

# Inside billionaire Peter Thiel's private lectures: Warnings of 'the Antichrist' and U.S. destruction

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*The Washington Post reviewed leaked audio from four off-the-record lectures the tech investor delivered in San Francisco over the past month that fused beliefs about religion and technology.*

Tech billionaire Peter Thiel recently warned that Swedish activist Greta Thunberg and critics of technology or artificial intelligence are "legionnaires of the Antichrist" in private lectures on Christianity that connected government oversight of Silicon Valley to an apocalyptic future, according to recordings reviewed by The Washington Post.

In the four, roughly two-hour lectures, which began last month and culminated Monday at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco, Thiel laid out his religious views to a sold-out audience told to keep the contents "off-the-record," according to an event listing. He argued that those who propose limits on technology development not only hinder business but also threaten to usher in the destruction of the United States and an era of global totalitarian rule, according to the recordings.

"In the 17th, 18th century, the Antichrist would have been a Dr. Strangelove, a scientist who did all this sort of evil crazy science," Thiel said in his Sept. 15 opening talk, according to the recordings. "In the 21st century, the Antichrist is a Luddite who wants to stop all science. It's someone like Greta or Eliezer," he said, referring to Thunberg and Eliezer Yudkowsky, a prominent critic of the tech industry's approach to AI.

Thunberg has criticized global capitalism as a driver of environmental degradation while Yudkowsky advocates for limiting AI research to prevent the technology from surpassing human intelligence. Thiel previously funded Yudkowsky's work but said in his Sept. 15 lecture that he is now embarrassed by the association and that the AI critic and others like him have become "deranged," according to the recordings.

Thiel's lectures come at a time of rising Christian nationalism in the United States. Christians have varying interpretations of the biblical Antichrist, but the figure is often understood to be an opponent of God who appears during the end-times.

The Post sent Thiel, through a spokesperson, a detailed list of questions about his remarks in the lectures, but Thiel declined to comment.

Yudkowsky said in a statement “my understanding is that authorities from multiple Christian denominations have stated that Thiel’s views, identifying the Antichrist with proposals to regulate the AI industry, are not deemed by them to be compatible with conventional Christian belief.” Spokespeople for Thunberg did not respond to a request for comment.

The Post reviewed audio recordings of all four of Thiel’s lectures, titled “The Antichrist: A Four-Part Lecture Series.” A review of a sample of the audio by Hany Farid, a digital forensics expert and professor at the University of California at Berkeley, indicated they were probably authentic and not manipulated by AI. Reuters previously reported some passages from Thiel’s lectures.

Thiel, an early investor in Facebook and co-founder of data analytics firm Palantir, has long espoused libertarian views, arguing that politics, bureaucracy and regulations have led to economic stagnation in the U.S. and Europe.

But the recent lectures appear to mark an intensification of this ideology and attempt to pitch it on a grander scale. The recordings offer new detail about how the billionaire seems to place those who would critique or regulate tech developers into a religious good-vs.-evil worldview, where the future of all creation depends on giving innovators free rein.

Silicon Valley leaders have escalated their fight against regulating AI since President Donald Trump’s inauguration. Thiel has close ties to administration officials including Vice President JD Vance, White House science adviser Michael Kratsios and David Sacks, White House AI and crypto czar. As one of the industry’s most influential leaders, his effort to cast resisting oversight of technology development as a religious battle could intensify the industry’s crusade.

Thiel said in his third lecture, on Sept. 29, that only a religious argument could inspire the proper response to the threat of a growing web of global rules, according to the recording.

“There are a lot of rational reasons I can give why the one-world state’s a bad idea: Turn the planet into a prison; I think the tax rates would be very high,” he said, according to the recording. “But I think if you strip it from the biblical context, you will never find it scary enough. You will never really resist.”

The billionaire’s lectures were also notable as a forceful display of religiosity in an industry that has historically been secular. Christianity has recently become a significant presence in some influential tech circles, in part because of ACTS 17 Collective, a nonprofit dedicated to spreading Christian principles inside the tech industry that organized the Thiel lectures.

Those with tickets were required to attend the full series of four talks in addition to respecting the off-the-record policy, the event listing said. Thiel hinted in his third lecture on Sept. 29 that the restriction was intended to draw more attention to his ideas, according to the recording. “It’s a pretty good marketing shtick if

you want everyone to hear about something, not to let anyone into the room,” he said. “I’m not bragging, but I’m not totally incompetent.”

The billionaire spoke for nearly eight hours across the four private lectures about his theories of the role of technology in society and the world, according to the recordings, citing sources ranging from the Bible and theological and philosophical texts to Japanese anime.

He acknowledged that technology could have negative effects on people and society but argued that constraining its development would be more harmful.

“Maybe these things are good or bad — stopping them seems far, far worse,” he said, according to the recordings. “If the internet or the AI deranges some people but we have to shut it down altogether, that feels like out of the frying pan into the fire — a cure that’s far worse than the disease.”

A threadbare patchwork of state laws imposes limits on AI development, requiring California companies to safety-test products and preventing Texas companies from discriminating against protected classes. Despite a flurry of activity in Washington in recent years, no federal law has passed.

Thiel argued that critiques of technology and calls for stricter regulation by Thunberg and others appear to echo biblical interpretations of an Antichrist who will win power by offering the world “peace and safety” from apocalyptic destruction, according to the recordings. He previously cited Thunberg in a June interview with the New York Times

Thiel also accused Swedish philosopher Nick Bostrom, who is known for popularizing the idea that humanity will eventually invent a potentially dangerous “superintelligence,” of advocating for restrictions on technology that will hold society back, according to the recordings.

In an interview, Bostrom said his views are “complex” and have evolved to focus more on the positive potential of AI. “Maybe he needs a new casting agency for his demonology,” Bostrom said of Thiel.

Thiel, whose net worth is around \$27 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, also used his private talks to criticize financial regulations. He said such rules were a sign that a singular world government has begun to emerge that could be taken over by an Antichrist figure who could then use it to exert control over people.

“It’s become quite difficult to hide one’s money,” Thiel said, according to the recordings. “An incredible machinery of tax treaties, financial surveillance and sanctions architecture has been constructed.” Wealth gives the “illusion of power and autonomy,” Thiel added, according to the recordings, “but you have this sense it could be taken away at any moment.”

Thiel has deep ties to the Trump administration and was early among tech figures to endorse the president’s first run for office in 2016. He did not donate

to any Republican politicians in 2024 but was part of a network of tech elites who helped install Vance, a mentee, as vice president.

Thiel has donated to GOP candidates this year, giving \$850,000 to the joint fundraising committee of House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-Louisiana), according to federal election filings.

In his lectures and the Q&As that followed each one, Thiel offered views on whether figures including President Trump, Chinese President Xi Jinping, former president Joe Biden and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates were Antichrist-like figures, according to the recordings.

Biden and Xi were not charismatic enough, Thiel said, according to the recordings, and while he declared Gates a “very, very awful person,” the investor said he was not “remotely able to be the Antichrist.”

Thiel’s comments about Trump were more complex, according to the recordings. “If you, in a sincere, rational, well-reasoned way are willing to make the argument that Trump is the Antichrist, I will give you a hearing,” he said. “If you’re not willing to make that argument, maybe you have to be open to possibility that he’s at least relatively good.”

A spokesman for Thiel, Jeremiah Hall, said: “Peter doesn’t believe Trump is the Antichrist. His challenge was for Trump’s liberal critics to make that case if they want Peter to hear them out, and he knows that in practice they can’t and won’t do so.” The White House did not return a request for comment.

Thiel also talked about other powerful figures in technology. He accused fellow tech investor Marc Andreessen of “pure Silicon Valley gobbledygook propaganda,” according to the recordings, in Andreessen’s 2023 essay titled “The Techno-Optimist Manifesto” that predicted AI would rapidly transform society in many positive ways.

Thiel had kinder words about Tesla CEO Elon Musk, according to the recordings, calling the entrepreneur, who has recently praised Christianity, one of the “smarter, more thoughtful people” he knows.

The investor said he recently encouraged Musk to renege on his 2012 commitment to the Giving Pledge movement co-founded by Gates, which asks wealthy people to commit the majority of their fortune to charitable causes, according to the recordings.

“\$200 billion — if you’re not going to be careful — is going to left-wing nonprofits that are going to be chosen by Bill Gates,” Thiel said he warned Musk, according to the recording, painting the philanthropist as among the malevolent forces besetting technologists.

Musk did not respond to a request for comment. Spokespeople for Andreessen and Gates did not respond to requests for comment. Reuters previously reported some of Thiel’s comments on Trump and Musk.

Thiel has long been a devout Christian, but in recent times he and other prominent Silicon Valley figures have been more vocal about their faith. The movement has gained momentum since Trump's reelection and has become entangled with the rapid development of artificial intelligence, which some see as a potentially all-powerful technology raising deep questions about humanity.

ACTS 17, the Christian nonprofit that organized Thiel's talks, is an acronym for Acknowledging Christ within Technology and Society. Its name also refers to the New Testament book of Acts, in which the apostle Paul travels to Athens, where he debates the Christian Gospel with philosophers.

The group's founder, Michelle Stephens, is married to Trae Stephens, an investor at Thiel's venture capital firm, Founders Fund, and a co-founder of military tech company Anduril.

Stephens has said that she got the idea for ACTS 17 at a 40th birthday party for her husband in 2023. At the celebration, she has said in interviews, Thiel gave a speech about Christ and miracles, prompting her to realize that ministering to elites is just as important as Christian teachings about ministering to the poor.

Stephens introduced Thiel at his first lecture on Sept. 15 as "one of the great capitalists" and also "great Christians of our time," according to the recording. Protesters gathered outside the event, according to local news reports, with some dressed as devils or holding signs that accused Thiel himself of being the Antichrist.

When asked for comment, Stephens asked The Post to "respect" the event's off-the-record policy and did not comment further.

Garry Tan, chief executive of the start-up incubator Y Combinator and a member of ACTS 17, has hosted events in his San Francisco home — a converted church — about the intersection of Christian faith, science and technology over the past year.

One gathering hosted by Tan in June featured Pat Gelsinger, former CEO of chipmaker Intel, and was organized by ACTS 17, according to a social post by Gelsinger. "Such a deep discussion on the 'Holy Shift' across life, AI, leadership and faith," he wrote.

A spokesperson for Playground, a venture capital firm where Gelsinger is a general partner, declined to comment.

Tan said he thought Thiel's comparison of potential overregulation of AI to the Antichrist was "thought-provoking" and a "somewhat tongue-in-cheek" use of the concept. "These are useful mental frameworks for how technology interacts with society," he said.

Overregulation of nuclear power has worsened the climate crisis, he added. "What if we do that to the age of intelligence? The future won't repeat, but it will rhyme."