

The Convergence of L. Ron Hubbard and Peter Thiel

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This essay compares two movement-builders who locate deliverance in “technology”—Hubbard in spiritual technology, Thiel in civilizational technology—and now, increasingly, in explicit Christian eschatology. Hubbard’s system offers salvation by procedural ascent (courses, auditing, graded initiation) administered by an institution that claims uniquely efficacious knowledge. Thiel’s more recent public posture fuses venture logics with apocalyptic frames: lectures on the Antichrist, scriptural and patristic references, and a warning that global technocratic control could crystallize into an anti-progress “one-world” authority. In both projects, truths are cast as scarce “secrets,” organized through inner circles, and verified by results—spiritual relief and testimonial transformation on one side; monopoly, policy wins, and culture-level influence on the other. Our question is not whether Thiel “is a religion,” but whether both instantiate a single genus: soteriology by technique, myth operationalized as method, belonging structured by initiation, and authority consolidated through canon/capital. We analyze five dimensions—myth, method, membership, money, and measure—and propose tests for accountability that resist cultic closure while preserving serious inquiry. By reading Hubbard’s ecclesial machinery alongside Thiel’s increasingly theological venture-politics, we map a contemporary style of salvation-politics that blurs sacred and secular and reshapes how elites mobilize conviction.

Keywords: secular soteriology, technē of salvation, eschatology, Antichrist discourse, monopoly and secrets, initiation structures, canon vs corpus, para-church of capital, verification and falsification, charisma and institution, civil religion, apocalyptic narratives, governance ethics.

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1. Why This Comparison Now

1.1 Category caveat: church vs. capital network

This paper does not collapse a church into a venture network. It distinguishes their ontologies and truth-tests while analyzing shared movement mechanics. Hubbard founded an ecclesial system with soteriology, rites, and a prescriptive canon. Thiel leads an elite capital-intellectual network in which ideas travel through lectures, memos, financing, and policy ventures. Their accountability surfaces differ (sacrament/testimony vs. market and policy outcomes), yet both build forms of belonging around scarce knowledge, graded access, and a promise of deliverance—spiritual in one case, civilizational in the other. The comparison is methodological: it treats “salvation by technique” as a genus that can manifest as churchly liturgy or as venture politics—without asserting identity of aims or authority claims. (On Thiel’s lecture vehicle and networked dissemination, see recent coverage of the private Antichrist series; on his earlier public religio-political framing, see Hoover interviews.)

1.2 Convergence as an analytic rather than moral thesis

Our claim is analytic: both projects braid myth (grand narrative), method (repeatable procedure), membership (initiation/inner circle), money (sustaining organization), and measure (verification). This lens explains how secular elites can produce *civil religion*: apocalyptic stakes, named antagonists, and ritualized gatherings that mobilize conviction while retaining worldly tests (exits, elections, policy wins). Taking convergence seriously clarifies why these movements punch above the word count of their texts: Hubbard via canon and ecclesial scaffolding; Thiel via a slim corpus amplified by salons, capital, and media feedback loops—including satire that increases memetic reach (e.g., *South Park*’s send-up of his Antichrist talks). The point isn’t equivalence, but to map structural rhymes that matter for governance ethics and epistemic hygiene today.

1.3 Evidence of Thiel’s explicitly religious turn (lectures, sources)

Over the past year, Thiel has moved from allusions to explicit Christian-eschatological framing:

- Four-part series “The Antichrist” (San Francisco, off-the-record): Invitations and subsequent reporting confirm a sustained theological frame linking the Antichrist to modern “one-world” technocratic control and anti-tech sentiment; attendees and leaks emphasized his warnings about climate/AI-justified centralization and his call for religious courage to resist it.
- Named adversaries in a theological register: Accounts quote Thiel labeling prominent anti-tech figures as “legionnaires of the Antichrist,” refracting policy disputes through apocalyptic typology.

- Prior on-record theological scaffolding: In 2024 Hoover conversations, Thiel explicitly tied his “Christian intuition” to avoiding Armageddon and invoked the biblical term *Antichrist*, citing literary and theological sources (e.g., Solovyov, Newman/Benson tradition) as context for modern tech politics.
- Cultural confirmation loop: The lectures were widely covered and parodied (*South Park*), indicating that his religious rhetoric is now part of his public persona, not a private aside.
- Commentary across the spectrum: Analyses from *Reason*, *Wired*, and *The Guardian* situate the talks within libertarian suspicion of centralized power, Schmittian state-of-exception theory, and Silicon Valley’s religio-political turn—evidence that observers now read Thiel through an explicitly theological lens.

UpShot: Whatever one thinks of the content, the *register* has shifted: Thiel now advances a civilizational program in scriptural and apocalyptic terms he can quote fluently, making a disciplined comparison with Hubbard’s “spiritual technology” newly salient and timely.

2. Myth: Grand Narratives of Peril and Deliverance

2.1 Hubbard’s cosmology of trauma, purification, ascent

Hubbard’s master-story begins with a damaged psyche: the reactive mind stores engrams—traumatic imprints that trigger suffering and error. Salvation is procedural: through auditing one “clears” these engrams, then ascends the Bridge to Total Freedom across graded levels (including OT levels) that promise expanding agency and knowledge. The myth is linear and teleological—downward causation from hidden trauma, upward deliverance by a proprietary technique administered by an institution. The system grounds belonging (shared path), authority (the canon and auditors), and verification (testimony of relief and progress).

2.2 Thiel’s apocalyptic register: Antichrist, stagnation, one-world control

Thiel’s recent lectures recast political economy as eschatology: the Antichrist appears not as a horned tyrant but as a charismatic, modern anti-technology unifier who leverages AI/climate risk to justify centralized, global control. The peril is stagnation enforced by technocratic moralism; deliverance is civilizational tech progress backed by religious courage and dissident elites. This fuses his long-running “secrets/monopoly” growth myth with explicitly Christian frames, shifting the tone from contrarian VC to secular-sacred alarm. (Primary reporting documents the private, four-part Antichrist series; broader coverage tracks the one-world-control motif and his ability to quote scripture and Christian authors from memory.)

Media confirmation (culture loop): The lectures spilled into pop satire (e.g., *South Park*'s "Twisted Christian"), which both amplifies and caricatures the narrative—evidence that the apocalyptic frame is now part of Thiel's public mythos.

2.3 The function of enemies: suppressive persons vs. "legionnaires of the Antichrist"

Both mythologies mobilize by naming the obstructor. In Hubbard's world, the enemy is the Suppressive Person (SP)—an antagonist who impedes spiritual gains and must be identified, managed, or expelled to protect the movement's ascent. The SP concept externalizes failure, sharpens boundary policing, and justifies organizational discipline.

In Thiel's apocalyptic register, opponents of unfettered technics—cast in reporting as "legionnaires of the Antichrist"—become the antagonists whose moralizing restraints risk civilizational collapse. The effect is similar at the movement level: clarify the foe, heighten stakes, consolidate in-group resolve, and routinize vigilance. The difference is domain and test: ecclesial protection of spiritual progress vs. market/policy struggle over technological direction.

3. Method: From Spiritual Tech to Civilizational Tech

3.1 Procedure as promise: auditing vs. secrets/monopoly logics

Hubbard. The procedural core is *auditing*: a repeatable counseling technology that identifies and drains engrams using scripted interactions and the E-meter. Progress is formalized as ascension up the *Bridge to Total Freedom* (grades → Clear → OT levels), with each rung specifying techniques, "end phenomena," and fees. The promise is mechanized grace: reliable relief and ascent if one follows the protocol.

Thiel. The procedural core is *contrarian discovery* of "secrets" that support monopoly-scale firms (or policy thrusts). The promise is mechanized progress: if elites identify non-obvious truths and organize capital around them, society escapes stagnation. In his recent Antichrist lectures, this technique is nested inside a theological frame—progress as resistance to a unifying, anti-tech regime—so the method (find secrets → build monopolies) doubles as a civic calling. Reporting on the lectures emphasizes this fusion of method and soteriology.

3.2 Scripture, Newman, Solovyov, Benson: theological sources in Thiel's frame (*Hoover Institution*)

Across on-record conversations at Hoover, Thiel explicitly grounds his apocalyptic vocabulary in Christian sources:

- Vladimir Solovyov's "Short Tale of the Antichrist" (charismatic world-leader who prefers self to God).
- Robert Hugh Benson's *Lord of the World* (European president becomes global sovereign—proto one-world ruler).
- John Henry Newman and related Catholic currents that treat modernity's homogenizing moral consensus as a potential precursor to Antichrist. (Flagged by Hoover as context for Part I → Part II discussions.)

In the leaked San Francisco series, these sources reportedly scaffold his claim that climate/AI regimes can morph into theological substitutes—thus his insistence that only religious arguments can muster resistance to centralized moral-technology control. The method (elite discovery + capital formation) is thereby *theologically narrated* as a katechontic act—holding back illegitimate unification.

3.3 Efficiency claims: grace by process vs. progress by capital

Hubbard's efficiency thesis: properly applied auditing yields predictable spiritual outcomes; deviation from protocol (or contamination by SPs) explains failure. The institution's control of curriculum, apparatus, and canon secures procedural efficacy.

Thiel's efficiency thesis: properly applied contrarian-monopoly method yields superlinear returns and escapes to new frontiers; deviation (consensus, regulation, over-caution) explains stagnation. In the Antichrist frame, efficiency becomes moral: channel capital into technologies that widen human latitude before governance congeals. Coverage from *Wired*, *Reason*, and *The Washington Post* converges on this: the lectures recast venture method as eschatological duty—progress *now* to forestall a one-world freeze.

UpShot: In both systems, *procedure* is the guarantor of deliverance—*auditing* → *grace made reliable*; *secrets + capital* → *progress made reliable*. The novelty in Thiel's recent turn is that the procedural claim is no longer merely economic; it is explicitly narrated as a theological bulwark against civilizational captivity.

4. Membership: Initiation, Inner Circles, and Status

4.1 Graded revelation (courses/OT levels) and curated salons/fellowships

Hubbard. Belonging is stair-stepped: auditing and study move a member from “preclear” → Clear → OT levels along the Bridge to Total Freedom, presented as a precise, sequential route administered by trained auditors (often with an E-meter). The charted grades and OT tiers function as a visible hierarchy and a timetable for advancement.

Thiel. Belonging is curated, not charted: access comes via invite-only salons/lectures (e.g., the off-the-record Antichrist series) and prestige pipelines like the Thiel Fellowship. These confer status, opportunities, and proximity to capital, creating an initiation arc without formal “levels.”

4.2 Shibboleths and rites: language, memos, leaks, “off-the-record” convenings (*The Guardian*)

Hubbard. The in-group is marked by specialized vocabulary (engrams, SPs, “Bridge,” “disconnect”), confessional rites, and compliance with procedural texts; these stabilize doctrine and sort insiders from outsiders.

Thiel. The in-group coheres through shared frames and signals: contrarian “secrets,” monopoly logic, and—more recently—explicit Christian-eschatological language rehearsed in off-the-record lectures. Reporting documents invitation-only evenings in San Francisco, the circulation of leaked notes, and a stylized vocabulary (e.g., “legionnaires of the Antichrist”) that doubles as a shibboleth for sympathizers and a provocation for critics. *The Guardian’s* coverage reconstructs the series’ themes and tone; it also tracks how the private talks radiated outward through leaks and media.

4.3 Phenomenology of belonging: certainty, mission, exceptionalism

Both systems feel like elevation into a purpose-bearing minority.

- Hubbard’s arc promises cumulative certainty (“standard tech” works), moral clarity (SPs vs. auditors), and a mission to “clear the planet,” producing a phenomenology of disciplined ascent.
- Thiel’s arc offers conviction through insider epistemics (you “see” the secret others miss), mission (accelerate progress to avert an eschatological freeze), and exceptionalism conferred by selection into fellowships or salons. The *Washington Post* and *The Guardian* describe how the Antichrist series reframes policy disputes as spiritual struggle, intensifying the insider sense of calling; the culture-loop (e.g., *South Park’s* parody)

further cements the identity by giving adherents and critics a shared myth to push against.

UpShot: Whether by canonized levels or curated rooms, membership is engineered to convert access → identity → mission. The mechanism differs (churchly gradation vs. capital-intellectual curation), but the lived effect—belonging under heightened stakes—is strikingly convergent.

5. Texts and Authority: Canon vs. Corpus

5.1 Hubbard's vast prescriptive canon

Hubbard built authority through sheer textual mass: *Dianetics* establishes the reactive mind/engram theory and the promise of auditing; Scientology's Bridge to Total Freedom then charts graded ascent—training on one side, processing on the other—culminating in confidential OT levels. The canon is procedural (bulletins, policy letters, course packs), prescriptive (exact “end phenomena”), and institutionally enforced (only authorized auditors/orgs may administer it). The Bridge functions both as theology and org chart, anchoring hierarchy and fees.

5.2 Thiel's slim corpus amplified by capital, lectures, and media feedback (e.g., satire cycles) — SFGATE +1

By contrast, Thiel's written corpus is slim (*Zero to One*, a handful of essays/interviews), but its force is amplified through (a) capital allocation (funds, fellowships), (b) invite-only lectures (e.g., the four-part Antichrist series), and (c) a culture feedback loop where reportage and satire propagate the frame. *SFGATE* documents how *South Park*'s “Twisted Christian” episode lampooned the Antichrist talks, effectively enlarging their audience; broader UK coverage the same week read the parody as part of Thiel's public myth-making arc. In this ecosystem, money + salons + media substitute for a thick written canon—the “text” is a moving circuit of talks, leaks, memes, and placements that keep the thesis live.

5.3 Managing dissent: orthodoxy, excommunication, and narrative control

Scientology. Orthodoxy is guarded via ethics/judicial procedures (declaring Suppressive Persons), mandated disconnection, and historically aggressive posture toward critics (the notorious, if later “cancelled,” fair game era). The effect is canonical discipline: dissent is framed as spiritual risk and organizational threat, justifying boundary-policing that keeps the canon uncontested inside.

Thiel-world. There is no formal excommunication; dissent management is narrative: off-the-record convenings, selective access, and leak-mediated reframing by national press and local outlets. The cycle—private lecture → leaked quotes → coverage → satire—lets allies harden in-group meaning while critics contest it in public, a softer but effective corralling of interpretation. Washington Post/Guardian reconstructions of the Antichrist series—and the ensuing media parody—illustrate how narrative control now runs through attention markets rather than ecclesial courts.

UpShot: Hubbard’s canon centralizes authority through fixed texts and ecclesial enforcement; Thiel’s corpus-plus-circuit centralizes authority through capital, curated rooms, and a media feedback lattice that keeps his claims salient even when the “texts” are transient.

6. Money and Organization

6.1 Tithe/IP church vs. equity/exits/philanthropy networks

Hubbard. Financial architecture is doctrinal: revenue flows through a tithe-like schedule of courses, auditing hours, and training—each keyed to advancement on the Bridge. Intellectual property (marks, “tech,” course materials) is centralized; licensure and franchise-like orgs enforce uniform pricing and quality control. Money is the sacramental medium of access: you buy time with trained ministers and authorized texts; the hierarchy monetizes progression and orthodoxy simultaneously.

Thiel. Capital is allocative and catalytic: equity stakes, follow-on rounds, secondaries, and eventual exits compound both wealth and narrative. Philanthropy (fellowships, grants, endowments) extends this logic to talent pipelines and ideas, underwriting salons, research, and advocacy. The same dollar can speak three dialects—return-seeking (VC), agenda-setting (policy), and meaning-making (philanthropy)—so organization becomes a portfolio of vehicles tuned to different time horizons and legitimacy regimes. Where a church sells rites, a venture ecosystem purchases options on futures—companies, candidates, and cultural frames.

6.2 Governance surfaces: ecclesial hierarchy vs. boards, funds, PACs

Hubbard. Authority is vertical and canonical. The governance surface is ecclesial: offices, ethics committees, adjudication procedures, and a rule-bound chain of command. Disputes are theologically coded (orthodoxy vs. deviation), and remedies are sacramental/disciplinary (amends, ethics handlings, disconnection). Compliance is enforced by access to grace-conferring procedures.

Thiel. Authority is modular and multiplex. Boards govern firms; general partners govern funds; PACs and 501(c) orgs govern campaigns and causes; private companies set internal policy; fellowships use selection committees. Each forum has distinct fiduciary duties, disclosure rules, and veto points. Power accrues by cross-seating (overlapping trustees/directors), sequencing (fund → think tank → media push → regulatory play), and optionality (the ability to pivot capital between vehicles). Disputes are framed as thesis risk, compliance risk, or reputation risk and resolved with governance tools (board votes, capital calls, NDAs, narrative pivots) rather than doctrine.

6.3 The “para-church of capital”: think tanks, nonprofits, media ecosystems

Between ecclesia and enterprise sits a third formation: a para-church of capital. Its liturgy is the salon, its catechisms are memos and decks, its seminaries are fellowships and incubators, and its evangelism runs through podcasts, newsletters, conferences, and sympathetic outlets. Think tanks give metaphysical claims policy clothing; nonprofits legitimize long-horizon projects and recruit adherents via prestige; media ecosystems translate theses into public myths (heroes, villains, endgames). Funding is diversified—DAFs, foundations, donor circles—so the movement maintains redundant arteries even when one organ (a firm or figure) takes reputational damage. Analytically, this para-church achieves what a canon once did: durable coherence. It coordinates language (“secrets,” “monopoly,” “Antichrist/stagnation”), routes novices into structured advancement (grants → stages → co-invest), and polices boundaries by controlling access rather than creeds. Its accountability is mixed: part market test (P&L), part procedural legitimacy (501(c) audits, board minutes), part attention economics (can the story hold?).

UpShot: Hubbard’s church monetizes sacramental scarcity through IP and rites under a single hierarchy. Thiel’s ecosystem monetizes epistemic scarcity through portfolios of entities under plural governance. Both convert belief into institution via money, but the first binds with canon and tithe; the second binds with optionality, selection, and narrative throughput.

7. Measure: What Counts as Verification

7.1 Testimony and sanctified outcomes

Hubbard. Verification is *experiential and liturgical*. The basic unit of evidence is testimony: reduced distress, clearer cognition, improved agency—ratified by auditor notes, case folders, and advancement to named “end phenomena.” Because procedures and roles are canonized, outcomes are sanctified when they occur *within standard tech*: correct session form, authorized materials, approved auditors.

Strengths. Phenomenology is not dismissed; repeated reports under controlled ritual can stabilize expectations and technique.

Weaknesses. Testimony is vulnerable to suggestion, demand effects, selection bias, sunk-cost rationalization, and organizational pressure. “Inside-the-tech” verification risks tautology: success = proof of tech; failure = proof you departed from it or encountered an SP.

Audit-ready lens. A neutral measure would require: (a) preregistered endpoints (e.g., sleep, anxiety, executive function), (b) blinded raters or objective instruments, (c) retention/relapse tracking, (d) comparison to credible counterfactuals (CBT, medication, placebo-like controls), (e) openness to adverse-event logs.

7.2 Markets, monopolies, policy traction as “proofs”

Thiel. Verification is *external and performative*. The basic unit of evidence is traction:

- Markets: revenue growth, unit economics, cash flows vs. capital intensity, survival through cycles.
- Monopolies: durable moats (IP, network effects, switching costs), sustained margins, regulator-proof positioning.
- Policy & Culture: election wins, regulatory shifts, agenda adoption by adjacent elites, memetic persistence (ideas that keep returning in elite discourse).

Strengths. Exposes theses to adversarial environments (competition, scarcity, public scrutiny). Forces intertemporal discipline (compounding over decades).

Weaknesses. Markets can underprice tail risks and overprice narratives; monopolies can be historically contingent (rate cycles, subsidy regimes); policy wins can be coalitional artifacts rather than truth-tracking. Cultural proof is noisy: attention ≠ accuracy.

Portfolio lens. Treat results as Bayesian evidence: one success raises posterior on the method modestly; a pattern across vintages, sectors, and regulatory climates raises it more. Negative evidence includes zombie firms propped by capital, thesis drift masked as “pivot,” or policy wins that later reverse in court.

7.3 Falsification criteria for each program

For Hubbard’s program (therapeutic–soteriological):

- Outcome falsifiers: In preregistered studies, auditing under “standard tech” fails to outperform active controls on agreed endpoints; gains do not persist at 6–24 months; adverse-event rates exceed benchmarks.

- Process falsifiers: Independent replications show protocol-independence (benefits match generic empathic counseling), undermining claims of unique mechanism.
- Institutional falsifiers: Greater progress is observed *outside* ecclesial control using partial techniques, suggesting the canon's necessity claim is overstated.

For Thiel's program (contrarian—monopoly—civilizational):

- Market falsifiers: Over a full cycle (e.g., 10–15 years, multiple rate regimes), a representative basket of “secret → monopoly” bets underperforms diversified benchmarks on risk-adjusted returns; moats fail to persist.
- Discovery falsifiers: Post-mortems show wins were consensus-arbitrage or subsidy capture, not true secrets; edge vanishes without policy tailwinds.
- Policy falsifiers: The movement's flagship claims (e.g., “X regulation will freeze progress”) are refuted by realized counterfactuals (robust innovation under the rule), or apocalyptic forecasts fail under reasonable lead times.
- Civic falsifiers (eschatological register): The Antichrist/one-world-control thesis predicts specific consolidations (institutions, treaties, enforcement capabilities) by date T; instead, plural, competing regimes persist and expand human latitude, weakening the necessity of the movement's emergency program.

Cross-cutting integrity checks (both programs):

- Adversarial testing: Invite external auditors with power to publish *without* prior restraint.
- Open ledgers: Precommit to metrics, time frames, and stop-loss conditions (therapeutic harms; capital drawdown/impact ceilings).
- Counterexample logs: Maintain a living catalog of negative cases and near-misses; if absent, suspect narrative control.
- Exit interviews: Systematically study leavers (ex-members; ex-fellows) for convergent harms or structural blind spots.
- Reversibility tests: If the method discourages reversible experimentation (e.g., forbids second opinions; locks founders into capital with coercive terms), mark as anti-falsifiable drift.

UpShot. Verification differs in *locus*—inside ritual vs. in the world—but both risk insulating success claims. A philosophically clean comparison asks each program to name in advance: (1) what counts as success, (2) what would count *against* it, (3) who measures, and (4) what remedies follow a failed test.

8. Ethics of Asymmetry

8.1 Secrecy, consent, and informational gradients

Structure of the problem. Both systems rely on unequal access to knowledge—confidential levels or off-the-record salons. Such gradients can be ethical (protecting novices; defending fragile ideas) or predatory (manufacturing dependence).

Norms to distinguish protection from manipulation

- Purpose-bounded secrecy: Withhold *why*, from whom, and for how long—and state those limits up front. If secrecy has no sunset or review, it drifts toward domination.
- Layered informed consent: Consent must track the *actual* risks of each tier (financial, psychological, reputational), not a generic “agree to terms.” Elevation in status ≠ elevation in consent literacy.
- Reciprocal audit windows: Those subject to asymmetry get periodic access to independent ombuds/auditors who can see both sides of the gradient and publish redacted findings.
- Epistemic non-entrapment: Members must retain the option to ask for *plain-language rationales* without penalty. If explanation is perpetually deferred to “higher levels,” consent is degraded.

Diagnostic questions

- Can a member explain, in their own words, *what* is withheld and *why*—without fear of sanction?
- Are there clear declassification triggers (time, outcomes, harms discovered)?
- Does the organization ever increase secrecy to cover embarrassment rather than protect persons?

8.2 Instrumentalization risks (adherents/recruits/beneficiaries)

Moral hazard. Hierarchies that promise deliverance can tilt from *care for persons* to *use of persons*—as labor, data, testimonials, or optics. Instrumentalization often hides in “for your own good” rhetoric or “for the cause” exceptionalism.

Red flags

- Asymmetrical burden: Costs (money, time, reputational risk) accrue to juniors; benefits (equity, prestige, access) accrue to seniors.

- Testimonial extraction: Pressure to produce success narratives as a condition of advancement or ongoing support.
- Hostage mechanisms: Ties that punish exit—debt covenants, social “disconnection,” non-disparagement clauses that outlive any plausible confidentiality interest.
- Moral laundering: Recasting private interests (fund returns, brand defense) as universal goods to override dissent.

Protective design

- Two-key decisions: Any choice that materially binds a member (large fees, equity terms, public endorsements) requires *independent advisement* plus a cooling-off period.
- Fair upside: When recruits generate outsized value (IP, datasets, prestige), they receive structured participation in rewards; otherwise “mission” talk becomes extraction talk.
- Exit with dignity: Guaranteed channels for grievance, neutral references, and access to one’s own records.

8.3 Duties of stewardship and transparency

The stewardship thesis. Whoever controls scarce maps to salvation—spiritual or civilizational—incurs fiduciary-like duties: to tell the truth, proportion risk to competence, and place persons before programs.

Core duties

- Truthfulness under asymmetry: Leaders must proactively disclose known limits, failure rates, and credible alternatives. Silence where novices predict success is a lie by omission.
- Proportional risk: Do not load individuals with risks the institution is unwilling to bear (e.g., personal debt vs. institutional endowment; founder liability shields vs. recruit exposure).
- Explainability at decision points: Any consequential gate (new level, new round, public pledge) must come with plain-language rationales and documented tradeoffs.
- Independent oversight: Standing ethics board with outside members empowered to publish periodic reports; no prior-restraint clauses on whistleblowing about harms.
- Repair and restitution: When harm is shown, provide *structured remedies* (refunds/royalty adjustments/therapy support/legal fee coverage) and publish what changed to prevent recurrence.

Public-reason interface

- Accountable myth: If a movement uses apocalyptic or soteriological language, it must pair it with *operational claims* that can be checked in public (timelines, metrics, governance levers).
- Transparency ladder:
 1. publish methods/protocols;
 2. publish aggregate outcomes (with error bars);
 3. enable third-party replication or adversarial review;
 4. commit to policy-relevant pre-mortems (what would make us *stop*).

UpShot. Asymmetry is not intrinsically unethical; it becomes so when secrecy outruns care, when persons are treated as means, or when leaders enjoy *non-reciprocal immunity* from the risks they prescribe. A movement worthy of trust treats power and knowledge as debts to be justified, not assets to be hidden.

9. Cultural Feedback and Mythic Capture

9.1 Media memetics (e.g., *South Park*) and the arousal economy

Thiel's Antichrist frame jumped from semi-private lectures into a high-velocity meme circuit once *South Park* premiered "Twisted Christian," converting niche theology-tech talk into repeatable jokes, clips, and image macros. The episode functioned as a distribution engine: it packaged the narrative with sticky symbols (bathroom surveillance, "6-7," Jesus as counselor), then broadcast them into the attention markets where arousal (novelty, outrage, ridicule) governs spread. Local and entertainment press amplified the payload—an SFGATE write-up tracked the parody's Thiel–Antichrist focus, while *EW* summarized the season-launch arc—ensuring the lecture meme set escaped the room and entered pop memory. San Francisco Standard's recap shows how regional outlets localize the meme back onto the city's lecture scene, closing the loop between offline salons and online myth.

9.2 When satire strengthens the myth

Satire can de-legitimize a claim—or entrench it by making it more salient and easier to recall. Recent research finds satirical criticism can, in some contexts, be more reputation-shaping than direct critique, precisely because humor reduces defenses while boosting attention and sharing. In arousal markets, that means parody can weaponize virality for the very frame it mocks: the antagonist becomes larger-than-life, the story gains canonical scenes, and sympathizers gain

rallying signals (“they’re laughing at us → we must be over the target”). The *South Park* cycle thus risks mythic capture: it fixes characters, stakes, and slogans in ways later reporting can only chase.

9.3 Guardrails against totalizing frames

To keep movements—and their critics—from being swallowed by the story they’re telling:

- De-arousal formatting: Pair coverage or advocacy with slow media (long-form transcripts, source packets) and time-boxed deliberation windows; reduce the incentive to escalate affect for reach. (WaPo/Guardian reconstructions of the lectures model this “receipt-first” posture.)
- Two-channel messaging: Every mythic claim (Antichrist, “one-world control”) must ship with a policy ledger: concrete, checkable predictions, decision levers, and falsifiers—so discourse can exit the meme loop into adjudicable space.
- Satire with receipts: When deploying parody, link out (or chyron) to primary sources; nudge audiences from laugh-track to evidence-track.
- Plural narration: Commission counter-myths and counter-metaphors (different heroes/foes/endgames) to prevent any single apocalyptic arc from monopolizing imagination.
- Memetic hygiene for insiders/critics: Maintain “myth budgets” in orgs and newsrooms (caps on sensational framings per piece), and publish post-mortems when a meme outgrows its facts.

UpShot: In a memetic economy, parody doesn’t just *reflect* a movement’s myth—it can finish writing it. Steering back to receipts, timelines, and levers is how public reason resists capture by the most contagious story.

10. Civil Religion and Salvation-Politics

10.1 Sacralization of technique and policy

Both projects convert means into meaning. In Hubbard’s system, *technique* (auditing, coursework, ethics procedures) carries salvific charge: to follow the protocol is to approach freedom. In Thiel’s ecosystem, *technique* is contrarian discovery organized by capital—“secrets” → monopoly → progress—and, in his recent talks, is narrated as a bulwark against civilizational captivity. This is classic civil-religion dynamics: political-economic instruments take on sacred valence, creating rites (courses; salons), holy days (product launches; policy rollouts), creeds

(doctrine; theses), and martyrs (excommunicated critics; cancelled founders). Bellah's account of American civil religion—public myths, rituals, and sacralized statecraft—offers the analytic frame for seeing how policy programs acquire quasi-theological weight and why dissent is moralized.

10.2 Eschatology in technocratic clothes (AI/climate governance debates)

Thiel's Antichrist lectures explicitly fuse Christian eschatology with contemporary governance disputes: he warns that climate/AI risk management can become a *moral alibi* for centralizing a one-world order hostile to technological progress. The Guardian's reconstruction of the four-part, off-the-record series details this arc—naming institutions and public figures, and mapping a scenario where anti-tech “unifiers” legitimize consolidation “for safety.” The Washington Post's reporting on leaked audio independently confirms the motif (“legionnaires of the Antichrist,” anti-tech critics as precursors), while libertarian analysis emphasizes the through-line of state overreach in Thiel's narrative. The result is eschatology *in technocratic clothing*: regulatory choices are reframed as end-times forks, and acceleration becomes a soteriological duty.

10.3 Designing plural, auditable public reason

To keep civil religion from hardening into totalizing myth, pair grand frames with receipts:

- Two-column claims: Next to any apocalyptic or salvation claim, publish the *operational ledger* (concrete policy levers, measurable forecasts, sunset/review clauses).
- Plural fora, plural referees: Route disputes through independent venues (university panels, adversarial think-tank debates, blue-ribbon commissions) with mixed priors and transparent funding.
- Pre-mortems & falsifiers: Attach dated *could-be-wrong* statements to movement theses (e.g., predicted centralizations, innovation slowdowns) and name what reverses the policy.
- Disclosure ladders: For secret-bearing orgs (churchly or capital), commit to staged declassification and outsider audits that can publish redacted findings.
- Memetic hygiene: When satire (e.g., *South Park*) amplifies a frame, pair coverage with curated source packets to draw audiences from meme → evidence. Local and entertainment press show how fast parody can fix a myth; responsible discourse should exploit that attention to surface primary materials (transcripts, timelines, policy texts).

UpShot. Civil religion is inevitable when techniques promise deliverance; the task is to civilize it—by multiplying referees, publishing falsifiers, and keeping policy accountable to public reason rather than to the strongest myth.

11. Steelman & Objections

11.1 Category error and disanalogy

Objection (steelmanned). Comparing a church to a venture-capital network mistakes kinds. A church claims sacramental authority over souls, defines sin and salvation, and binds members by doctrine and rite. A VC network allocates risk capital, pursues returns, and—however grand its rhetoric—remains accountable to markets and law. Superficial similarities (charisma, in-groups, mythic language) do not bridge this categorical gap. Convergence talk risks a guilt-by-analogy fallacy that muddies evaluation standards appropriate to each domain.

Reply. The paper’s claim is structural, not ontological: distinct kinds can share a governance pattern—myth → method → membership → money → measure—that shapes behavior and externalities. The value of the comparison is diagnostic: it highlights when secular projects borrow soteriological form (deliverance by technique, graded access, enemies that unify) and when religious projects adopt managerial form (metrics, playbooks, IP). Guardrails: (1) keep outcome tests domain-appropriate (therapeutic/ethical vs. financial/policy), (2) never infer moral verdicts across categories without extra argument, (3) treat similarities as hypotheses about incentives, not identities of essence.

Disanalogy we concede. Churches anchor authority in revelation and sacrament; VC networks in property and contract. Coercive powers, exit costs, and remedy pathways differ—these differences tighten (not weaken) the case for separate verification and ethics regimes.

11.2 Distinct goods: therapy vs. entrepreneurship

Objection (steelmanned). The goods pursued diverge: one promises *healing and salvation*, the other *innovation and prosperity*. Therapeutic relief should be judged by phenomenology and harm reduction; entrepreneurship by discovered value (prices, adoption). To cross-grade them risks exporting the wrong metric (e.g., demanding RCTs of a startup thesis or EBITDA of a rite).

Reply. Distinct goods require distinct measures, but both claim causal efficacy—“if you do X, you get Y.” That licenses parallel questions: What outcomes are promised? What counterfactuals are plausible? What harms are tolerated? What forms of informed consent are owed? The comparison encourages good metric hygiene: preregister endpoints for therapeutic claims; commit to risk-adjusted, cycle-length evaluation for venture claims; name failure thresholds in advance for both. It also surfaces moral spillovers: intense techniques (therapeutic or

entrepreneurial) can impair autonomy, redistribute risk to juniors, or privatize upside while socializing downside. Separate goods; shared duties.

Constructive separation. Keep categories clean in dashboards: spiritual/clinical outcomes on one axis; economic/civic outcomes on another. When actors blend them (e.g., eschatological rhetoric to motivate policy), demand dual ledgers: a narrative column and an operations column.

11.3 The case for non-apocalyptic progress

Objection (steelmanned). Apocalyptic frames (Antichrist; “last hour”) distort policy reasoning, encouraging exception logic (suspending normal debate, overstating certainty). Technological and civic progress can arise from plural, incremental processes: heterogeneous regulation, competition among jurisdictions, open standards, and patient capital. We do not need end-times rhetoric to achieve growth; in fact, it can select for brittle coalitions and bad bets.

Reply. A non-apocalyptic program is not complacent; it is proceduralist:

- Plural referees. Encourage rival risk models (academia, industry, civil society) and require reconciliation memos rather than winner-takes-all narratives.
- Time-boxed urgency. Use emergency lanes sparingly, with sunset clauses and ex-post reviews; otherwise favor iterative pilots and staged rollouts.
- Option-preserving design. Prefer architectures that keep reversibility (modular regulation, sandboxing) and reduce lock-in.
- Distributed proofs. Track progress via many small successes (safety records, energy intensity declines, latency and cost curves) rather than a single salvific moonshot.
- Narrative humility. Pair strong metaphors with dated, falsifiable predictions so the story can lose gracefully.

Positive vision. Progress without apocalypse = *high-variance exploration under thick accountability*: many bets, transparent stop-rules, auditable claims, and a civic rhetoric that sacralizes truthfulness and repair rather than existential showdown. This keeps passion while lowering the probability of mythic capture.

UpShot. The strongest objections sharpen the thesis: keep categories distinct; match measures to goods; and prefer auditable, plural pathways to salvation-politics. If movements adopt end-times language, they assume added duties: explicit falsifiers, reversible policies, and institutions that can stand down when the world fails to end.

12. Diagnostics & Predictions

12.1 Indicators of drift toward cultic closure or civic openness

A. Membership signals

- Closure: rising cost-of-belonging (fees, NDAs, loyalty oaths), probationary periods lengthen, exit penalties (social or financial) harden, leaver-testimony is systematically discredited.
- Openness: low-friction entry paths (public curricula, transparent selection rubrics), dignified exits (references, record access), routine engagement with critics in recorded fora.

B. Epistemic signals

- Closure: appeal to authority replaces evidence (“because the Founder said”), expanding lists of “unreadable” sources, doctrine changes without version notes, internal replication discouraged.
- Openness: preregistered claims, error logs with timestamps, red-team invites, replication bounties, versioned doctrine/memos with diffs and rationale.

C. Operational signals

- Closure: secrecy inflates without purpose limits; “temporary” off-the-record norms become permanent; more energy spent policing speech than improving method.
- Openness: time-boxed confidentiality, periodic declassification calendars, third-party audits whose summaries are publishable.

D. Resource signals

- Closure: revenues/allocations concentrate in a single center; dependence on personality for fundraising; whistleblowers punished via resource denial.
- Openness: diversified finance (multiple funds/foundations), conflict-of-interest ledgers, standing channels for protected disclosures.

E. Arousal & narrative signals

- Closure: escalating end-times metaphors to motivate routine decisions; enemies multiply; satire treated as blasphemy rather than feedback.
- Openness: myth kept on a “budget” (explicit limits per communiqué), satire engaged with receipts, policy ledgers accompany grand claims.

Rule of thumb: If a newcomer can learn *how to disagree safely* in < 10 minutes from public docs, the system is trending open; if even veterans cannot articulate safe dissent paths, it's drifting closed.

12.2 Accountability levers that actually bite

For church-like programs

- Precommitment charters: publish outcome endpoints, acceptable harm rates, refund/restitution rules; bind leadership to external review after thresholds are crossed.
- Ombuds with subpoena-like powers: independent office empowered to inspect records, interview members, and publish redacted findings on a fixed cadence.
- Reversible sacraments: cooling-off windows and cost caps before advancing to higher, costlier levels; transparent pricing with means-tested ceilings.
- Leaver protections: right to copies of personal records, neutral reference letters, sunset on non-disparagement, and funded aftercare when harm is found.

For capital-intellectual programs

- Dual ledgers per thesis: narrative column (claims, metaphors, stakes) + operations column (KPIs, dates, stop-losses, falsifiers). Publication required at launch and annually.
- Cycle-length scorecards: evaluate returns/risk over full macro cycles; publish hit/miss attribution (secret discovery vs. subsidy capture vs. luck).
- Red-team endowment: fixed % of AUM or philanthropic budget reserved for adversarial audits and counter-experiments; auditors select their own questions.
- Access safeguards: no-retaliation policies for fellows/founders who decline to echo talking points; standardized, non-coercive term sheets (no perpetual gag clauses).
- Satire-to-substance protocol: when a meme spikes, release a source pack (transcripts, timelines, data) within 72 hours; convert attention into adjudicable evidence.

Cross-domain levers

- Sunset & stand-down clauses: emergency rhetoric triggers dates at which extraordinary measures expire absent fresh evidence.
- Public error budgets: leaders state how many “big misses” they will accept before revising doctrine or stepping down.

- Counterexample registries: living catalogs of failures/harms with post-mortems and implemented fixes.
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12.3 Research agenda: tracing belief → method → institution → outcomes

A. Belief layer (myth & claims)

- Corpus build: scrape/curate speeches, sermons, lectures, memos; produce a versioned, searchable archive with metadata (date, venue, audience, claim type).
- Claim typing: label assertions as therapeutic, metaphysical, economic, policy, or eschatological; encode expected timelines and implied falsifiers.
- Myth intensity index: quantify arousal (apocalypse, enemy naming) per document and correlate with subsequent organizational moves.

B. Method layer (procedures)

- Protocol maps: formalize step-by-step procedures (auditing flows; “find-a-secret → build-a-moat” playbooks).
- Replicability audits: attempt independent reproduction (clinical endpoints; venture theses in matched domains); register successes and failures.

C. Institution layer (money & governance)

- Capital/rite graphs: map funding flows, board overlaps, fellowship pipelines, and ecclesial roles; detect centralization vs. modularity over time.
- Secrecy ledger: track which artifacts are private vs. public, their stated purposes, and declassification events.

D. Outcome layer (verification)

- Therapeutic panel: blinded measures (well-being, relapse, adverse events) at fixed intervals; compare to active controls.
- Venture/policy panel: risk-adjusted returns across vintages; moat persistence metrics; policy adoption and durability (court challenges, bipartisan uptake).
- Cultural panel: meme half-life, sentiment shifts, and source-checking behavior after major media events.

E. Causal tracing & predictions

- Event studies: time-lock around key speeches/launches to observe shifts in recruitment, capital flows, and policy alignment.
- Instrumental variables: use exogenous shocks (rate changes, platform policy shifts) to isolate method vs. macro effects.
- Prospective tests: preregister 3–5 measurable predictions derived from each movement’s own claims (e.g., specified consolidations by date T; specified clinical gains by week N).

F. Open infrastructure

- Data commons: anonymized datasets (with IRB-style safeguards) for external researchers.
- Adversarial fellowships: fund critics and sympathizers to work from the same evidence base; require joint statements on convergence/divergence.
- Replication prize: annual award for the best *failed* replication that led to a constructive protocol change.

UpShot. Treat both movements as causal programs—beliefs specify methods; methods harden into institutions; institutions generate outcomes. Diagnostics watch the joints; accountability applies leverage at the joints; research illuminates the joints so publics can decide—with evidence—whether deliverance is more than a story.

13. Conclusion: Convergence Without Collapse

13.1 What the comparison clarifies—and must not confuse

Clarifies. The juxtaposition surfaces a shared *movement grammar*: myth to orient, method to operationalize, membership to mobilize, money to endure, and measure to legitimate. It shows how both “spiritual tech” and “civilizational tech” can promise deliverance through procedure under conditions of scarcity—of certainty, meaning, or growth. It also makes visible the *risk vectors*: secrecy that outruns care, enemies that harden identity, and verification regimes that drift toward self-sealing.

Must not confuse. Church and capital remain different kinds of authority with distinct goods, tests, and remedies. Therapeutic claims answer to phenomenology and harm reduction; venture and policy claims answer to markets, institutions, and law. Convergence in *form* does

not erase difference in *ends* or *accountability forums*. The analogy is diagnostic, not a moral verdict by association.

13.2 Criteria for responsible movements that use myth without being used by it

- Myth budget. Name the metaphor—and cap its use. Every apocalyptic or salvific turn must be paired with a plain-terms brief, dated predictions, and a review date.
- Dual ledgers. Publish a narrative column (stakes, story, values) next to an operations column (protocols, metrics, falsifiers, stop-rules). Keep them in tension.
- Tiered transparency. If secrecy is necessary, make it *purpose-bounded* (who/why/how long), with scheduled declassification and independent ombuds access.
- Reversible commitment. Cooling-off windows, dignified exits, and non-coercive covenants (no perpetual gags; fair claims to one's data/work).
- Adversarial stewardship. Fund red teams; reward disconfirming evidence; version doctrines/memos with changelogs and reasons.
- Repair doctrine. When harm occurs or a thesis fails, trigger precommitted remedies (refunds/royalty resets/aftercare) and publish what changed.

13.3 Keeping salvation talk answerable to public reason

Translate. For every soteriological claim (“freedom,” “civilizational rescue”), provide the secular articulation: who is affected, by which mechanism, on what timeline, with what trade-offs.

Falsify. Attach outcome thresholds and sunset clauses; specify what evidence would make the movement *stand down* or pivot.

Pluralize. Submit claims to multiple referees (academia, courts, regulators, civil society), disclose funding and conflicts, and prefer federated pilots over universal edicts.

Memetically ground. When satire or virality inflates a frame, release the receipts—transcripts, timelines, datasets—so attention can convert into adjudication.

Moral minimum. Treat persons as ends, not vehicles: proportion risk to capacity, tell the truth under asymmetry, and share upside with those who bear the load.

UpShot. Convergence need not mean collapse. By distinguishing goods, matching measures to claims, and binding myth to auditable practice, movements can harness the motivational power of salvation talk without surrendering public reason—or the people entrusted to them.

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