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Isaiah 61:4

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THE STALEMATE MENTALITY

by Gary North

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. As one ship sat burning in the harbor, its anti-aircraft guns blazing at the incoming waves of planes, a chaplain reportedly began assisting the gunners, and was heard to shout, "Praise the Lord, and pass the ammunition!" This phrase was turned into a popular patriotic song of the Second World War. The chorus ended, "Praise the Lord, and pass the ammunition, and we'll all stay free." It was this vision of men's responsibilities that motivated British and American forces. Churchill's "Blood, Sweat, and Tears" speech — actually, he had said "blood, sweat, toil, and tears" — delivered a similar message: **the assurance of victory**, at first in a defensive battle, but ultimately offensively. The Allies were determined to carry the war to the enemy's front door, and then knock down the door. It would not be easy, but it would be done.

Pusan or Inchon?

In June of 1950, the North Korean army attacked South Korea. The poorly equipped South Korean army, outnumbered two-to-one, collapsed immediately. Half of its 65,000 men were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner. President Singman Rhee (age 75) and General Douglas MacArthur (age 74), who had flown in from Japan, watched the final rout from the front lines. Seoul, the South Korean capital, fell in four days.

America flew in the Army's 24th and 25th divisions from Japan. Inexperienced, poorly trained, and poorly equipped, they retreated for six weeks until they were trapped on the southern tip of Korea, the Pusan peninsula. Some American troops had surrendered at first, until they learned how few prisoners the North Koreans took. It looked as if MacArthur's troops would be pushed into the sea. Finally, the Americans and South Koreans dug in, and a stalemate ensued. A chunk of land south of a 120-mile strip across the southern tip of Korea was all that remained of free South Korea. Now what?

MacArthur had an idea. Why not launch an invasion at the port of Inchon, 24 miles west of Seoul and 150 miles from the rear of the North Korean forces? It was considered impossible to complete an amphibious landing at Inchon. MacArthur knew what military exerts believed, so he decided to attempt it. The element of surprise was crucial. The 1st Marine Division was secretly shipped in from San Francisco, and on September 15, the invasion began. It was over the day it started. The American forces cut the North Koreans off from behind, and within two weeks the North Koreans were defeated. Half were in prisoner of war camps; the rest were cut off in small units or trying to flee home.

The war did not end, of course. The Chinese Communists invaded with a huge force of 300,000 men in late November. MacArthur had been caught off guard, despite warning signs. The Chinese had done to him what he had done to the North Koreans. It was the worst military defeat of his career. He learned first-hand what he had taught: there is no respite during a war. **The war goes on until one side wins.**

The 1st Marine Division was cut off and surrounded. They had attacked the Chinese from the rear, since they had been 40 miles to the north when the Chinese hit the Eighth Army. But the Chinese had anticipated the Marines' attack, and had cut them off. The Marines then broke out of the trap. Lt. Gen. Walton Walker, the Marine commander, uttered the classic line of the Korean war — which later became the title of a movie about the war. When asked by a reporter if he was retreating, he responded: **"Retreat, hell! We're only attacking in a different direction."** Col Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller almost matched Walker's line: "The enemy is in front of us, behind us, to the left of us, and to the right of us. They won't escape this time." They hacked their way out for 14 days through blizzards and thousand-foot chasms. (See William Manchester, *The Glory and the Dream* [Boston: Little, Brown, 1972], pp. 530-47.)

"Bugout Fever"

Why all this military history in a religious newsletter? Because we are still in a war. From time to time, a truce breaks out. No one is fooled except the Christians. The fundamentalist equivalents of the State Department — seminaries, denominational magazines, old-line campus evangelism ministries, Gospel quartets, prophetic tape ministries, and paperback devotional books by housewives — keep informing us that the "real battle to come" is not for us, that the tribulation is for the Jews, and victory is post-tribulation. Today's battle cry: "Pray for a stalemate." The largest Christian army on the field is an army of insurance salesmen selling eternal fire insurance policies to the terminal generation. The troops are all looking forward to R&R: not rest and recreation, but rapture and restoration. They suffer from the affliction first described at Pusan: **"bugout fever."** In 1950, American troops trapped at Pusan wanted to get back to Japan. Today, the Christian troops want to "bug out" to heaven before enemy forces launch the great tribulation.

Those who promote "the last outpost" perspective are divided. Some believe that the last outpost will end with the return of Christ and His angels in final judgment. Conclusion: not a single non-ecclesiastical institution we build today will survive the final onslaught of the enemy, which precedes Christ's victorious return. The other major viewpoint teaches that Christ will return to set up an international chain of command with headquarters in Jerusalem. God's angels — a kind of heavenly "1st Airborne Division" — will relieve us of command, letting us "bug out" for our long-awaited R&R. When we return in our perfect physical bodies, it will be desk jobs, PX prices, and field-grade commissions for all of us, and hard times for spiritual gooks, wogs, and fuzzy-wuzzies everywhere, for a thousand years.

We all know one thing: **we're in Pusan.** We are trapped on the peninsula, and the enemy is at the bridges (or gates, as the case may be). Christians know that humanists control the

Congress, the President, the big-three T.V. networks, the prestige universities, the public schools (except, you understand, local public schools attended by 90% of the children of the mainline denominations, where 30% of the faculty and the assistant football coach are Baptists, and it doesn't matter who writes the textbooks, so "go, team, go"), the news media (except, of course, the local newspaper, which is owned by a Presbyterian elder, and it doesn't matter who writes the AP and UPI stories), the social welfare committees of every denomination of more than 15,000 members, the oil companies, big business, big labor, and the big foundations. What do Christians control? The right-to-life movement, the temperance movement, half a dozen 4-year colleges, three satellite T.V. networks, and possibly as many as 14 small-town branches of the YMCA. This is Pusan. Will we break out or bug out?

Gen. MacArthur had the right idea: the Inchon landing. Gen. Walker also had the right idea: attacking in a different direction. Senior officers do not go into battle expecting to surrender, or to be trapped in some enclave. Those who do go into battle expecting defeat are soon defeated. They spend the war in a POW camp. Or the Gulag Archipelago.

Walking the Point

In mid-September of this year, Rev. Jerry Falwell devoted one broadcast of his Old Time Gospel Hour to a report on the attacks he has sustained from the humanist media and humanist demonstrators. He showed film clips of placard-carrying protestors. He also showed filmed interviews with several of them. One group of protestors was parading in front of his church, and one of them carried a small cross with a dead frog nailed to it. The cross bore the inscription: "He died for your sins." To put it mildly, the protestors we saw were not people who inspire confidence.

The object of the presentation was to raise money. The various ministries of the Old Time Gospel Hour are under financial pressure, he reported. Giving is down, costs are up. With a 5,000-student college, the television programming costs, and all the other expenses, his ministry needs a continuing flood of money. The recession and the bad publicity have cut into people's giving, he reported.

The way he chose to raise funds is a good one: identify the common enemies. Provide visual proof of just how reprehensible the enemies are — the same thing they do when they run their full-page ads against the Moral Majority and related ministries. Books like *Holy Terror: The Fundamentalist War on America's Freedoms in Religion, Politics and Our Private Lives* (Doubleday, 1982) and *The New Subversives: Anti-Americanism of the Religious Right* (Continuum, 1982) pull no punches. But their humanist authors resent it when Falwell fights back for what he believes in.

A recurring theme in his presentation was this: "I am the point man in this battle." What is a point man? He is the soldier who walks ahead of the platoon, checking out the road, watching for the enemy, and drawing the first shots. He used another analogy: walking through the mine field. He might have used a third: a lightening rod. Someone has to walk the point, draw the initial fire, catch the flak. Jerry Falwell is the New Christian Right's point man.

Obviously, most soldiers prefer not to walk the point. It is a dangerous position. There is nowhere to hide when you walk the point. This is the job which he has chosen, he said, and he is willing to continue. But, he said, he wants to know that others are behind him, that they will take a stand with him. **No one wants to walk the point if the troops behind him have retreated.**

This leads me to the following observation: if he is going to survive the ordeal, the point man needs a team backing him up. But if the team is to be motivated to do this, rather than bug out, the members need to have confidence. They need to trust their commanding officer, their noncommissioned officer, and their point man. They also need to trust their battle plan. A platoon that expects to be wiped out probably will be. No point man wants to walk the point in front of a discouraged platoon that is ready to cut and run at the first sound of gunfire.

What impressed me about Rev. Falwell's appeal was this: he kept telling his viewers that victory is assured, that the forces of moral righteousness will not be defeated, that the United States is about to be turned around. **Like a good company commander, he was talking victory.** He was rallying the troops for a fight. He was not calling them to a losing battle.

The "electronic churchmen" who are trying to rally Christians to take a stand have abandoned the language of premillennialism. Those who still cling tightly to the older faith are not calling their viewers to do anything risky, or to take an unpleasant stand. The difference between the preaching of Howard C. Estep ("The King is Coming") and Jerry Falwell is striking. The latter has not officially abandoned the eschatology of the former, but unofficially he preaches a new gospel, a gospel of victory.

What the New Christian Right has discovered is that if this society isn't redeemed, then we face a cultural crisis of major proportions. They have built up large followings, have amassed huge debts, and they now face political and ultimately religious pressures from the humanists who dominate the media and national politics. They see the need of fighting back, but they have learned an important truth: **it is difficult to raise troops and money for a losing cause.** It is easier for followers to stay home and play safe, when it is a question of getting behind a point man in a self-professed losing cause. And the point men like Falwell who refuse to quit now need to rally the troops.

They are no longer calling for an enclave, for a perpetual stalemate. They are no longer content to remain bottled up on the Pusan peninsula. No one needs a point man in a defensive operation anyway; point men are offensive. They are used in breakouts. They are used to "carry the war to the enemy." They are not used in defensive operations. **By identifying himself as a point man, Jerry Falwell has been forced, institutionally and financially, to abandon the language of premillennial dispensationalism, whether he still believes it or not.** He has adopted the language of victory.

Christians are rallying to support Falwell and others like him who stand up and fight. In doing so, they are steadily abandoning premillennialism, psychologically if not officially. Older groups still cling to eschatologies of defeat. These groups are large, but they are dying. Their influence is shrivelling up. People who have rallied for a battle do not want to hear tales of inevitable defeat from their commanders.

The kind of theology represented by Hal Lindsey's books is fading. Those who follow Lindsey hope for "peace in Pusan." **They pray for a continuing stalemate,** for they see persecution and external defeat as the only alternative to stalemate. But these people are not in the front lines of today's religious battles. **"Bugout theology" does not produce armies, only refugees.** These people cannot serve as point men. Their theology will not produce a sustained battle — the kind of battle Christians are lining up for today.

A stalemate is not good enough. MacArthur said it best: **"There is no substitute for victory."**