

# Blessed Are the Warmakers?

by [Christopher Manion](#)

I asked Cal Thomas a few months ago why so many Christians were so enthusiastic about war with Iraq, if the Pope was so resolutely against it.

He answered, "I have no idea."

You can say that again.

Mr. Thomas, normally a sensible man writing from an evangelical Christian point of view, has just announced that the biblical "[Time for War](#)" is at hand.

Invoking Woodrow Wilson, that most peaceable, honest, Christian creature, Thomas explains that "Peace is a byproduct – a benefit – when evil is vanquished."

Mr. Thomas is probably the most widely syndicated Christian columnist in America. So he merits our attention. He is sounding a clarion call to those who regard him as their authority on political questions. He has now told them that evil can be vanquished, that it will only take one little war, and that, when it is over, we can have peace.

Now, Karl Marx believed that, but Jesus Christ didn't, Augustine of Hippo didn't, and certainly Pope John Paul II does not.

Which is another way of saying, "Hogwash!"

Since this disputed assumption about the nature of evil and peace constitutes the defective ingredient at the foundation of Mr. Thomas's case, it begs a bit of belaboring.

Marx taught that the revolution (Lenin called it the "permanent revolution") would end with a version of heaven on earth, but only after the dictatorship of the proletariat, the last stage of history and Marx's materialist counterpart of the Second Coming of Christ and the ensuing establishment of a new

heaven and a new earth.

For Marx, "peace" would prevail after the emergence of "truly socialist man." Marx explains in his German Ideology that, in post-revolutionary society, there would be no exchange – no longer would that original sin of the division of labor haunt us. We would all be "like Robinson Crusoe." And there would be peace. Evil (for Marx, the past) would be vanquished and the tension of history would be resolved.

Christ told us otherwise: Good men and bad men would cohabit the earth until the end times. The wheat and the tares would never be separated out from one another. There would be wars and rumors of wars. And Christ cautioned his apostles even further, in a warning fraught with political implications: "In the world you will have trouble, but be brave, for I have conquered the world." (John 16:33)

Please note, for the record, that Christ said that He had *already* conquered the world, and still warned His apostles that they (and we) would have trouble in it. This might prove to be somewhat troubling indeed, to those who were hoping, with Mr. Thomas, to enjoy true peace if only we would embark on this one manageable little world war in the Middle East first.

Mr. Thomas dismisses that knotty problem, however, with his discovery of two new godlings who redefine evil in a nice, manageable, human sort of way, and, *en passant*, rearrange human nature altogether. Embracing their treatise that redefines good and evil, Mr. Thomas announces: "Listen Up, Christians! Evil can be conquered, even without the United Nations!"

It comes as no surprise, alas, that these sources of the new definitions of good and evil are Lawrence F. Kaplan and William Kristol. I refer to them as godlings to be consistent with the words of temptation in Genesis, "You shall be as gods, knowing the difference between good and evil." In their new ordering of good and evil, Mr. Thomas finds sufficient justification (note: I did not say "argument") to condemn entire nations, dehumanize millions of people, elevate to semi-divinity those who agree with him, and reject out of hand any rational discourse, all in 800 words.

Quite a feat, to be sure.

For Mr. Thomas, "peace" is the good to be sought here. And it is fair to say that his argument implies that peace is the absence of Saddam. Like Thomas Hobbes, Mr. Thomas has, for this occasion, set aside the pursuit of the *summum bonum*, the traditional goal of a thoughtful, spiritual life within western civilization, and replaced it with the pursuit of the elimination of a *summum malum*, which (for the moment) is Saddam.

How evil is evil? "(Saddam) has imprisoned, tortured, gassed, shot and bombed thousands upon thousands of his own subjects. He has launched wars of aggression against his neighbors and still seeks to dominate the Middle East. He has expended vast resources on the development of weapons of mass destruction. He is at once a tyrant, an aggressor and, in his own avowed objectives, a threat to civilization."

Now a quick look back on the history of the past hundred years might find dozens of tyrants who meet these criteria. Some of those tyrants have been our allies (Stalin). Some of them we have embraced as "strategic counterweights" to our enemies (Mao). Some of them Madeline Albright has danced for (Kim Jong Il). And dozens of them have gone on killing and raping without the United States lifting a finger to stop them.

But what specific difference have the godlings found that makes Saddam the unique crucible of evil whose defeat will bring on that post-eschatological peace?

Well, Mr. Thomas doesn't say.

Instead, he smears anyone who would disagree.

Mr. Thomas has declared for war. Fine. But he doesn't stop there. He has given this war a power that is not only historic, but transcendental. While Christ cautioned us that true salvation and peace were possible only in the afterlife, Mr. Thomas now unites himself with the authority of the godlings on the nature of good and evil. Prophetically proclaiming that now is the "Time for War" of Ecclesiastes 3:8, he bypasses the New Testament and embraces the worldview of the godlings instead.

While rational persons might conclude that Saddam is like a lot

of other bad guys, past and present, the godlings reject such an approach, for fear, perhaps, that it will impose the normal, civilized limits of human conduct on what must be an unlimited effort. The concept of such limits can be found as far back as Aristotle, but emerge as a central theme in Augustine and in the Founding Fathers. The ideological campaign to eradicate the *summum malum*, on the other hand, has no limits because the Manichaean evil itself is unlimited, and must be met on its own ground.

Our constitutional order imposes limits on the warmaking power of the president. Those limits have been ignored. The doctrine of just war imposes limits on the warmaking power of civilized rulers. Those limits have been dismissed in a breathtaking exercise of "situation ethics" by those in the philosophical community one would least expect to do so.

When such limits are broken, those who break them know better than to appeal to the authority of the constitution, or the doctrine, they are breaking. Instead, they humbly claim the authority of Divine Providence, whose power is unlimited, and who conveniently confers upon the self-designated recipient a generous dollop of power that is normally the province of the Almighty, the exercise of which by mere men is normally illegal and immoral but not in this case because God is smiling upon us and upon our efforts.

Care to disagree? Be careful. The back of the hand of Mr. Thomas is coming your way, and right behind it is the tide of history.

Mr. Thomas praises the godlings for their wholesale condemnation, including dehumanization, of anyone who disagrees with them: "They indict nations and organizations that refuse to confront evil," he cheers. He applauds their attempt to reduce those who disagree to the level of barbarian vermin: "The debate over war with Iraq has shown that too many opinion makers, elected officials and others who guide the fortunes of the world's sole superpower have lost their capacity to identify evil and to act against it. Even when it stares them in the face," they announce, and Mr. Thomas nods.

After dehumanizing Saddam, the godlings find it convenient to dehumanize everyone else who disagrees with them.

Uncivilized, to be sure, but effective.

Note what is happening here: the gnostic assumption of a power that God Himself does not exercise (the removing of the rational intellect from his creatures), at odds with the Gospel and claiming a superiority to it, blithely relegates anyone who disagrees with them to the realm of the subhuman. The standard of the godlings is so perfect that it need not even be subject to rational discussion or to reflection in the light of Scripture. In fact, to subject it to such discussion would be a perverse indulgence in consorting with barbarians who have no capacity to perceive evil, recognize it for what it is, or to act upon it. Mr. Thomas, his anchor now long gone, glides effortlessly far to the left of the most extreme of the liberation theologians – and I'm sure, if discussion were permitted, it would come to him as quite a surprise.

Don't bother. Mr. Thomas is busily cheering the death of rational discourse. Being a good Christian, he does not want actively to endorse the dehumanization of large parts of the human race, he just wants to embrace its consequences. "The time for debate is over... The time for war is now!" Enquote.

But Mr. Thomas ignores the truth that is staring him in his face: The language he applauds here is clearly non-Christian; in fact, it is Hegelian. Not only does it claim to be the new source of good and evil, it even endows the godlings with the authority to dispense justice, as they gaily "indict" entire countries, organizations, and even public officials because it appears these barbarians disagree with them. The gnostic conceit is palpable: if you disagree with us, you have "lost your capacity to identify evil and to act against it." First the verdict, then the trial. We godlings are above it all. Bombs away.

This approach nicely dehumanizes the entire array of opposition to the war on Iraq, and the beauty of it – and its neo-Marxist character – is that it does so without any allowance for rational discussion! So, in asserting that they and those who agree with them are the only truly human actors left, they contemptuously deny reason, rational discussion, and civilized discourse to the rest of what used to be humanity. Talk about the end of history!

Karl Marx, in his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, declared that "heretofore philosophy has only interpreted the world. The

point is, to change it." I can find no indication that Mr. Thomas and the godlings have any problem with Marx in this regard.

In contrast to Mr. Thomas's succumbing to "The Closing of the American Mind," a most unexpected invitation to rational discourse appeared on the same day as Mr. Thomas's denial of rationality. While many of his fellow evangelicals see Israel's role in the conflict as their ticket for a front-row seat at Armageddon, Mr. Thomas avoids even the mention of Israel in his call for war. But former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski in [The Polish-Jewish Heritage Foundation of Canada](#)... defies Mr. Thomas's prohibition of rational discourse, and invites a closer look at the role of Israel. In fact, he calls for more discussion all around, and insists that it focus on (of all things) the questions that Mr. Thomas and the godlings and many other fervent supporters of the war have gone to such great lengths to avoid:

"In addition, the manner in which the United States defined its "war on terrorism" has struck many abroad as excessively theological ("evildoers who hate freedom") and unrelated to any political context. The evident reluctance to see a connection between Middle Eastern terrorists and the political problems of the Middle East fueled suspicions that the United States was exploiting the campaign against terrorism largely for political and regional ends. Moreover, the increasingly shrill but unsubstantiated efforts to connect Iraq with al Qaeda have also given rise to the question of whether that alleged (or emerging) linkage is the reason for U.S. policy or, increasingly, the result of it.

Matters have not been helped by the evident, if unstated, endorsement by President Bush of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's notions of how to deal with both the Palestinians and the region as a whole. The European press has commented more widely than the U.S. press on the striking similarity between current U.S. policies in the Middle East and the recommendations prepared in 1996 by several American admirers of Israel's Likud Party for the then-prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu.

That these admirers are now occupying positions of

influence in the administration is seen as the reason the United States is so eager to wage war against Iraq, so willing to accept the scuttling of the Oslo peace process between Israel and the Palestinians and so abrupt in rejecting European urgings for joint U.S.-European initiatives to promote peace between Israel and the Palestinians."

So many unsubstantiated efforts, so many striking similarities, so many troublesome questions.

But don't bother Mr. Thomas with such nettlesome distractions. It's time for the war!

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