



TABLE TALK

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STRANGER THINGS & THE END OF THE WORLD

By Dr. James Tyler Robertson¹

The Netflix show *Stranger Things* garnered hundreds of millions of fans worldwide over the past decade—and historians of religion should take note. On New Year's Day 2026, the series finale debuted, garnering impressive viewership.² Critics of the final episode were underwhelmed by the ways in which the five-season show concluded its various story arcs. For some, this spawned a theory that the final episode was actually a ruse and the real finale was still to come.

People took to social media to make connections, show still frames, dig into lines of dialogue for double meanings, expose plot holes, and even used numerology to argue a second finale was on the horizon. They predicted January 7th for the return of *Stranger Things* and, when that day came and went without verifying such theories, I was struck by the similarity between this event and various apocalyptic movements throughout Christian history.

In the apocalyptic movements of preceding generations, communities believed they were the only ones able to read messages in the scriptures. They argued their community embodied a truer faith because they could understand Jesus's real teachings while so many of their co-religionists remained blind.

But such groups faced the same issues the "Secret Finale" fans did on January 8th when no new episode appeared. A former Tyndale professor, Dr. Mark Steinauer, summarized this conundrum succinctly when he said, "What does a community, built around the idea that the world will end on Monday, do when everybody wakes up on Tuesday morning?"

For the most part, these groups evolved their teachings, lost some members, recalculated their previous findings, and went forward in the world. The same appears to be true for the fans of *Stranger Things*. As the days have gone by, rumours about a spin-off series are now beginning to abound and most seem willing to

forgive those who advocated for the "true" finale. Conversations are shifting from secrecy and revelations to simply celebrating, or critiquing, a show that captured the imaginations of hundreds of millions around the world.

While the content and context of a television show is different than Christian beliefs, to dismiss the similarities is to miss an interesting moment in present-day culture. We are inundated with multiple conspiratorial theories about the happenings of the world. Due to social media, novelty and rapidity have usurped deliberation and reflection, and communities dedicated to a so-called new/truer teaching can spring up overnight. Sometimes, the incorrect theories are harmless, like in the case of *Stranger Things*. Other times, espoused theories impact policies and promote harmful theologies; like the spread of Christian nationalism or racism couched in so-called biblical teachings.

Apocalyptic visions are always compelling and in times of perceived upheaval they become even more so. The *Stranger Things* finale offers an innocuous example of the human tendency to construct more hopeful narratives in times of grief (like the ending of a favourite show); to support such narratives with dubious facts pulled from a variety of unconnected sources in order to give the impression of cohesion; to interpret the criticisms of such narratives as attacks from those who are not "in the know"; to become entrenched in a specific worldview; even how the failure of the apocalyptic vision to manifest is unable to wholly dislodge the faithful from their perspectives—the communities pivot, but they remain. While a television show finale lacks true importance, this strange moment has allowed us historians of faith a chance to witness the evolution of a "Great Disappointment" playing out in real time.³

And there are relevant lessons in that.



James Tyler Robertson, PhD, is Associate Professor of Christian History and Director of Distributed Learning at Tyndale University in Toronto.

Endnotes

1. This article is adapted from a blog post on the website of the Canadian Baptist Historical Society.

2. According to the “Hollywood Reporter” the finale, “stands at 105.7 million views, good for ninth place on the all-time list.” As found on <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/stranger-things-5-finale-netflix-ratings-top-10-all-time-1236465845/>

3. Millerite leader, William Miller, preached that Jesus would return on 22 October 1844. When this did not occur, he and his followers were disappointed. This is one of my favourite historical descriptors for that moment, but it is important because the Millerites’ Great Disappointment was also the beginning of the Seventh Day Adventist Movement.

NEWS

Annual Wesley Studies Symposium: The Wesley Studies Symposium took place on 28 April 2026. The keynote speaker was Dr. David Bundy from the Manchester Wesley Research Centre.

Alister E. McGrath Chair of Christian Thought and Spirituality: On 24 February 2026, Dr. Patrick Franklin, Associate Professor of Theology, was officially installed as the Alister E. McGrath Chair of Christian Thought and Spirituality. He is the second person to occupy this chair, succeeding Dr. Dennis Ngien. Please join us in congratulating Dr. Franklin on this appointment.



Panel Discussion on the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea: This past October, Dr. Ashoor Yousif, Dr. James Pedlar, and Dr. Wafik Wahba participated in a faculty discussion forum about the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea with His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Armenian Orthodox Church. The panel was chaired by Dr. Michael Krause, Interim Dean of Tyndale Seminary.

UPCOMING COURSES

The Department of History and Theology is offering the following courses in the Spring/Summer 2026 Semester:

- **History of Christianity I** (Asynchronous Online) with Dr. Taylor Murray
- **History of Christianity II** (Asynchronous Online) with Dr. James Robertson

- **Perspectives on Global Mission** (Asynchronous Online) with Dr. Wafik Wahba
- **Theology of Church Renewal** (Synchronous online) with Dr. James Pedlar
- **Gospel Church and Culture** (Asynchronous Online) with Dr. Wafik Wahba
- **Systematic Theology** (Asynchronous Online) with Dr. Alex Trew
- **Theology of the Human Person** (In-Person) with Dr. Victor Shepherd

If you are interested in taking any of these courses, please speak with registration office at Tyndale University.

WHY “TABLE TALK”?

By Dr. Taylor Murray

You may see the title of this newsletter and wonder why we’ve selected it. Seems a little odd for a periodical about theology and history, no?

It dates back to the Reformation, specifically to Martin Luther himself. The great German reformer was more than a theological agitator, he was also an educator at the University of Wittenberg. As a professor, he often opened his house up to his students. He shared meals with them and, in this casual setting, offered wisdoms and theological insights (and more than a few crude remarks). Over a period of years, his students recorded these comments and later published them in a volume that they titled *Tischreden*, or, in English: *Table Talk*.

This newsletter (likely) won’t contain crude remarks, but it will provide an opportunity to engage in a more casual context—similar to the one Luther shared with his students. It will contain a brief reflection or article, followed by news and updates from the faculty in the Department of History & Theology at Tyndale Seminary.



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Editorial Information:

Table Talk is edited by Dr. Taylor Murray, with contributions from the Department of History & Theology at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, ON.