

## THE RELIGION OF THE SILICON VALLEY "GODS"

### and why do they need it?

After reading a considerable amount of material about the activities of the American Silicon Valley multi-billionaire Peter Thiel, I can say that his personality would be completely uninteresting if it were not for his "religious" views and methods by which he seeks to establish himself in the world and GOVERN it. Although he pretends to know the history of Christianity well, in reality his knowledge is selective and interpreted tendently. His speeches show that he did not know the depths of the Teaching of Jesus Christ. He relied on Thomism, although T. Aquinas himself was condemned to the Inquisition for his heresies. But this time he is not talking about Thomism<sub>s</sub>, and about thielism and its origins.

### HOW DID IT ALL START?

2023 Peter Thiel's venture capital partner and co-founder of Anduril Industries (a high-tech defense systems and weapons manufacturer) **Trae Stephens** celebrated his 40th birthday and threw a party. A business journalist told us about what happened there and other things in a very interesting way. **Emma Goldberg**<sub>2</sub> (*Here is an abbreviated translation of her text - Celestina*). It was a multi-day event at Mr. Stephens' home in New Mexico. That evening, the congratulations were followed by another event and finally a brunch with caviar balls, mimosas, and breakfast pizza. The speech at the brunch was given by **Mr. Peter Thiel**, Silicon Valley billionaire and right-wing kingpin. **He spoke. *about* Jesus Christ (UK), His miracles, repentance.** The guests were impressed. There is much to talk about, but **this does not mean that the speaker is a UK follower** The latter circumstance is particularly important.



Peter Thiel

More than 220 people, mostly from tech and venture capital, said: **“Oh my God, I didn't know Peter Thiel was a Christian.”** That was especially surprising **Michelle Stephens**, Mr. Stephens' wife: **“He's gay and a billionaire. How can he be a Christian?”**

Out of surprise and genuine curiosity, Ms. Stephens had an idea: to bring together influential people, including those from Silicon Valley, to talk about the Christian faith. A year later, she founded the non-profit organization ACTS 17 Collective. The organization organizes events for tech and entertainment industry executives to discuss faith-based topics. This created an opportunity for the demigods of the industry to seek “spirituality.”

The keynote speaker at the first ACTS 17 event, held at the San Francisco home of Garry Tan, CEO of Y Combinator, was again Mr. Thiel. He talked about, **how Christian theology shapes his politics** In Peter's opinion, the most meaningful of the Ten Commandments of God (from the Old Bible!!!) is this one: **“Worship God and do not covet what others have.”** (it was not UK law, – His Law is one and it is well known.) (Thiel simply spoke **against the psychology of mimetic desire** (and not by chance, my note). Over 200 people attended that party. One of them – Mr. Garry

Tanas – later began organizing in his home **fundraising campaigns** ACTS 17 for the organization<sup>3</sup>...in the name of bringing Christianity to the technological world.

The next time, the organization held another lecture at Mr. Tan's home, this time with former director of the National Institutes of Health, Dr. Francis S. Collins, who had long spoken about this, *when* he combines science with his Christian faith. Inspired by her success, Ms. Stephens began planning events not only in San Francisco but also in Los Angeles, with speakers including former Intel CEO Pat Gelsinger and Ayaan Hirsi Ali (a Muslim activist turned critic of Islam who converted to Christianity).

Mrs. Stephens really enjoyed the story of the Apostle Paul's mission to Athens and Thessalonica, where he spread the Gospel among the Greeks. "*Kings and Queens of Culture*", that is, the prominent and affluent demographic groups that she herself seeks to serve. She realized that **this is against Christianity**, but...she really liked this game. "**As Christians, we were taught to serve the meek, the little, the marginalized.**", said Ms. Stephens. **But then she realized that "the rich, the wealthy, and the powerful need Jesus just as much."** So, Silicon Valley leaders are used to chasing what is beyond the reach of the average person – wealth, opportunity, power, but God does not occupy a high place on this list. According to the journalist of this text, the Bay Area is characterized by the fact that people there rarely attend church, and are more likely to satisfy their spiritual longing with meditation, ayahuasca<sup>1</sup>, intermittent fasting, etc.

Mr. Thiel also believes that his colleagues are atheists or agnostics, while for him the Christian faith is "at the center of his worldview." He examines Christianity *from a heterodox point of view*<sup>6</sup>, combining references to Scripture with conservative political theory, analyzing ancient signs and wonders, and looking for their connection to today's technological wonders. In his latest podcast interviews, he **draws on Bible prophecy to warn of the Antichrist**, which will promise protection from existential threats like artificial intelligence and nuclear war, but will bring something much worse: a one-world government. (*By the way, Mr. Thiel often refuses to give interviews through Ms. Stephens, and his spokesperson does not respond to emails.*)

Other tech and entertainment gurus also seem to practice some form of religion. For example, Joe Rogan has spoken about the importance of faith in several podcast episodes, saying that he used to be "pretty atheistic" but after his grandfather died

became more spiritual. In an episode last February, Mr. Rogan said: "Over time, people will realize that you need to *some kind* divine structures" because many very intelligent people *rejects all positive aspects of religion*".

In a recent interview **psychologist Jordan Peterson**, which has become peculiar **manosphere** guru,<sup>4</sup> Elon Musk has said he is a "strong believer in the principles of Christianity." Mr. Musk summed it up in a kind of song about X: "Atheism left an empty space, and *secular religion* took her place," he wrote.

ACTS 17, which is non-denominational, aims to provide people with an easy and accessible introduction to religious beliefs. The company's website uses the hallmarks of a direct-to-consumer brand for the millennial generation: it depicts beautiful people in puffer jackets, talking and smiling... "Happy"...

If religious rituals offer old ways to navigate new, turbulent times, it's no wonder they're making a comeback in Silicon Valley, which seems to be going through its own rebirth cycle. Tech moguls are cheering President Trump, fighting for a return to an earlier era of higher birth rates. The political shift has sparked some skepticism. *new religiosity* in the technology community. Some Christians question their selflessness and sincerity. Anne Foerst, a theologian and computer scientist at St. Bonaventure University in New York and author of *God in the Machine*, says: **"Some evangelicals believe that once you accept Jesus as your savior, you are saved. Then you don't have to worry about making drones, rejecting aliens, rejecting awakening, and all that kind of stuff."** But San Francisco Bay Area clergy support them because theology and Scripture suggests *something vitally important* for people whose technological work touches on burning ethical and existential questions.

"We really *we feel a burden to help people* to reflect, **how the model of Christ could help them think about the impact of technology...**", said Paul Taylor, an Oracle employee turned pastor who leads **San Francisco Bay Area Center for Faith, Work, and Technology**. That group is helping to bring technologists to religion!!!

Ms. Stephens' mission at ACTS 17 is more tactical: If startups and tech workers are used to kneeling before the powers of venture capital and big tech, why not encourage them to bow to God as well?

## SYMBOLIC CHRISTIANS

If an artificial intelligence model created an image of Silicon Valley's powerful couples, it might remind **Mr. and Mrs. Stephens**. They live in a picturesque corner of San Francisco, where they like to gather with the “kings and queens” of local culture. They both took up religious topics that interested them, that attracted young entrepreneurs. Mr. Stephens is related to a Southern Baptist pastor in a small Ohio town, and Ms. Stephens was raised Roman Catholic in a Philadelphia suburb. Her father was a church restorer. The two met at Georgetown University and became friends by discussing the role of faith in their lives. They would take long walks, talking about the Bible and the differences in their religious practices, such as why Ms. Stephens prayed to the Virgin Mary and Mr. Stephens prayed directly to God. After college, **Mr. Stephens worked for US intelligence services**, and Mrs. Stephens is a nurse in the pediatric intensive care unit. This is where Mr. Stephens' great career begins.



### Mr. Stephens

**In 2008, Mr. Stephens received an offer to join Palantir, now a data analytics giant.** Mr. Stephens rose through the tech elite and in 2013 was invited by Mr. Thiel, who had funded Palantir, to become the head of his venture capital firm, Founders Fund, and he then moved his family to San Francisco.

He helped establish "**Anduril**, which makes autonomous drones and submarines, is in the midst of a \$28 billion funding round. Meanwhile, Ms. Stephens founded a digital healthcare company. Together, they have two sons.

Throughout this period, they held on to their faith, which elevated them in the social life of the San Francisco Bay Area. Church attendance was not mandatory where they lived, and they sometimes felt like token Christians. The desire to share their beliefs and sowed the seed—ACTS 17. Each event of the organization featured a conversation with a famous person who seemed completely unchristian to the audience. However, the lectures attracted both devoted and non-Christian listeners. Tickets cost \$50, and participants were also sought on social media. The goal of the ACTS 17 event was to encourage participants to take a step on a journey of faith, since some had never heard of Jesus, others had never read the Bible.

The parties and lectures were "spectacular." For example, one talk by Dr. Collins on "Code and Space" featured aptly named cocktails (like the mango-orange cosmos), chilled wine flowing from the tap, and generous cheese platters. It was an opportunity for twenty-somethings and thirty-somethings to *improve* and gain religious knowledge. The ACTS 17 website promised: "These cozy gatherings encourage *interesting discussions and valuable connections* who can help *improve your career*." The idea that people come to ACTS 17 scrambling to meet speakers and Silicon Valley "kings" didn't bother Ms. Stephens. "Maybe they come first to hear a speaker and make connections, and then they're surprised and delighted that I, too, can explore issues of faith in this environment."

In this way, ACTS 17's activities expanded and grew. One fall, two events were held as far away as the United Arab Emirates. The Stephens flew to Abu Dhabi and Dubai. There, they gave two presentations: one on how Christian faith can guide career planning, the other on how God shapes their views on artificial intelligence and defense. In Abu Dhabi, an audience member asked Mr. Stephens after the event what he thought about the social stigma associated with working in defense technology. Back in 2018, Google faced protests from thousands of employees over its plans to use artificial intelligence to help the Pentagon target drone attacks. "There are much easier ways to build startups than what we're doing at Anduril," Mr. Stephens said in a Zoom interview with the event's host.

people who participated. **"We do this because we believe it is right and moral."** He drew a parallel between his work and that of J. Robert Oppenheimer, who, after the first nuclear test, recalled the words of the Bhagavad Gita: "Now I have become Death, the destroyer of worlds." **"It was a reconciliation with divine destiny in the pursuit of justice."**, added Mr. Stephens. Mr. Stephens told the Zoom audience that entrepreneurs often come to him for career advice when they feel "wandering in the wilderness," lonely and spiritually exhausted. He suggested they embrace **the matrix he created**, which divides work into four categories: bad and easy (making pointless iPhone games), bad and hard (creating a new e-cigarette), easy and good (creating encrypted messaging services), and hard and good (a colony on Mars). Anduril, Mr. Stephens said, falls into the latter category: hard and good work done where God directs it, he said. The company is forming a consortium with other technology groups to compete for defense contracts, and Mr. Stephens was promoted *candidate for Mr. Trump's Pentagon*.

Ms. Stephens is quick to clarify that ACTS 17 "has no political affiliation," "there is no agenda," "there is no specific movement..." She added that the group does not intend to discuss political issues, although she understands that it is impossible to completely avoid them, we just ask God to guide the moderators and speakers... (*Where to get married? Unexplained... - Celestina*).

**However, politics cannot be avoided when speaking Libertarian Mr. Thiel. He was one of Mr. Trump's early supporters in 2016, and Vice President J.D. Vance is one of his followers.. Thus, he recognizes the strength that comes from an alliance of political and religious conservatives..** "The Reagan coalition was made up of free-market libertarians, defense hawks, and social conservatives," Thelis told economist Tyler Cowen in a recent interview. What do a millionaire, a general, and a priest have in common? He continued, "But the coalition worked incredibly well, and I think they were united by anti-communism and a common enemy."

## IMITATION AS A FORM OF FAITH

Year after year, the Stephens prepare **Faith and Work Group** Epic Church. It is non-denominational and receives support from a network of evangelicals in Dallas that plants churches in "spiritually hard-to-reach" parts of the United States. Since starting weekly services in San Francisco in 2011, Epic Church has grown to hold services every Sunday.

attracts about 1,000 people, including the poorest and richest residents. The church now has its own \$12 million office space. Epic pastor **Ben Pilgreen** is delivering a message to San Franciscans: He believes that any job—advertising sales, software engineering, human resources management—can be sacred. The Lord's work is not limited to clergy. It's an appealing idea to those in his community who *wants to believe*, that the time they devote to their careers has a higher purpose. "If you've been called to be a graphic designer," Mr. Pilgreen said, "it's a sacred calling."

Mr. and Mrs. Stephens became church members shortly after moving to San Francisco. It was in the Epic community that they solidified their thinking about, **how Christian faith should influence their efforts in Silicon Valley**. For four years, until the end of 2021, the Faith and Work Group they led proclaimed the importance of religion to their professional lives. Mr. Thiel and Mr. Tan were among the notable guests who stopped by. The Stephens-led group studied the work of René Girard, a literary theorist who has become Silicon Valley's favorite theologian. Mr. Girard's name is often mentioned by Mr. Thiel and Mr. Vance on their podcasts.

Incidentally, Mr. Girard (who died in 2015) was also Mr. Thiel's mentor at Stanford. Girard's books present a view of religion that fits in well with Silicon Valley belief systems. He argued that "**all desires are mimetic**" **"We want what other people want."** – and one of the individuals who broke this cycle of competition was Jesus Christ. By interpreting his work, readers conclude that **The way to overcome petty desires is to convert to Christianity and try to imitate Christ**. Some of his readers and critics, such as the historian **John Ganz**, says Mr. Girard identifies religion as "an antidote to the vices that are now exacerbated by social media: Does Instagram make you jealous of other people? No problem; keep scrolling, but remember that you should only want to be like Christ." Another explanation for Mr. Girard's growing influence is *mimesis itself*. **People want to emulate Mr. Thiel**. After the first ACTS 17 event, one attendee approached Ms. Stephens and said he was struck by the confession of faith of Mr. Thiel, whom he called a professional "idol": if Mr. Thiel worshipped Jesus, perhaps he should do the same.<sup>7</sup>

**1Ayahuasca, ayahuasca**—entheogen, a hallucinogenic drink made from liana or other plants with psychoactive properties, long used by Indians living in the foothills of the Andes), **2Source: Emma Goldberg.** *Business journalist who writes about workplace culture and how work is evolving during social and technological change. Find more information here:* <https://christian360.news/seeking-god-or-peter-thiel-in-silicon-valley/>

**3Title ACTS 17** is an acronym for (Acknowledgment of Christ in Technology and Society).

**4Manosphere,** English *Manosphere*,—a collection of websites and online forums that promote masculinity, fierce opposition to feminism, gynocentrism, and sometimes misogyny. The manosphere traditionally includes movements for men's and fathers' rights. The manosphere is often associated with the radical political right, and some communities promote violence against women.)

**5Mimetic desires**—Defining mimetic desire is not easy, despite the fact that no one escapes its charms. We could say that it is a social desire, essentially based on the desire to have the same thing that others have. If there is something that makes others happy, why not take advantage of it at the same time? This desire has been observed throughout human history, but has intensified exponentially in consumer societies. Capitalism, supported by the media and advertising, has awakened people's needs (and greed). The constant bombardment of emotions through advertisements and commercials, films and social networks has encouraged consumerism. Mimetic desire begins to manifest itself in childhood. Surrounded by a multitude of toys, a child wants the toy that someone else has. The term was coined in the 1970s by the philosopher René Girard. He first noticed this phenomenon while analyzing the great works of world literature, such as Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote, Flaubert's Madame Bovary, Stendhal's The Red and the Black, Marcel Proust's In Search of Lost Time, and others. Many of the characters in these works aspired to be what other great characters were and felt great discomfort that they themselves had not achieved this. Observing this, René Girard put forward the idea of mimetic desire, which arises not only under the influence of advertising and the media, but also in sexual life, business, etc. This desire forces us all to imitate each other, to become a homogeneous society. We feel that if we do not have the same as others, we are not worthy of it - so mimetic desire can be a source of discomfort. For example, envy, the boom of spinners. It has even affected adults. They are still sold today, but that was 5 or 6 years ago when everyone was crazy about these toys, and to this day we don't really know what they were for. Some said it allowed them to relax, others that it helped children concentrate. Mimetic desire expresses all fashions, explains our main motivations, defines business competition and, unfortunately, also responds to certain psychological and behavioral disorders. René Girard, in his book "Anorexia and Mimetic Desire" (2009), talks about the relationship between eating disorders and mimetic desire. He talks about how the beauty canon created a real tyranny (and still does). Many women want to have an extremely thin body, similar to that of supermodels and other celebrities. The same happens with men who want to have the bodies of actors and influencers. This leads to image problems, such as vigorexia. People are led to believe that a well-groomed body is synonymous with unlimited happiness, wealth, and sex appeal. The mimetic desire to have what others have explains evolution and survival. Lukeris Burgis explores this question in his book *Wanting: The Power of Mimetic Desire in Everyday Life*. Throughout evolution, humans have imitated the behavior of others, believing that if it helped them survive, it must be good for us too. Mimetic desire no longer serves this role, and it no longer helps us gain something useful from what others do. This desire to have what others have can immerse us in intense competition. It can lead to unhealthy jealousy and even a desire to harm those who have more than us. Only when we realize that we are all different and original, that even the happiest and most beautiful are just like others, does the obsession with imitating them disappear. Self-satisfaction also disappears, and happiness is found not in others, but in ourselves.

**6heterodox**—Heterodoxy is a term derived from the Greek words "ἕτερος" (heteros), meaning "other" or "different", and "δόξα" (doxa), meaning "opinion" or "teaching". The word is used

to describe religious or philosophical teachings that deviate from officially recognized orthodoxy or the main doctrine of a religion. In a religious context, heterodoxy is often defined as a form of belief, teaching, or practice that does not conform to the official dogma or norms of the Church. The term is most often used in contrast to orthodoxy, which means "the correct belief." Heterodox views are often considered heresies or deviations when they contradict accepted religious truths.

7All emphasis and comments in quotation marks are mine.

**8Thomism** -Scholastic philosophy – the study of Christian teaching and [Aristotle](#) a synthesis of philosophy expressing the harmony of faith and reason. Pioneer [Thomas Aquinas](#) . It arose in the struggle against Augustinian spiritualism and Latin [Averroism](#) Thomism has been the official doctrine of the Dominican Order since 1309, and with the canonization of Thomas Aquinas in 1323, it eventually became the teaching of the Church.

1879 Pope [Leo XIII](#) in the encyclical *Eternal Father* declared that Thomism is the only correct philosophy of Catholicism, that is, the eternal philosophy (*perennial philosophy*).