



Dr. Kim Duk Whang and Eastern Social Welfare Society -Upon Dr. Kim's Retirement

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“Take care of orphanages and single mothers”

Dr. Kim Duk Whang kept this phrase deep inside his mind when he founded Eastern Social Welfare Society in early 1970. At that time, there were only few people out there to take care of the orphans and unwed mothers. Most of the Koreans were interested in how they could be better off in the industrializing society and did not care about abandoned babies. It was Dr. Kim Duk Whang who took action for those children in need. In an interview with EBS, he recalled, “In those days, people abandoned babies in plastic bags, in the streets, etc. Thus I decided to do something for these babies.” He believed every life was given by God, thus everyone is so precious.

“I love to help others. After I retired from Ministry of Health and Welfare, I started to help orphans and churches,” said Dr. Kim asked about the reason he started welfare organization. Dr. Kim was almost sixty years old when he started ESWS. In the age when most people get retired, he started something, something very precious.

He first tried domestic adoption, however, he had to meet a lot of obstacles. In the early 70s, adopting a baby was regarded as shameful in Korea. Koreans had no rooms in their hearts for children without a family. In 1970s, many people believed that those children deserve orphanage. Simply put, just feeding and providing accommodation was enough for orphans.

“Some people from orphanages may have a good life. However, it is better to grow up in a family. They will have more opportunities and more education. If they stayed in an orphanage in Korea, who would educate them in college and graduate school?” recalled Dr. Kim.

I presume, at first, he started adoption from the caring heart for the little babies. When he first started adoption, he had a dream that someday these little angels grew up to be loved in a family, live safely, reach their potential and be a contributing member in this world. And after thirty years, his all wishes and dreams for those children became real. Before he retired from ESWS, it was one of his biggest joys to meet and talk with adult adoptees who grew up wonderfully. His prayers were answered.

Moreover, God gave him much more than he prayed

Among the babies who came to the care of ESWS, some had disability. Sometimes, it is too severe to find parents to adopt them. For these children, Dr. Kim founded an institution, special school and other facilities and extended service area. Under Dr. Kim's strong leadership, ESWS came to reach out hands for all levels people in need from babies to senior citizens. Now, ESWS plays a significant role in the improvement of Korea's social welfare.

However, it was not always easy to do such things. In early 1980s, when they decided to build Eastern Child Welfare Center in Pyongtaek, they had to face severe opposition by neighbors. The residents did not want the neighbors with disabilities. They asserted that living with them will threaten their safety. They demonstrated against building the Center almost every day.

Nevertheless, deep inside his heart, Dr. Kim had a faith that children, though they have disabilities, should live in better circumstances and be given education. Persuading native residents and Pyongtaek city officials, at last, in 1985, Eastern Child Welfare Center was established.

Now it serves as the main social welfare center in the community. Thanks to the center, a lot of disabled children of the community can get a quality education, and children from disrupted families can live in a shelter and a lot of members of the community get the benefit from the Center. In about 25 years, it turned out his decision not only changed the lives of clients, but also upgraded the level of welfare in Pyongtaek city.

Besides that, he did so many things that change the lives of the needy people and, ultimately, the history of social welfare in Korea.

He was a very strong and faithful person, but for children, he was just a warm-hearted grandfather. He did not pass by a baby who was waiting for his or her turn at the Love the Children clinic without holding it. And he didn't forget to express gratitude to the foster mothers of the baby. The mothers were consoled for their hard work by his encouragement. Whenever he visited Pyongtaek, he would be surrounded by children there, because he was always all smiles on his face. He was just a grandfather to all the children at ESWS.

Every staff at ESWS knows how Dr. Kim always prayed for each baby who was adopted. Until his health allowed, he would go to the mountain every dawn to pray for the well being of the babies and adoptees. He felt really sorry that people in Korea could not take all of them and had to send them overseas. And he prayed that each baby could be happy and healthy.

Many people will remember him as an enthusiastic social welfare professional. However, he was an influential historian as well, who specializes Korean history of northern territory. He wrote a lot of books on history and religion like "Manchurian dictionary", "History of Manchuria", "Our nation, our history", "History of Korean religion", "History of Korean philosophy", "Research on Ethics of Ancient Korea", "" etc. He was so sad that we lost Manchurian area where our ancestors lived for a long time. He wrote these series of books wishing that many Korean people should not forget the love and interest on that area.

His passion, love and energy enabled him to work for people in need and to study history in depth. We all thank God for allowing him with health so that he could do those things such wonderfully. We see "God" in every decision he made, and in every action he took. In an interview with a TV show about ESWS, Dr. Kim said, "It has been God's choice, surely, God's choice. There were several crucial moments in my life when I was almost dead. However, he spared my life all the time. Now I think it was because he wanted to use me for people in need."

Until now the history of ESWS has been equivalent to Dr. Kim's life. Though he is retired now, his vision, passion and faith will be deeply inscribed in the soul of each staff. And we pray God will use us as a passage of blessings as He did to Dr. Kim.