Thanks for the XML-hint, I embarrassingly was totally oblivious to that
and treated it as a shell script (a la .cshrc).

So I used 'Property List Editor' but all the combinations I could think
of did not change anything. Emacs.app would never see my 'IDL_PATH'. I
tried with and without quotation marks, with '+' signs or avoiding them,
with '<IDL_DEFAULT>' or without, etc. the IDL shell in Emacs.app would
always only see the default path. I might do some other stupid mistake?

Your other hint (setenv in .emacs) works excellently though, so I am
sticking to that.

Thanks a lot for the help!

Chris