionnews.com/2025/09/09/antichrist-or-armageddon-peter-thiel-rethinks-apocalypse-from-silicon-valley/>

Nuclear weapons remain the greatest threat to civilization, and a nuclear Doomsday is possible: nine nuclear states, thousands of warheads, and arms-control treaties that have largely lapsed.

Engineered pandemics: the same biotechnology that produced vaccines at unprecedented speed also lowers the cost of synthesizing dangerous pathogens, and that barrier is falling faster than any verification regime is rising.

Artificial intelligence: whether the greater danger is rogue agents and systems escaping human control or the unrestrained proliferation of data centers, the intermediate risks—autonomous weapons, AI surveillance, mass persuasion via customized algorithms, the advent of AGI, cascading financial and infrastructural failure—are already actionable and are the object of serious proposals for international oversight.

Climate change is the primary catastrophe on the horizon, according to most of the younger generation, confirmed by scientific consensus. To this one may add ecological collapse more broadly and the destabilizing potential of human biological enhancement. No modern state can secure its own outcome nor compel other states to cooperate with a global response. The danger is undeniable in its scope and consequences.

Each threat presents a collective-action problem in which unilateral restraint is futile and possibly self-harming. If one state forgoes a dangerous capability and others do not, the abstaining state has bought nothing but disadvantage. The logic runs toward binding coordination: verification regimes, inspection rights, compute thresholds, treaty bodies with genuine enforcement. In the standard formulation of the field, planetary problems require provisional, safeguarded, planetary authority.

This is precisely the inference Thiel refuses, and that refusal is the heart of his project. What he proposes instead is best heard in his own words, to which I turn once the necessary vocabulary is in place.

II. A Necessary Glossary

The terms below carry precise meanings that have shifted across two millennia. I define each biblically, historically, and theologically, because the argument turns on distinctions that disappear when the words are used loosely—and they are almost always used loosely.

Apocalypse

From the Greek *apokalypsis*, meaning *unveiling* or *disclosure*—not catastrophe. It names a literary genre before it names an event: prophetic visionary literature, written largely between 200 BCE and 100 CE, in which a seer is shown the hidden shape of history. Daniel and Revelation are the canonical examples; the genre is far larger, including 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch. Crucially, this literature was produced by and for communities under imperial oppression—Daniel during the persecution of Jews under Antiochus IV, Revelation under

Roman domination of Jews and Christians. Its social function was consolation and resistance from below.

It is coded literature. The beasts, horns, numbers, and cities are ciphers, legible to insiders and opaque to censors, which is why apocalyptic flourishes precisely where plain speech is dangerous. And its subject is not the annihilation of the world but the exhaustion of a world on the edge of a new reality. In its ancient usage, apocalypse means the present order of things will pass away; something new is being revealed. What remains a mystery in the moment will soon be made clear. In modern usage, apocalypse indicates the end of everything by global disaster and misses the hidden and more hopeful idea: that history has a divine purpose, human life a hidden meaning, that the mystery will be revealed and a new era begin.

Eschatology

The study of *ta eschata*, final things: death, judgment, and the consummation of history. The Greek *eschaton* means the last or furthest thing—both a final era or age and the inventory of what belongs to it. The concept is shared by the three Abrahamic religions: Jewish eschatology anticipates the messianic age and the world to come; Christian eschatology adds the return of the Christ; Islamic eschatology has its own parallel doctrine of *al-ākhirah*, the Last Hour, and the signs preceding it.⁵

Christian eschatology is not primarily prediction. It is a claim about the direction and the ownership of time—that history is going somewhere, that it belongs to God rather than to any regime, and that the decisive act has already occurred (in the Incarnation of God in the Christ) while its full manifestation remains to be fulfilled. Theologians call this the “already and not yet.” Its political function, when it is working properly, is to empower the faithful to repair and relativize every existing order until that day when all is completed.

Antichrist, and antichrists

The word appears in the New Testament only in the letters of John—four times—and never in Revelation. The term appears in the plural, and elsewhere as a *spirit*—a disposition or tendency at work in the world in opposition to the spirit of justice and righteousness. In I John 2:18 the writer reminds his readers that they have heard the Antichrist is coming and then tells them that in fact “even now are there many antichrists”; the referent is to people who have left the community of faith and became apostate, not a single world ruler. Later Christian tradition assembled a composite figure from other materials: Paul’s “man of lawlessness” who exalts

⁵ In Islamic eschatology, the doctrine of the Last Hour (*al-Sā‘ah*) refers to the definitive culmination of history, the utter destruction of the universe, and the subsequent resurrection and judgment of humanity. This cataclysmic event is preceded by major and minor signs of the times and culminates in the last battle and restoration of all things. The Battle at Dabiq or al-A’māq is in northern Syria, followed by the coming of the Mahdi and the return of Jesus to defeat the *Dajjāl*, the deceiving false messiah who functions as Islam’s antichrist figure.

himself in the temple (II Thessalonians 2), the beast of Revelation 13, and the arrogant final king of Daniel 7–11. That composite has been confidently identified as Nero and Domitian (by early Christians), as the Roman papacy (by Luther), as Napoleon, as Hitler, as Stalin, as the European Community reconstituting the Roman Empire, and as several American presidents, including Obama and Trump. Every one of those identifications of an autocratic world leader turned out to be historically wrong, which is the most reliable finding in the entire history of the doctrine.

The more disciplined strand of the tradition (sometimes called *realized* eschatology in contrast to the predictive prophecy of end-times) treats *antichrist* as a spirit or a system to be discerned rather than a person to be named, an oppressive power to be unmasked and engaged, not a human being to be destroyed.

Armageddon

A place for battle, not a global collapse. Revelation 16:16 names *Har-Megiddo*, the hill of Megiddo in northern Israel, as the gathering ground for the last battle. Islam identifies al-A'māq in northern Syria as the place for the final conflict. Megiddo is a real battlefield, a chokepoint on the Via Maris where armies have fought since the fifteenth century BCE. The text is using a place-name saturated with historical carnage as a symbol of the final triumph of good over evil.

In popular imagination the term has expanded to mean the final world war bringing total civilizational destruction, and this expansion is shared across the Abrahamic traditions. Jewish eschatology speaks of the war of Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 38–39), a final assault on Israel preceding the messianic age. Christian premillennialism folded Megiddo into a scenario of global war before the Millennium (one thousand years of peace on earth). Islamic eschatology has a parallel pattern, place and final battle. Three traditions, three deceivers, three final battlefields. The shared vocabulary travels easily and dangerously across religious traditions.

Thiel uses *Armageddon* in the popular sense: the total collapse scenario, as opposed to the global control scenario, the *Antichrist*.

Katechon: the Restraining Force

This is the biblical term that matters most to Thiel, and it is the most obscure. In II Thessalonians 2:6–7 Paul tells his readers that *something* is holding back the “man of lawlessness” from being revealed, and that this restraining force will eventually be removed. He uses a neuter participle in one verse—to *katechon*, “that which restrains”—and a masculine one in the next—*ho katechōn*, “he who restrains.” Then he pauses and notes that the Thessalonians already know what he means.

Historically, Christian patristic writers (Tertullian among them) identified the restrainer with the Roman Empire and its rule of law as the order that held chaos at bay. Others proposed a divine decree, the archangel Michael, or the preaching of the gospel to the nations as the restraining force which holds things in place before the end. Nineteenth-century dispensationalists identified

it with the Holy Spirit indwelling the church, to be withdrawn when the church is removed in a rapture.

There is no way to recover what Paul meant and the Thessalonians understood. Augustine of Hippo surveyed the options and candidly confessed that he did not know what Paul meant.⁶ Nor do I. Safer to say that the restrainer remains a spiritual mystery.

In the twentieth century the biblical term *katechon* acquired a second life as a category of political theory, chiefly through Carl Schmitt, the German jurist who joined the Nazi party in 1933 and whose work Thiel has read closely. Schmitt turned the *katechon* into a justification for sovereign power: the empire that delays the end does God's work simply by existing, and its authority is legitimated by that delay rather than by the consent of the governed. This is an updated doctrine of the divine right of kings, with eschatology doing the work that dynastic succession once did. The transformation is crucial and should be marked precisely. In Paul, the restrainer is a spiritual mystery. In Schmitt, it is a geopolitical warrant.

Rapture

From the Latin *rapiemur*, rendering the Greek *harpagēsometha*, “we shall be caught up” or “snatched away,” in I Thessalonians 4:17: “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.”

But what American evangelicals mean by “The Rapture” is a secret removal of the true believers from the earth before or during a seven-year tribulation period that immediately precedes the Second Coming of Christ. “The Rapture of the Saints” is not an ancient doctrine but a modern one, asserted and systematized by one John Nelson Darby in the 1830s. It was popularized in the United States by the Scofield Reference Bible in 1909 and turned into an Evangelical (Fundamentalist and Pentecostal) doctrine and culture by Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) and the *Left Behind* novels of Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins.

It bears stating plainly for a non-specialist readership: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, United Methodist, and most Protestant Reformed traditions, along with much of global evangelicalism, have never held this doctrine of limited escape from world persecution. It is less than two hundred years old and geographically concentrated in the United States.

⁶ Augustine, *City of God* XX.19, on II Thessalonians 2: having reviewed the interpretations available to him, he concludes that he does not know what the apostle meant and declines to guess. That confession is the most honest position in the tradition, and it has rarely been imitated.

New World Order

Here the record needs correcting, because the phrase carries a false pedigree that has created conspiracy theories that have done spiritual, social and political harm.

Novus ordo seclorum—“a new order of the ages”—is not a biblical phrase but rather a line from the Roman poet Virgil in his fourth *Eclogue* about the return of a Golden Age on earth (40 BCE). The poem announces the birth of a miraculous child who will bring an end to an era of suffering and strife, and usher in a new age of peace, harmony, and abundance (what the Jewish tradition calls *shalom* in all its fullness).

Novus ordo seclorum does not refer to a “new world order” in any dark conspiratorial sense. Research reveals the phrase was appropriated in America by Charles Thomson, secretary of the Continental Congress (1774-1789), adopted for the reverse of the Great Seal in 1782, and printed on the back of the one-dollar bill only from 1935. *Seclorum* is the genitive plural of *saeculum*, an age or generation. It refers to time, not to territory. It signified the beginning of a new American era, dated by the Roman numerals at the base of the pyramid to 1776.⁷

The modern phrase has a separate and traceable history: from Woodrow Wilson’s postwar language to H. G. Wells’s 1940 book of that title, and then George H. W. Bush used it in 1990–91 to describe post–Cold War great-power cooperation. Within months it had been absorbed into American prophecy culture as the name for the coming global tyranny, a fusion completed by Pat Robertson’s bestselling *The New World Order* in 1991, which joined the Illuminati-Masonic-Rothschild banking narrative to premillennial prophecy for a mass audience.

The groundwork had been laid through the 1970s, when the phrase circulated in Fundamentalist-evangelical prophecy circles. For a very large American constituency the phrase still functions as

⁷ According to an AI-assisted research summary: The Bavarian Illuminati, a real Enlightenment society, existed from 1776 to 1785 and was suppressed. In 1797 the Scottish scientist John Robison published *Proofs of a Conspiracy*, arguing that the order had survived and infiltrated Freemasonry to foment the French Revolution; the Abbé Barruel argued the same in France. In 1798 and 1799 the Congregationalist minister Jedidiah Morse preached this thesis in New England, and Timothy Dwight of Yale echoed it—the American Illuminati panic, which took place under President John Adams and not, as is often claimed, his son. John Quincy Adams belongs to the second generation of this tradition, and to a different branch of it. Following the disappearance of William Morgan in 1826, he became a prominent Anti-Mason, published a series of letters against Freemasonry between 1831 and 1833, and stood as an Anti-Masonic candidate for governor of Massachusetts. His target was a secret fraternal order and its influence on American public life, not a world government. That distinction has been thoroughly erased by later writers who cite him as an early witness against the New World Order. Charles Thomson, “Remarks and Explanation” of the Great Seal of the United States (20 June 1782) Accessed on September 9, 2026: <https://www.greatseal.com/mottoes/seclorum.html>; and *The Great Seal of the United States*, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, July 2003 — <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/27807.pdf>

a bridge term: it sounds like foreign policy and means the Antichrist as a global ruler of a new world order. Any rational or sensible proposal for binding international authority by political and economic coordination is dead on arrival in American popular culture before its merits can be openly discussed.

Perhaps America is ready for a new order of the ages, a new epoch, or a return to an older era of peace and prosperity. But the religious and political conspiracy tradition reads the Great Seal as an apocalyptic code of a hidden agenda, the secret signature of the Illuminati, enlightened global masters bent on world domination. Thiel does not endorse this reading, and I do not attribute it to him. What matters for the argument is that a substantial part of the audience he addresses has been formed by it, and that any proposal for international authority therefore arrives already translated.

III. Thiel's Techno-Political Theology, Quoted and Decoded

In a wide-ranging podcast posted on 26 June 2025, host Ross Douthat introduced Peter Thiel as the “most influential right-wing intellectual of the last 20 years” before asking him about his Christian eschatology in relation to existential threats:

ROSS DOUTHAT: “...You have been giving talks recently about the concept of the Antichrist, which is a Christian concept, an apocalyptic concept. What does that mean to you? What is the Antichrist?

PETER THIEL:

...how do we articulate some of these existential risks, some of the challenges we have, and they're all framed [in] this sort of runaway dystopian science text. There's a risk of nuclear war, there's a risk of environmental disaster, ... climate change...

bioweapons, [and] you have all the different sci fi scenarios. Obviously, there are certain types of risks with AI, but I always think that if we're going to have this frame of talking about existential risks, perhaps we should also talk about the risk of another type of a bad singularity, which I would describe as the one world totalitarian state.

... the political solution, the default political solution people have for all these existential risks is one world governance. You know, what do you do about nuclear weapons? We have a United Nations with real teeth that controls them and they're controlled by an international political order. ... what do we do about AI? ... We need a one world government to control all the computers; log every single keystroke to make sure people don't program a dangerous AI. And I've been wondering whether that's sort of going from the frying pan into the fire.

...the atheist philosophical framing is “one world or none.” That was a short film put out by the Federation of American Scientists in the late 40s, [and] starts with a nuclear bomb blowing up the world. And obviously you need a one world government to stop

*it. One world or none. And the Christian framing, which in some ways is the same question, is “Antichrist or Armageddon?” You have the one world state of the Antichrist or we’re sleepwalking towards Armageddon. One world or none. Antichrist or Armageddon on one level are the same question.*⁸

Breaking it down, Thiel’s techno-political eschatology can be stated as four connected threads.

First thread, the threats are real, but the fear is being magnified and manipulated.

Thiel agrees that nuclear, biological, artificial-intelligence, and other risks are serious. Yet he insists that the discourse of existential risk is amplified beyond the evidence, and that the amplification is politically advantageous for those who perform it.

In the same June 2025 conversation, Douthat asks Thiel to identify the Antichrist and how he or she will take over the world.

PETER THIEL:

... The way the Antichrist would take over the world is you talk about Armageddon nonstop. You talk about existential risk nonstop. And this is what you need to regulate. It’s the opposite of the picture of Baconian science from the 17th, 18th century, where the Antichrist is like some evil tech genius, evil scientist who invents this machine to take over the world. People are way too scared for that. ... In the 17th century, I can imagine a Dr. Strangelove, Edward Teller type person taking over the world. In our world, it’s far more likely to be Greta Thunberg.

ROSS DOUTHAT:

So I can buy that the world could turn to someone who promised peace and regulation if the world became convinced that AI was about to destroy everybody. Right. But I think to get to that point, you need one of the accelerationist apocalyptic scenarios to start to play out. Right. To get your peace and safety Antichrist, you need more technological progress.

PETER THIEL:

... Well, but again, there are these different gradations of this we can describe. But is this so preposterous, what I’ve just told you as a broad account of the stagnation that the entire world has submitted for 50 years to “Peace and Safetyism”? This is 1

⁸ Ross Douthat, interview with Peter Thiel, *Interesting Times*, New York Times Opinion, 26 June 2025. Transcript version, “A.I., Mars and Immortality: Are We Dreaming Big Enough?”, accessed 2 September 2026, <https://singjupost.com/a-i-mars-and-immortality-are-we-dreaming-big-enough-peter-thiel-transcript/>. Video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vV7YgnPUxcU>.

Thessalonians 5:3. The slogan of the Antichrist is “peace and safety.” And we’ve submitted to it.

According to Thiel, the way the Antichrist system achieves world governance (and global regulation) is through magnifying fear and manipulation, with a strong man promising and delivering “peace with security” at the expense of freedom and democracy—a relatively small price to pay to avoid an Armageddon collapse of civilization.

Second thread, one-world governance (which many think is the remedy) is itself the catastrophe.

A centralized authority able to halt a technology across the whole earth must have global reach and no outside authority. Thiel calls this the one-world state promoting a false sense of peace and safety, and identifies it with the spirit of the Antichrist and the sure destruction the apostle Paul warns against in I Thessalonians 5:3: “For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them.” In Paul’s letter to the Thessalonian Christians the point is not that peace and safety are bad things but that they are the words on the lips of a deceptive and doomed order—a security promised precisely where it cannot be delivered.

Thiel is claiming that global governance will arrive not as a conquest but as a welcomed relief by frightened populations who have been taught to want it. According to *The Guardian*’s reconstruction of the San Francisco lecture series, Thiel reads the Book of Daniel as “a prophecy about globalization, empire, and the dangers of a one-world state.”

What we first imagine as the solution to the existential threats may become the catastrophe we had hoped to avoid.⁹ Knowledge increasing, science progressing, and technology improving can be very good things, he grants—the end of disease and death, protection from natural disasters—even as the same powers allow us to destroy ourselves with nuclear and biological weapons. Globalization, likewise, brings trade in goods and services. The danger, in his telling, lies in the one-world state of the Antichrist.¹⁰

Or the advent of unrestrained Artificial General Intelligence, AI sentience and Singularity. And/or a dangerous road toward biological or nuclear World War Three.

At the secret lectures in San Francisco, in response to a question about whether World War Three might be a ‘Just War’ in the Christian sense, Thiel admits:

I think we can say that if you had an all-out world war three or war between nuclear powers involving nuclear weapons, it would simply be an unjust war. A total

⁹ Douthat interview with Thiel, 26 June 2025, transcript as above.

¹⁰ *The Guardian*, 10 October 2025.

*catastrophe, possibly literal Armageddon, the end of the world. So World War three will be an unjust war.*¹¹

In “Voyages to the End of the World,” his co-authored literary essay with Sam Wolfe in *First Things*, Thiel commends the prophet Daniel as a worthy guide to the end of the age. Daniel, he says, “envisioned history as a succession of four kingdoms, ending with the Roman Empire,” and interprets Daniel 12:4—“many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased”—as the rise of a new kind of knowledge, perhaps a special type of superintelligence revealed in the last days. It means, he writes, science progressing, technology improving, globalization, people traveling around the world. *Multi pertransibunt et augebitur scientia* is a kind of eschatological mantra for Thiel and the technologists of Silicon Valley.¹²

His exegesis continues:

*An evil king or anti-messiah appears in the Old Testament books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Daniel imagined the four great empires of human history as beasts, the last of which has “ten horns” and represents the Roman Empire (Dan. 7:7). These ten horns, an angel explains, symbolize ‘ten kings that shall arise’ as Rome falls (Dan. 7:24). Daniel prophesied that these ten would be subjugated by an eleventh: “I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn . . . and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things” (Dan. 7:8). This “little horn” will rule the world’s powers and principalities for three and a half years before the apocalypse.*¹³

What globalists propose as a remedy for existential threats will itself become the catastrophe, he says in response to a question from his audience: “Of course, you have all these examples where it’s one toggle switch from katechon to the antichristic thing. Claudius to Nero, Charlemagne to Napoleon, anti-communism after the Berlin Wall comes down, it gets replaced by neoliberalism.” For political philosophy, Thiel adds sardonically, the question “One world or none?” has but one answer: *better red than dead*. Theology reformulates the question as “Antichrist or Armageddon?” To which, he says, the Christian replies: neither. He prays instead for new miracles, new technologies, and strange new possibilities.¹⁴

¹¹ Peter Thiel, leaked San Francisco lectures, quoted in Johana Bhuiyan, Dara Kerr, and Nick Robins-Early, “Inside tech billionaire Peter Thiel’s off-the-record lectures about the antichrist,” *The Guardian*, 10 October 2025.

¹² Peter Thiel and Sam Wolfe, “Voyages to the End of the World,” *First Things*, November 2025. The Latin tag—“Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased”—is the Vulgate rendering of Daniel 12:4, which Francis Bacon placed on the frontispiece of the *Instauratio Magna* (1620).

¹³ Thiel and Wolfe, “Voyages to the End of the World,” *First Things*, November 2025.

¹⁴ *The Guardian*, 10 October 2025; and Thiel and Wolfe, “Voyages to the End of the World.”

Third, something restrains the beast, for now.

In the San Francisco secret lectures, Thiel explains why the United States plays a unique role in apocalyptic eschatology:

America is, at this point, the natural candidate for katechon and antichrist, ground zero of the one-world state, ground zero of the resistance to the one-world state. The US world police is the one truly sovereign country. ... International law gets defined by the US.

If we forget its essential role, which is to restrain the antichrist, the antichrist might even present himself or itself or herself as the katechon, or hijack the katechon. ... The katechon is tied in with empire and politics. If the antichrist is going to take over the world, you need something very powerful to stop it.¹⁵

The global financial architecture, he adds in the same lecture, is not run by shadowy international organizations but is basically American—above all through the reserve-currency status of the dollar, which functions as the backstop for all the money and recycles the world's surpluses back into the United States. The country is simultaneously the most outside the world state and a kind of ideological superpower, at once Christian, ultra-Christian, and anti-Christian, a city on a hill serving as a beacon to other nations.

Thiel currently locates the restraining force in American power—particularly the leverage the United States derives from its position in the global financial system, including the capacity to exclude adversaries from payment infrastructure. He has hedged publicly on whether Trump and the MAGA coalition occupy the same role. To his credit, he repeats Schmitt's own warning back against himself: a restrainer can become the thing it restrains, and one should never identify the *katechon* with a particular institution or civil authority. Yet he associates it with civil authorities and traditional institutions and admits that the current *katechon* can easily flip to the antichrist.

The restraining force is more than a spiritual force, more than institutional power, and more than one national or transnational state. It is a system that includes the dollar-clearing architecture, the sanctions apparatus, the defense-technology sector, and the fusion of government data across agencies. Thiel is not just an observer of this system but part of it. He co-founded Palantir Technologies, whose principal business is integrating and analyzing state data for intelligence, military, immigration-enforcement, and policing clients. Add to this the physical infrastructure now being built at speed—data centers with the power draw of mid-sized cities, frontier models deployed without external audit, autonomous capabilities integrated into weapons systems.

Before drawing the obvious conclusion, the tradition imposes a discipline on the one who draws it. The Antichrist material is an exercise in discernment, not a targeting system. What we are

¹⁵ *The Guardian*, 10 October 2025

asked to discern is spirits and systems, not persons. There is real good and real evil at work in the world, and I do not intend to soften that; but sound theology does not sort human beings into ontologically good and evil natures. The governing text is Ephesians 6:12: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Structures of domination, not neighbors. The usable rule is this: no living person is identifiable as the Antichrist, while any power that demands ultimate loyalty and sanctifies domination is antichristic in tendency. And the rule admits no exceptions—not for Thiel’s named legionnaires, not for the technocracy he proposes, not for whatever one has designated the restrainer, and not for one’s own side.

By that rule, a public theologian is obliged to name not a man but a system. An apparatus built to make populations legible and subject to the state, extending surveillance and domination without accountability, is antichristic in tendency, and it is a stronger candidate for the imagery of universal control than the treaty bodies Thiel warns against. If we are looking for a technology that could plausibly exert total control and admit no appeal, we need not look toward Geneva.

For Thiel, however, the enemy is not new technology but the global empire that would restrain it. In evangelical predictive prophecy the Antichrist is the machine—the barcode, the microchip, the cashless economy, the universal database. Thiel’s Antichrists are dangerous Luddites. In the leaked recordings he names Greta Thunberg, Eliezer Yudkowsky, and Nick Bostrom not as the Antichrist himself but as “legionnaires of the Antichrist,” advance agents of an anti-technological world order. The vessel is Evangelical; the contents have been reversed.

The corollary deserves to be stated with equal vigor: if binding coordination is the Antichrist and stagnation is the road to it, then the remedy is unimpeded technological development in the hands of those capable of producing it—which is to say, committed technocrats. Thiel seems willing to sacrifice local democracies to avoid the global Beast. More precisely, he is prepared to accept a considerable reduction in democratic accountability to avoid what he takes to be the greater dangers. Thiel said in 2009 that he no longer believed freedom and democracy were compatible. His current lectures on the Antichrist are the theological elaboration of that sentiment.

Fourth, if restraint fails, exit.

This is the least explicit and least documented part of the system, inferred from a long public record rather than from the lectures themselves. Thiel became a New Zealand citizen in 2011 and owns a 477-acre property near Lake Wānaka, though the widely repeated claim that he has built an apocalypse compound there is not accurate.¹⁶ What matters is not any particular building but

¹⁶ Thiel became a New Zealand citizen in 2011 and owns a 477-acre (193-hectare) property on which he wants to build some kind of security compound. Civil consent for the lodge was refused by the Queenstown Lakes District

the logic. When the world becomes uninhabitable through collapse or intolerable through control, the answer is not to repair it but to leave it.

The best way for tech billionaires and aspiring monarchs to escape crumbling civilizations at the end of the world is through a post-apocalyptic survival or high-tech transport. This eschatological thread brings us to Thiel's secular concept of the "Rapture."

IV. The Rapture

The Pauline word for escaping terror before the worst arrives is *rapture*. Thiel's version is the survival compound, the transnational passport, and the billionaire's yacht—and set beside the evangelical Rapture, the structural identity is hard to miss.

According to American Christian dispensationalists, the Rapture is promised to those who are faithful to the end. When the world enters its worst period, the Great Tribulation, a select group will be removed before the suffering and persecution begin. The point of the doctrine is deliverance *from* the suffering that those left behind must endure. One does not have to heal the world, repair the planet, or even survive its destruction. One must belong to the righteous remnant, and watch and pray, for the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, and those who say "peace and safety" will not escape.

The theological objections are well established. The doctrine rests on a nineteenth-century harmonization of texts that do not obviously fit together. It makes the church a spectator to history rather than a change agent within it. And it has repeatedly supported political passivity about environmental, nuclear, and humanitarian problems on the grounds that the faithful will not be present for the consequences. I do not say this from outside the tradition; I say it as someone who was taught the charts and had to unlearn them.

The techno-libertarian escape hatch promises the same thing by other means: seasteads, network states, private jurisdictions, hardened compounds, life extension, planetary settlement. The mechanism is capital rather than grace, but the shape is identical. When the world becomes uninhabitable, a select group exits. *Left Behind* readers wait for it. Thiel's peers purchase it with their wealth. Both are versions of an old temptation the tradition has been arguing about for centuries.

The point I want to hold charitably is this. One may believe many things about the end without departing from the tradition. But an eschatology whose *practical upshot* is that the prepared leave and the rest remain has changed the subject from redemption and healing to evacuation and escape. Christian salvation is not an evacuation plan. Like Judaism, it is a way to repair the world

Council in 2024 and the project apparently abandoned. See *Otago Daily Times* and *New Zealand Herald* coverage, 2022–2024.

and redeem humanity—which is why the ordinary citizens of the contaminated zone, who stayed, have more to teach us than the compound does.

V. Why Biblical Language?

A political argument about the dangers of an integrated global authority can be made entirely in secular terms. Friedrich Hayek and Karl Popper managed to critique scientism, totalitarianism and central economic planning without quoting a single scripture verse. So why does Thiel use the Bible?

The first answer is formation. Thiel’s religious biography is complicated and contradictory. *The New Yorker* reported in 2011 that he had been raised evangelical; a decade later he disputed that characterization. He has described himself as Lutheran by upbringing and affiliation and emphatically not Calvinist, has called his views “somewhat heterodox” and later “fairly orthodox,” attends a conservative Protestant congregation, supports progressive church plants and projects, and affirms the bodily resurrection of Jesus as the central miracle. His family were devout German immigrants who settled in California.

The religion scholar Bradley Onishi made the sharpest observation on this point: for all the heterodoxy, Thiel has “the same Antichrist as Billy Graham.”¹⁷ A coming world government, a restraining force that delays it, an escape for a select group—rings more Evangelical than Lutheran or Reformed, traditions that are reticent about end-times chronology. His eschatology resembles mid-century American revivalism, which saturated the culture Thiel grew up in, as it did for me.

The second answer is conviction, by way of Girard. Thiel studied with the Roman Catholic philosopher René Girard at Stanford in the late 1980s and has described the encounter as formative. Girard’s mimetic theory holds that human desire is imitative—we want what others want—which breeds rivalry. To discharge the conflict, groups unite to project blame onto a single victim or scapegoat. This “scapegoat mechanism” creates temporary peace and unity and forms a foundation for human culture and civil religion. The Gospels, Girard argued, expose the mechanism from the inside by narrating it from the victim’s point of view, and condemn the killing of the scapegoat, Jesus himself having been a Roman scapegoat. Authentic Christianity takes the side of the innocent victim, revealing the truth about human violence and divine love.

¹⁷ Bradley Onishi, quoted in Hayden Royster, “Silicon Valley’s Christ-curious moment: The evangelical groups courting tech elites,” Religion News Service, 2 January 2026. Onishi’s point is that the formal structure of Thiel’s eschatology parallels that of mid-twentieth-century American revivalist preaching, whatever the differences in content.

If Thiel and others actually believe this, then the religious language is not a decorative metaphor for a political purpose. It is an ethical and theological description of what occurs in culture and how to respond faithfully to it.

The trickier question is how to distinguish the victim from the perpetrator, the oppressed from the oppressor—because in the historical record the two regularly exchange positions, and the mechanism works precisely because it is invisible from the inside. The crowd never believes it is a crowd. Yesterday's persecuted minority becomes tomorrow's established power; the accused of one generation becomes the accuser of the next. Girard's contribution was not a rule for identifying villains but a warning about how easily any of us join a unanimous accusation and mistake it for justice.

Which is why the form of Thiel's project deserves attention alongside its content. Consider what it is: a closed gathering of people who hold enormous power, achieving cohesion by naming living individuals as agents of a cosmic enemy, in language that cannot be negotiated with, in rooms where the accused cannot answer. That is not an application of mimetic theory. It is a demonstration of it. The lecture series performs the very operation its intellectual patron spent fifty years exposing.

And the point generalizes to the one making it. Girard's students are not exempt from Girard's mechanism, and neither is a theologian who names Palantir. What the theory asks of all of us is external accountability—the willingness to be read, questioned, and corrected by people who are not our own employees.

The third answer is rhetorical function. Political language invites negotiation; apocalyptic language forecloses it. To call consolidated global governance a dangerous idea is to invite political conversation. To call it the Antichrist is to convert a policy dispute into a cosmic one in which compromise becomes apostasy and opponents become legionnaires. This is how the apocalyptic phrase “New World Order” has functioned in American religious culture for a century, and it obscures the argument over whether the underlying policy view is right or wrong.

The fourth answer is legitimization. The new technology, especially surveillance and AI, is controversial and unpopular with the public. As a major defense-technology shareholder, Thiel's belief in technocracy requires a legitimization process, and in his mind, theological justification. Government regulation of AI (beyond some basic agreed upon guardrails), for Thiel and others, would be a social and economic disaster. The best alternative, in their view, is a new and powerful technocracy (in the hands of a trusted few) that preserves individual freedom and ensures the survival of civilization. (even if democracy must be sacrificed).¹⁸

¹⁸ One vocal member of Thiel's inner circle with extreme views on the need for a technocracy is Curtis Yarvin, who calls himself a “royalist” or tech-monarch. Long known by his pseudonym “Mencius Moldbug,” Yarvin calls for the liquidation of democracy and the eventual dissolution of nations into a “patchwork” of sovereign corporations, each run by a C.E.O. answerable only to a secret board. Thiel has not endorsed monarchism, and his eschatological

In my judgment, the human capacity to arrive at a sincere political or theological conclusion that happens to be indistinguishable from one's own advantage is not a cynical but a realistic assessment of human nature. Religious traditions have words for this tendency: self-interest, self-deception, selfishness, hypocrisy, and dare I say sin.

So is Thiel serious, or playing with religious symbols? Both, I think, and the distinction may not matter. He has studied the scriptures, finds the symbols helpful, made his own apocalyptic charts and diagrams, and believes the narrative to be true. But he is not doing serious theology in the disciplined sense: there is no ecclesial accountability, no sustained engagement with the exegetical tradition that has worked these passages for two thousand years, no visible willingness to be corrected by professional theologians whose vocation is the study of these texts and their history of interpretation in multiple contexts. Call it freelance eschatology—serious in intent, unaccountable in method.

Which brings us to the secrecy, which deserves more attention than it has received.

VI. Why in Secret?

Why deliver an argument you believe to be both true and urgent in private rooms that forbid recording devices, bar journalists, and ask participants not to discuss the content outside the gathering? I put the question to a colleague, an Episcopal priest, who attended the San Francisco series, and his surmise was modest and probably correct as far as it goes: Thiel may be workshopping the material before committing to it publicly, “maybe because it’s so potentially incendiary and open to mischaracterization and hype.” Several further explanations are plausible and not mutually exclusive.

Esotericism (secret, coded, knowledge) a feature in Thiel's circle. For example, he argues that a coming human antichrist, to be able to pull off a one-world government, would have to be “a youthful conqueror.” In numerology, he points to the auspicious number 33 as significant because it mirrors the age of Jesus at his death and is elaborated across Roman historiography, Buddhist tradition, Islamic accounts of the afterlife. And, of course, 666 is the identifying number for the Beast of Revelation.¹⁹

framework is distinct from Yarvin's; the association is by patronage and proximity. Thiel invested in Yarvin's software company, introduced him to J.D. Vance, and includes him as a dialogue partner for his project. See Ava Kofman, “Curtis Yarvin's Plot Against America,” *The New Yorker*, June 9, 2025 (in print as “Autocracy Now!”).

¹⁹ To quote Thiel: “Christ only lived to age 33 and became history's greatest man. The antichrist has to somehow outdo this. I don't want to be way too literal on the 33 number – I'd rather stress the antichrist will be a youthful conqueror; maybe in our gerontocracy, 66 is the new 33. But something like these numbers do occur almost mystically through a number of different contexts. Buddha begins his travels at age 30 and experiences Nirvana, ego death, at age 33. ... One idea that's pretty cool is, when you're reborn into your afterlife, you're born into your 33-year-old self. Your 33-year-old self is your best self. Livy's – the Roman historian's 33rd chapter of the 33rd book – it announces this 33-year-old conqueror. It's like Alexander at the peak of his power. Or even in Tolkien, the hobbits

The political philosopher Leo Strauss argued that philosophers throughout history wrote on two levels: an exoteric surface for the general reader and an esoteric teaching for the careful few, partly for their own safety and partly because unguarded truth destabilizes societies. Perhaps the Straussian conviction applies to the new technology, that serious teaching is properly reserved for those prepared to receive it, and that a closed room produces a different and better kind of thought than a public one. Whatever its merits as literary history, as a practice it is an argument for governing by initiates.

The irony is not subtle. One of the world's richest and most powerful men, warning that a coming world order will subject humanity to inescapable informational, economic, and social control, convened an invitation-only lecture series on the Antichrist under conditions of strict informational control. Predictably, despite the ground rules, the private recordings were leaked to the press within weeks.

It is worth adding that Thiel's eschatology has been rejected by essentially every institutional Christian body that has commented on it, while being held with enthusiasm by a specific enclave that happens to sit near the center of American technological and political power.²⁰ Marginality of belief and centrality of position are not the same thing, and it is the second that should concern this readership.

VII. Conclusion and Implications

Peter Thiel has constructed a coherent political theology in which catastrophic risk is real, global coordination is the Antichrist, civilizational collapse is Armageddon, American financial power and technological acceleration are the restrainers that hold both at bay, and private exit is the fallback. Both beasts—totalitarian control and total civilizational collapse—must be avoided at all costs. The argument is delivered in closed rooms to an initiated audience and is held with conviction by a small network sitting very near the center of American power.

My judgment is that the diagnosis is half right and the prescription is inverted. Scale and accountability are genuinely the problem with planetary authority, and Thiel is right that any authority claiming ultimacy is dangerous and antichristic in tendency. But the apocalyptic imagery, applied consistently and without exemption, falls at least as heavily on the surveillance-and-sanctions system he calls the restrainer as on the integrated global governance he calls the beast. His proposed restraining force bears more of the marks of the beast he fears than the

have a coming-of-age ceremony at 33. That's how old Frodo is when he inherits the ring." Leaked San Francisco lectures, 2025, as reported in *The Guardian*, 10 October 2025.

²⁰ Fr. Paolo Benanti, who advises Pope Leo XIV on artificial intelligence, described the project as a "prolonged act of heresy against the liberal consensus." The Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Catholic University of America both denied involvement with the Rome lectures. Mainline Protestant reaction has been negative. See Crispian Balmer, "Thiel's secretive Rome conference draws Church attention," Reuters, 15 March 2026. Evangelical reaction, in my observation, has been mixed, perhaps because the content has been inverted against the deepest instincts of traditional prophecy belief.

international bodies he warns against. And the alternative he offers—accelerated, AI-driven technological power in few hands, with exit for those who can afford it—reproduces the consolidation and the unaccountability that made the global state frightening in the first place.

For theologians: correct him from the sources

Thiel has done something almost no one else has managed. He has made eschatology consequential again. Academic theology largely relegated “last things” to a closing chapter. We are embarrassed by the predictive-prophecy industry and unwilling to make political claims and policy proposals in eschatological terms. Thiel has reopened questions that were dormant—the identity of the *restrainer*, the theology of technology, divine providence and the direction of history—and has forced those of us who object to say what we really think about *apocalypse*.

But it is not enough to say that he is misreading the Gospels and the Letters of Paul. Biblical theologians must say what we think Paul meant, how the texts have been interpreted historically, and what follows from that in multiple contexts. The discipline owes Thiel’s argument a serious reply, in public, in language political scientists can read.

For political scientists: follow the logic, and the money

Thiel offers the field a logical and symbolic account of the refusal of an integrated world order that is not merely nationalist self-interest. He restates the discipline’s oldest problem at planetary scale: world governance with no outside authority and possibly no exit. And he is a live demonstration that political theology now operates at the highest levels of American power, which most of the discipline had assumed was no longer the case.

The practical stakes are high. As the current administration enters its lame-duck phase, and as artificial intelligence approaches singularity and agents go rogue, the ideological work of describing and managing what comes next is imperative. Thiel is not a mere commentator. He is a major donor, an employer, a shareholder, and the most important private benefactor of the man most likely to seek the presidency in 2028. Arguments for coordination and guardrails on AI, biosecurity, climate, and taxation will increasingly be met not with counterarguments about cost or sovereignty but with claims about ultimate allegiance and spiritual danger. One cannot refute a demonology with institutional design. The discipline will have to learn to read theologically, which is a large part of why I have written this analysis.

For world citizens: discern the times

The word *apocalypse*, once more, means unveiling rather than destruction. What it unveils is who holds power, who benefits, and who pays. The useful question is not whether Thiel’s Antichrist is coming. It is whether we can still tell the difference between an order that protects the vulnerable and one that merely promises safety for the few.

The discipline of discernment supplies the questions, and they may be put to any proposed order—global, national, or corporate, and to one’s own as readily as to another’s. Does it demand ultimate loyalty? Does it clothe domination in the language of salvation? Does it promise safety in exchange for the capacity to dissent? Does it produce victims and require us not to see them? Who is exempt from it, and who pays for it? We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers. We live in apocalyptic times, the stakes are high, and spiritual discernment is required—not just for professional theologians and political scientists, but for global citizens who envision a better world.

The constructive alternative, to be explored in Part Two of this study, is not an unaccountable world state in the hands of a few. It is an integrated global authority by popular consent that is explicitly penultimate: plural rather than singular, bounded in competence, accountable in jurisdiction, appealable, revisable, removable, and making no promise of salvation. Such a provisional authority may prove a better restraint against a system of Antichrist than an ultimate hegemon, and a better restraint against an Armageddon collapse than a bunker without coordination or community.

Disclosure of AI Use

In preparing this essay I the used Claude (Anthropic) for initial research synthesis, analytical dialogue, source verification, and content drafting across six revisions. The argument, structure, theological judgments, insights, conclusions, applications, and writing style are my own. I have reviewed all sources cited and am solely accountable for the accuracy and integrity of the final product.

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