

arose out of Asia Minor. Therefore it should not be hard to transmit the Gospel to Eastern peoples. It is merely a question of "translating" it, keeping in mind the culture and the environment into which it is being announced, to avoid useless misunderstandings.

The controversy around the ancestor cults, for example, set back the expansion of the Christian faith in China and other Asia countries; after the first Jesuit missionaries, who rightly compared ancestor worship to the veneration of saints in the Catholic Church, came missionaries of other orders who interpreted that form of devotion as superstition and witchcraft, and thereby triggered centuries of persecution of the Christians.

In the encyclical, John Paul II defines the missionary as a "contemplative in action," stating that his "contact with representatives of the non-Christian spiritual traditions, particularly those of Asia, has confirmed me in the view that the future depends to a great extent on contemplation."

"Contemplation," continued Father Tang, "is a basic aspect of Hinduism, and also in Buddhism the path to salvation corresponds to a state of inner happiness, to be reached via contemplation; often in these countries the exaggerated stress on the mystical-contemplative aspect is an obstacle to social progress."

"The Holy Father," Tang continued, "wishes to underline that missionaries must understand the Asiatic soul, and must try to announce Jesus Christ by using all the positive religious elements present in Asian culture, of which contemplation is a fundamental element. Through the prism of contemplation it will be possible to propose, then, certain values of liberation and overall development of man which are those of the Christian message. These values also have to do with material well-being, economic development, the defeat of poverty, solidarity, and progress."

In his encyclical, the Pope notes that "in certain countries missionaries are refused entry. In others, not only is evangelization forbidden, but conversion as well and even Christian worship," a statement many have read as referring to Islamic countries. Father Tang adds that hostility to Christianity is manifested wherever religion is deformed into fanaticism.

"There are great difficulties even in India," Father Tang says, "where Christian preaching on equality among all men is seen as a threat to Hinduism, which upholds the division into castes. In other countries, like China, the problem is political. There, it is communism which does not allow the Catholic Church to announce the Gospel."

The element of novelty, the force, and the warmth of the *Redemptoris Missio* is precisely the reaffirmation of the perennial validity of missionary activity: "The Pope has given great relief to the activity of the young churches," Father Tang concludes, "involving them as protagonists in the evangelization of non-Christian peoples. It is a mission we have been awaiting for years, and this encyclical is coming at the right time."

North Korea could go either way

by Lydia Cherry

North Korea watchers are divided over whether the massively armed hermit kingdom will "exploit the military vacuum" created by the Gulf war and attempt to launch an attack over the demilitarized zone (DMZ), as South Korean leaders fear, or whether the rulers in North Korea's capital, Pyongyang, have instead begun to move in a very different direction: to ally with the rapidly developing countries of Asia in a bloc which it hopes will become free of U.S. control.

There are strong indications backing both propositions. What is indisputable, is that the country will be forced to move one way or the other, as the status quo has become untenable. A sharp drop in imports of crude oil from Iran since the Gulf war began has reportedly plunged metal and machinery industries into stagnation, and the regime has put into motion a "two meals a day" campaign to attempt to deal with acute food shortages.

The combination of the Gulf war and the resurgence of the hardliners in Moscow has the South Korean (R.O.K.) government's "northern policy" in tatters. That policy had envisioned that by getting closer to Moscow and Beijing, they could obtain a direct opening to Pyongyang. The initial South Korean hope of a reenactment in Korea of the German reunification process no longer seems possible.

South Korean confidence in Gorbachov's inclination or ability to help this process is waning. At a Jan. 22 press conference, Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Maslyukov announced that North Korea would continue to get weapons from the Soviet Union, but that the weapons were "defensive." Ridiculing the term "defensive," the South Korean newspaper *Choson Ilbo* described the scene: "The reporters in the crowd had the feeling that our expectations of the R.O.K.-U.S.S.R. relationship were falling apart. There was this great contrast between the attitude of the Soviet Union, which seemed to swagger even as it received the \$3 billion loan [from Seoul], and the attitude of our government which seemed to be a patsy."

There are unconfirmed reports of a policy split within the North Korean leadership. After the Ceausescu regime was toppled in Romania last year, a former Romanian official said that an anti-establishment organization exists in North Korea, comprised of at least three (unidentified) members of

the Central Committee. In early February, the North Korean press reported that the government had crushed a plot within the ruling Worker's Party to thwart the planned transfer of power from the older Kim to his son, Kim Chong-il.

War murmurings

Several times in late January, North Korea blustered that the yearly U.S.-South Korean "Team Spirit" military exercises, which began Jan. 23 and will run until the end of April, could set off a war. As such threats are relatively commonplace, they were taken with a grain of salt. However, several other indications were greeted with more concern.

Chinese and Soviet news services reported that on the morning of Jan. 27, an air defense exercise was conducted in Pyongyang, and that it was the first such exercise to have taken place in 10 years. According to Xinhua, on that day, "adult men with backpacks took shelter in subway underpasses and other underpasses, as did women who took along their children." Then, R.O.K. President Noh Tae Woo stated on Feb. 4 that North Korea was producing its own Scud missiles and had placed them along the demilitarized zone that divides North and South Korea, as reported by Yonhap, South Korea's news wire.

Charges that North Korea was involved in producing and improving Scud missiles and selling them to Iraq have recently been voiced by both a U.S. Defense Department spokesman and an Israeli professor. One source speculated that because the U.S. and Israel are stepping up their claims about North Korea violations of such things as the embargo against Iraq, North Korean leaders may "actually believe they could be a U.S. target." A Defense Department spokesman said on Jan. 17 that North Korea was "airlifting supplies" to Iraq, contravening the U.N. economic sanctions against Iraq. Then on Feb. 4, Seoul Domestic Service quoted Professor Leshen, a researcher on military affairs and technology at Tel Aviv University, asserting that Pyongyang has been involved in the production of Al-Husayn missiles, with a range of 6-700 kilometers, which, he said, are an improved version of the Scud-B and of the Al-Abas missile.

Yet according to the London *Times* Feb. 7, North Korea has also sold Scud missiles to Iraq's adversary (and U.S. "coalition" partner) Syria—insisting on full cash payment upon delivery. South Korean President Noh Tae Woo suggested recently that North Korea's role as an arms supplier is tied to a desperate need for hard cash.

In search of a way out

"We believe they are searching for a way out of the box," a Japanese diplomatic source told *EIR* in discussing the overtures which Kim Il-Sung had made to Asian countries in recent months. "When they proposed that we establish diplomatic relations—it came out of the blue," he said. He added that the kind of help that the North Koreans need right now, "China can't give them." Japan and North Korea are

continuing talks to establish full diplomatic relations and the two sides will meet again in March. It is not just Japan, however. The Kim Il-Sung government has also reached out to the governments of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand.

The first clue that North Korea was contemplating making a new set of friends came from the elder Kim himself, who, according to *Seoul Sinmun* Jan. 14, has over the last nine months taken responsibility for foreign relations and the economy back from his son, Kim Chong-Il. "Today Asia is entering a new stage of development," Kim Il-Sung is quoted. "If they unite and cooperate closely with one another on the principles of independence, equality, and mutual benefit, the diligent and talented Asian people can achieve the security and common prosperity of Asia and contribute to the cause of world peace. The government of the Republic will actively develop the relations of friendship and cooperation with the peoples of many Asian countries in order to build a new, independent and prosperous Asia."

South-South overtures

In the new year, the North Koreans made many forays into the prosperous countries of Asia. During the last week in January, North Korean Prime Minister Yon Hyong Muk visited Bangkok, and it was announced Jan. 31 that Thailand and North Korea "have agreed to establish full diplomatic relations and promote bilateral trade," in the words of the *Bangkok Post*. North Korea agreed to buy more farming and mining products from Thailand, and also demonstrated an interest in purchasing more rubber, tin, and zinc. Yon stated North Korea wanted to sell steel to Thailand.

The Seoul daily *Chungang Ilbo* on Feb. 4 quoted a North Korea expert from Japan noting that during the visit, Yon proposed importing 1 million tons of rice from Thailand during the next two to three years, including 500,000 tons this year. He added that the food situation in the North is "very serious."

On Feb. 2, an agreement on economic and technological cooperation and a trade agreement were signed between North Korea and Indonesia, following Prime Minister Yon's visit to that country.

Perhaps the most interesting visit was Yon's trip to Malaysia, whose independent-minded prime minister, Mahathir bin Mohamad, has recently incurred Washington's wrath again by continuing to organize for an "East Asian Economic Grouping" (EAEG) free from U.S. or Australian control. According to North Korea's news service KCNA, Prime Minister Yon told the Malaysians that his government "highly estimated and supported the proposal for creating an East Asian trade market . . . to strengthen South-South cooperation and protect the interests of developing countries."

Yon was also quoted as saying he was "deeply impressed" with the success achieved by the Malaysian people, who have achieved economic growth rates of 7-8% in recent years. The two sides also reportedly discussed the Gulf war.