



IS THIEL NIHILISTIC ENOUGH?

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ABSTRACT: This essay critically examines Peter Thiel's interpretation of the Antichrist and the *katechon* as frameworks for understanding the contemporary crisis of Western civilization. It argues that the central challenge facing the West is not merely the threat of eschatological collapse, but the emergence of a new form of nihilism rooted in the decline of shared religious and cultural foundations. Drawing on Nietzsche, Girard, Dostoevsky, and European intellectual history, the article suggests that contemporary nihilism may function not only as a symptom of decline but also as a source of new forms of meaning, sacrifice, and collective purpose. The question is therefore not how to prevent nihilism, but whether its energies can be directed toward a constructive civilizational future.

Keywords: Nihilism; Peter Thiel; *Katechon*; Antichrist; Western Civilization.

In Spring 2026, I was invited to discuss “the Antichrist” with Peter Thiel. His private lecture series stir public debate. Or, at least, they stir the public pot. It seems any idea of the tech bros is, by continuation, understood as a bid for upcoming policy in the Trump administration. It has long been unspoken that the driving seat of the administration, the country-listening heartlanders, follow the lead of the West Coast right.

Such political machinations are true, but equally: Thiel's *specific* interest in the Antichrist is no mere will to power. His diagnosis concerns us in the West, in particular. Our civilization is haunted by it. Our philosophy of history, our event horizon of the possible, is constantly oscillating between two extremes. Either we get perpetuated progress, or the End Times.

In brief, Antichrist is more than memetic talking-points for following Orange Man (as suggested by that useless Spectator piece). Antichrist helps

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us — now speaking as a Nordic European — to pin down the specific problems that increasingly plague the West. I'm talking about *nihilism*.

“Antichrist” does ring strange to the modern ear. So the great Josef Pieper remarked, and Thiel picks up on this. This is because we have by now forgotten how obsessed Christian societies were with the coming of a false Messiah. If we want an indication of Western society's ‘post-Christian’ quality, the queer sound of the A-word is not a bad canary.

One used to call out political opponents for being the Antichrist. When Ian Paisley accused the European Union of culpability, he spoke only for the lingering quadrant of Protestant politics that is Northern Ireland. He was met not with shock but with all the incomprehension of the committee of sneers. Columbanus' work, undone at last.

After three hundred years of scientific revolution and Enlightenment, with empiricism morphing into empire, we in the West eventually forgot about the Antichrist. The Christian wars of religion terminated in Prague, in 1648, outside London's Banqueting House, in 1649, and at Fontainebleau, in 1685. Never again would public morality rest in something so incendiary as metaphysics.

Was it ever otherwise? The modern mind cannot comprehend.

Whilst almost all human cultures have had some account of the world's origins and eventual fate, Thiel's contention is that Christianity gave history a direction towards a certain end, where Antichrist arrives as a sign of the End Times.

The End Times, then, is very much a thing. In fact, Armageddon is the one meme that has pushed the ambitions of modernity furthest, giving rise to unprecedented global regulatory institutions. Within living memory we have witnessed numerous attempts at erecting international frameworks: against nuclear holocausts; against climate change; against pandemics; against AI.

While atomic bombs, fossil fuels, lab-grown viruses and generative computing are very much products of modernity, Thiel observes how this modern paradigm has driven us towards ever-growing attempts at con-

trolling human ingenuity. We have seen the Western zeitgeist shift from production to control: from producers to controllers. These controllers rose to power under the pretext of promising safety for all. One world, or none, so Oppenheimer prophesied, in fear and trembling.

We no longer speak about the Antichrist, Thiel contends, because the Antichristians won. Their eschatology — that another world is possible — is paradoxically predicated on a mistrust against anything innovative. Since Creativity and Destruction are kindred spirits, Promethean humans can no longer remain unbound. This is what it means to live at the End of History. That is to say, at the end of *Christian* History.

What would it take in our present day and age to keep the human spirit going? What is strong enough to withhold the coming of Antichrist? This is Thiel's question and, in it, his revolt against the modern world. In order to stand up against eschatology, against the Eschaton, Thiel argues that we must once again seek the *Katechon* (you may want to look up these terms).

Thus far, most critique against Thiel has taken the form of ridicule, and can be summarized along three lines of thinking. First, is not Thiel himself the Antichrist? Secondly, is not the Katechon just self-serving code for military products that Thiel himself invests in? And third, is not eschatology a bit *too much*? Too esoteric? Too nihilistic? Perhaps all talk of the Antichrist can best be dismissed as the nihilistic rants of a rich, bored man?

Woe to modern-day critics: they are too predictable. They are obsessed with, as mentioned above, the *general* concerns of modern society. And modern politics is all about the physical, and never about metaphysics.

Put differently, our critics reflect the very nihilism that refutes the possibility of a *specific* civilizational challenge facing the West, in this case the coming of the Antichrist. It is this nihilism that underpins and fuels eschatology, which is precisely the object that Thiel is now mounting an assault on.

But what if we were to *affirm* nihilism? If we play affirmative, acknowledging our present-day lack of meaning, we may more swiftly arrive at a new starting point from which action *gives* meaning.

The novelty and strangeness of this idea, I believe, stems from living in a historical period that as of yet lacks the language for describing our way out of it. So, while lacking the Word, as Faust remarked, “In the beginning was the Deed”.

This is the real concern that Thiel brings home, namely: that the Antichrist is not *enough*. Not esoteric enough. Not nihilistic enough.

It is not enough for *LIFE*, which is to be pronounced with so much spirit and spittle that italics and capitals are opportune.

After all, the Antichrist was not enough for Nietzsche. He busied himself with whole books on getting *Beyond Good & Evil*, and the ‘New Artists’ who might walk those unlit mountains. So, in his own way, did Goethe.

The Antichrist accelerates but does not arrive

When Thiel describes the Antichrist it is as a force gaining velocity, but never arriving. Acceleration and alarm, but no rupture in the world’s fabric. The end is near, but never here. Why is this?

While the Western man of today is by and large secular, when he thinks of the Antichrist he thinks as a *Christian* would. Or as they say in old England, as a *small-c conservative* would. To that Christian and conservative, the take-away message is to keep the world from ending. Like staving off the bursting of a speculative real-estate bubble. Beyond that bubble awaits only the Abyss, into which he does not dare plunge.

Thiel is no small-c conservative. We might do better to understand him as a *small-k katechon*. Or at least, Thiel’s great fortune gives him some katechontic power.

But Thiel's katechontic power is not enough to avert the Antichrist. What must be done instead, and what is more likely to happen, is that those with katechontic power prepare for what is coming.

The katechon of the 21st century, put bluntly, prepares for war.

What would that war look like? Or, if we stay within the language of Christian theology, what does the Antichrist look like?

The closest Thiel has gotten to describing the coming of the End Times is through the following Girard-inspired reading (if I recall correctly, Thiel told us):

The Antichrist will be a great individual. He will be the philosopher to end all philosophers, the individual to end all individuals, and the man to end all men.

What Thiel is saying is that the logic of Christian History has abolished scapegoating, up to the point that Antichrist can rise to power under the cover of darkness. Or, in some of his less esoteric words, Christianity has taken our eye off the kettle; now it might finally boil.

Herein lies a grim prophecy. If Christian History abolished scapegoating, it also follows that we now find ourselves in a novel, *strange*, situation where neither Pagan sacrifices, nor Christian forgiveness, any longer works for keeping Armageddon at bay.

This is the same as saying that Christian History is no longer enough. Not katechontic enough.

Recent European memory reflects the diminishing katechontic power of Christian history. The generations growing up after World War II were less likely to ask "What would Jesus do?", because they were too focused on "What would Hitler do?"

This "Nürnberg Christianity", as a friend recently described the Post-World War II consensus, reduced fundamental questions about the good life to a sort of social programming: de-Nazification, anti-racism, and being against anything carrying the semblance of nationalism.

European geostrategy, most notably that of the European Union, became by necessity a peace project. That is to say, a *negative* project formulated as a cautionary tale to ward off the evils of the past. To avoid Hitler, defang Europe.

From a spiritual point of view, Christian History and Christian democracies sapped our *vitality*.

To the secular Christian of today, who grew up under Nürnberg Christianity, “being good” and “not being evil” may sound similar. In reality, it is the difference between living life *with* or *without* spirit.

And as it turns out, the generations coming of age now no longer ask themselves, “What would Hitler do?”. *That* history, and its katechontic power (if ever it had any), has run its course. It has *run out*. The new generations are hungry for spirit.

So what kind of history are we in now?

We are still human. However much our sense of ourselves and our place in the world has been transformed since the World Wars, we still desire to belong. We still define ourselves in relation to others, still compare and compete, still this desire that fuels rivalries and conflicts, in ways that give meaning to our lives. And it is this pursuit of meaning that still makes sacrifice possible.

But in a godless world, where neither scapegoating nor forgiveness has power, where does that desire to belong drive us? It drives us towards what we are left with, that great modern creation: the self.

Unable to form group-level identities, and subsequently unable to use group-level sacrifice, our desire to belong focuses on individual identities. We come to desire our own suffering, to sacrifice ourselves, and in the process create meaning for ourselves.

We ended the war of all against one, only to end up with wars of one against anything.

This comes both before and beyond believing. It is about feeling, to feel *something*.

Why else would Nietzsche call himself the Antichrist? To be anything at all, you affirm your existence with a hammer.

Another way of understanding this state of mind is what is sometimes described as “Nordic courage”. You act recklessly so as to achieve a sense of immortality. Men have always wanted immortality. But to attain it through the machinations of the self, its queer innerness, and rampant action, is definitively modern.

There would be nothing Periclean in this new bid to be remembered. Going Berserk was not about being ‘expressive’ or engaging in some form of self-realisation. Berserks are bound to Odin through the ritual that is frenzied recklessness. Violence to these warriors is religious, like the sex of Corinthian prostitutes. Victory to the gods.

Could not all of this, too, be passed off as nihilism? If so, it would be as a new kind of *ironic* nihilism. The kind that leaves you puzzled as to why someone acts recklessly.

Like Dostoevsky’s Underground Man, stripping his own skin to prove he does not desire according to an algorithm.

Like that Penguin from Werner Herzog’s movie *Encounters at the End of the World*, running off into the hinterland, towards the Abyss.

Is that Penguin the Übermensch, or the Last Man?

Understanding what kind of nihilism we are witnessing now is crucial for understanding what kind of history we are in now.

I ask these because I do not believe that the Katechon of our time, nor Thiel himself, is about to reboot Christianity. Rather, what we are to discover is something new, a revision of our entire *operating* system, our conception of self at the most fundamental level.

We can draw on Christian language as a way of discussing these deeper questions, but we can draw equally upon other, older, traditions too.

For us Nordics, at least, it is easy to see how the West's intellectual landscape has long operated on Christian software, but it still runs on Pagan hardware.

The West wants something holy

An Apocalypse of a kind — the end of one world, and the beginning of a new — is on the horizon. As the structure of the world in which we have grown up crumbles, new conflicts arise, not just in the East but also within the West. I concede my view is very much tainted by recent European experiences, the geopolitical upheaval that Europe is undergoing. All the same, a pattern is by now taking shape across the board.

In the decades to come, there will be new leaders who can imagine what replaces our current forms, beyond the current political event horizon, beyond liberal democracy. To the Boomers, this does sound like the End Times. Peace and Safety is no longer our future. It's easy to understand how, in the face of that eschatology, one might go looking for a Katechon.

But this is a quest for older generations, those with much to lose. To the young nihilist European, I wonder, is there not more to be gained from the twilight of the old gods?

Materially speaking, the young European has less buy-in with the present-day regime. No home ownership. No kids. No job that defines you. And what job there is may soon be done by AI.

This is not about averting that future, but about spelling out its implications, for clarity, so as to ask the right questions: Generation Alpha will have the largest proportion of idle members in World History. What would a 21st century Katechon look like to them? What will be holy to them?

The Young European that I see coming of age is more likely to long for a battlefield to die on. Like the riders of Rohan at the Fields of Pelennor, “for ruin, and the world's ending”.

Recklessness will be Alpha's generational bottom. This is the abyss staring back at them.

With *nothing to die for*, then, will it be possible to *die for nothing*? When there is no reason to call a crusade, can a crusade be called because there is no reason not to? Are there grounds for the Deed, even if it leads to your own undoing?

And so, finally, here at the start of something new, I propose the challenge facing a Katechon of the early 21st century is whether this nihilistic spirit can be directed, and if so to what end. Regardless of what we wanted to believe about modern life, the world still fights holy wars. And the West wants something holy.