

North Korea and the God Factor

Are we on the edge of a nuclear war, as some near-hysterical pundits claim? Will Kim Jong Un act foolishly, wreaking havoc on Japan and South Korea, only to suffer a devastating response from America? What is that demented dictator thinking? And what are other world leaders thinking, from President Trump to China's Xi Jinping to Russia's Putin? What about the military leaders? What are they counseling?

These are all important questions, questions we should be asking. But there's another question that, in a sense, is the biggest question of all. And it's probably the one we forget to ask, namely, What is God doing in the midst of this? What is His plan?

It's easy to forget that we humans are not the only ones calling the shots, and that, in the midst of the choices we make for good or evil, a sovereign King is carrying out His plan. In the words of Daniel, it is God who "removes kings and sets up kings" (Dan 2:21). Yes, "all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. And no one can stay His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Dan 4:35).

Should we imagine that this same God is sitting by passively, waiting to see what decisions His earthly creation will make? Or, worse still, should we imagine that He is wringing His hands in despair, worried about what Kim Jong Un and others will do?

Hardly. Instead, He is at work, be it overtly and covertly, and He has made His plans as well. What might those plans be?

I don't want to disappoint you, but I do not have a direct

revelation from heaven right now, nor can I point to a verse in the Bible that says, "This is the Lord's plan regarding North Korea in 2017."

But I do know that He cares about the souls of lost men and women (Ezek 18:32), that He desires all to come to repentance and know Him (2 Pet 3:9; 1 Tim 2:1-4), and that He hurts when His children are persecuted for the faith (Acts 9:4). This tells me that, whatever else may be going on, the Lord wants to penetrate the darkness of N. Korea so that His light can shine in.

Many of you have seen the satellite image of North Korea at night, the whole nation in virtual darkness while the surrounding countries are lit up. Well, as it is in the natural, so it is in the spiritual, with N. Korea consistently cited as the most dangerous country in the world for a Christian to live.

The state-sponsored persecution is brutal and unrelenting, with whole families imprisoned for the "crime" of Christianity. Stories of executions, torture, and inhuman punishment abound, and it is impossible for a Christian to practice his or her faith in public.

Yet leaders in South Korea have told me that, before the Korean War, the majority of Christians were in the northern part of the country, while overall, according to data cited on Wikipedia, as of 1945, "approximately 2 percent of the population was Christian."

As of 2014, "about 30 percent of [the] South Korean population is declared as Christian." Not only so, but "the influence on education has been decisive as Christians started 293 schools and 40 universities including three of the top five academic institutions."

Yet, as this massive awakening has taken place in the south, Christians in the north struggle to survive, going underground

in order to endure the ruthless, emperor-worshipping regime.

Of course, none of this takes away from the gravity of the moment, with threats and counterthreats coming from Pyongyang and Washington and Beijing and Moscow.

But a higher perspective—a heavenly perspective—reminds us that something more may be going on and that, perhaps, this might be the divine moment for the Bamboo Curtain to come down. When it does, we might be shocked to see how the Church of North Korea has survived and perhaps even grown.

I've ministered in Asia on more than 40 different occasions, including 12 trips to South Korea, and last year, I participated in a worship and prayer service held right on the DMZ border. It was quite a unique experience.

Naturally, South Koreans are acutely aware of the danger that lurks to the north, with all its military prowess, which is one reason South Korean Christians pray with such fervor every day. Their lives could literally depend on it.

But they also pray with broken hearts for their extended family to the North, for a people deceived by monstrous lies, a people so cut off from the outside world.

Shortly before one of my trips to Seoul, the founding leader of North Korea, Kim Il-sung, had just passed away, and the nation was in deep mourning for his loss. Men and women wailed for him, as if for a fallen god, and this too broke the hearts of the Christians in the South.

In a few short years after World War II, a once-free people found themselves living in an Orwellian nightmare, one they actually believed to be true. It is a modern-day tragedy of epic proportions, and it must grieve the heart of God too.

Could this be the time for North Korea's liberation? I pray that it will be so. And perhaps it could happen with a

dramatic swiftness that does not leave millions of casualties in its wake.

We can only pray that the will of the Lord be done, whatever that will is. May this be their time of liberation.