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The need for the languages of North and South Korea to be united prior to reunification

“We have to understand their hostility towards Christianity.”

‘Evaluating realization of Christian mission in North Korea through education’

As we memorialize the 62nd anniversary of the Korean War, a book that could lend weight to overcoming the conflicts between North and South Korea has recently been completed.

“Good News from John,” a translation of the Book of John, has been published by Professor Kim Hyun Sik a resident of the Greater Washington DC area. For the last five years, The Professor has ignored his aging body and with hard work and by pressing his students and volunteers to finish their work he has been successful in this effort.

After defecting to South Korea, Professor Kim felt frustration while undergoing trial and error because he did not understand the Korean spoken in the South which has adopted many foreign words. As a result, he came to the conclusion that it is urgent to restore the linguistic cultural homogeneity of North and South Korea. After this, he published ‘South-North Korean Dictionary for the Reunification’ and ‘Bible Stories South and North Koreans Read Together.’

‘Good News from John’ in North Korean language along with English texts from The NET Bible® was a first publication in parts. With this as a momentum, translations of other books are expected to follow continuously.

Professor Kim taught Russian to the late Kim Jong Il in middle school and played a pivotal role in the Language Revolution in North Korea. He laid the foundation of the North Korean education system by introducing her 11 year free-mandatory education system and policies on

foreign language education; he explains the meaning of publication of the Pyongyang Bible as follows:

Importance of the Bible translation for Christian mission in North Korea

The efforts Professor Kim, who is over 80 years old, made in order to publish ‘The Promise of God’ in parts was tremendous. There were so many days he was preoccupied with this translation work for more than 12 hours a day. The sacrifice and dedication of the professionals from various fields i.e. linguists, theologians, jurists, scientists were added to this efforts. Every contribution has been put into producing a translation that is both more accurate and much easier for North Korean people to understand, and ‘Good News from John’ is evaluated as putting into practice that “Christian mission strategy for North Korea through education” that Professor Kim has pursued consistently.

In order to understand the importance of the translation, the negative mindset of North Korean people toward Christianity, Christian missionaries or Churches should not be overlooked. North Korean people might not want to come to church even though they are allowed to because they would regard the Bible as opium that would train nonresistance.

Professor Kim came to the conclusion that evangelizing intellectuals, the basis of a nation, in order to understand the importance of the translation, especially through English education is the foundation for nurturing Kim Il Sung followers, and is key to overcoming this problem. In concert with North Korea’s policy for the fostering of future generations, this will have a marked effect. Since 1980, North Korea has been teaching English as a first foreign language but there are little or no good teaching materials. Hence, a Christian mission strategy of English education using English-North Korean Bible will be very effective.

The publication process of Bible translation

The characteristics of the North Korean way of education, that combine putting great effort into preparation of teaching materials for one hour lectures and conducting the class exactly in accordance with a lesson plan are completely reflected to the Pyongyang Bible. Professor Kim was never satisfied with simply translating English into language spoken in North Korea. He made a great effort to find the translation that the North Korean intellectuals could be most reasonably receptive to and retain the excellent quality.

Overcoming many kinds of difficulties, the contract with Biblical Studies Press LLC to obtain the right of publication of the translation was officially signed and the process of translation was accelerated. A collaborative channel with ‘TIPS’ (Truro International Programs & Services) program, that evangelizes foreigners by teaching English in Northern Virginia for almost 20

years, has been established. The director of the TIPS program, David Case and an attorney as well as a teacher at TIPS, Michael Sikorski have advised on detailed expressions of American style English. David Lyou, an expert in cross-cultural interpretation and translation, worked on the translation applying his 10 years of experience, comparing North and South cultural backgrounds and their differences. Professor Kim made comparison and analyzed every single word in all versions of English Bible and located the most adequate word and expression. Then, via video chatting, he has received advices from professionals across the U.S. The translations were sent to Korean students in his course for their review and who have participated in the groundwork of translation over the last 5 years. Right before the publication, it was read through from cover to cover in a tone of Pyongyang language in order to bring out the subtle nuance and rhythm.

Quote from actual texts of Pyongyang Bible

‘그 자신은 빛이 아니었다. 그러나 그는 그 빛에 대하여 입증하기 위해 왔다. 모든 사람들에게 빛을 주는 그 참된 빛이 세상 속으로 오고 있었다. 그 분은 세상 속에 계셨고, 세상이 그 분에 의해 창조되었으나, 세상은 그 분을 알아보지 못했다. 그 분이 자기 령역에 오셨으나, 그 분의 백성들은 그분을 맞아들이지 않았다. 그러나 자기를 맞아들이는 모든 사람들 즉 그분의 이름을 믿는 사람들에게 그분은 하나님의 자녀가 되는 권리를 주셨다. 이들은 인간의 부모에 의해 태어나거나, 사람의 의지나 남편의 결정에 따라서가 아니라, 하나님에 의해서 난 자녀들이다. 이제 그 말씀이신 분이 사람이 되어 우리들 가운데 살게 되시었다. 우리가 그분의 영광을 보았는데, 그것은 아버지에게서 오신, 은혜와 진리로 가득찬, 그 유일한 분의 영광이었다. (John 1:8-14)’

Future Plans

Professor Kim has been writing two other books aside from Pyongyang version of the book of John. “English, South and North Learn Together” puts together the translation methods and English grammar which are newly defined by reflecting Russian grammar. Professor Kim explained, “when South and North Korea share the way of learning English grammar via this book, it will set a milestone in the process of the Korean language becoming one in name and reality.”

‘Would Pyongyang change?’ is Professor Kim’s second autobiography putting together the policies of fostering future generation by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, and the history and policies of the North Korean education system. Through this book, Professor Kim is hopes to set the guidelines and direction for change and opening up of North by pointing out the fact that North Korea was able to maintain its regime and political system largely because of their

education policy; this despite undergoing war threats from the outside world and suffering a severe shortage of food. These two books are expected to be published at the end of July. Following this, Professor Kim plans to begin translating three other Gospels, the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Professor Kim said, “The publication of the Pyongyang Bible was made possible through God’s love and care” and “I am certain that this Bible, translated with all our might to ensure its accuracy and science, will greatly benefit those North Korean people who have learned Russian”.

Journalist, Lee, Byunghan

Professor Kim Hyunsik’s profile

- He participated in the Korean War as a soldier of North Korean People’s Army in 1950.
- Professor at the Pyongyang University, Kim Hyung Jik College of Education (1954-1987)
- Visiting Professor at Russian National College of Education(1988-1991)
- Lecturer at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and the National Graduate School of Intelligence (1994-1999)
- Researcher at Korean Institute for National Unification (Chairman of the Board, Hwang Jang Yup) (1993-2003)
- Visiting professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (2001-2002)
- Visiting professor at Yale Divinity School (2003-2006)
- Research Professor at George Mason University (2007 ~ Present)

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