CALVIN IN JAPAN

DONALD J. BRUGGINK

With the mention of Calvin one thinks immediately of Geneva, or perhaps the Netherlands, or Grand Rapids — but rarely of Japan. But Calvin is also in Japan, for one of the most influential groups within Japanese Protestantism are the Reformed Presbyterian churches. Not only are these Japanese sons of the Reformation aware of their Reformed background, but they are also very conscious of the power that lies in their roots. As evidence of this there exists the Calvin Translation Society in Japan.

The purpose of this society? To publish all of Calvin's commentaries in Japanese. Their own succinct explanation for this desire is that "the majority of Calvin's works are still unknown to average Christians in Japan. If his works are translated, it will not only strengthen and enrich the life of the church in Japan but will also greatly influence the general climate of thought." The importance of this to a young church necessarily without deep theological roots of its own, and therefore far more easily swayed by the "latest" theologians and scholars, can hardly be overestimated. It speaks exceedingly well of the Japanese scholars in this project that they are so cognizant of the importance of their roots in Geneva.

The Society has already formulated a plan for the 1959-64 period (marked by the 450th anniversary of Calvin's birth in 1959, and the 400th anniversary of his death in 1964). During this period the Society plans to translate and publish ten volumes of Calvin's commentaries on the New Testament. That these commentaries will find a market is indicated by the fact that when Volume I of the Institutes was published over 20,000 copies were sold! A truly remarkable phenomenon in view of the fact that Protestant Christians in Japan number only around 300,000!

Western Theological Seminary can also take pride in its own indirect part in this project, for one of its sons, the Rev. I. John Hesselink, R.C.A. missionary to Japan, has been instrumental in helping to organize the Society, and remains one of its sponsors. The sponsorship of this society reads like a meeting of a Japanese Reformed Alliance: Wm. A. McIlwaine of the Southern Presbyterian Church, Leonard Sweetman of the Christian Reformed Church, Richard H. Drummond of the Presbyterian U.S.A., I. John Hesselink of the R. C. A., while the Japanese, Masaichi Takemori, Nobuo Watanabe, Takeshi Matsuo, and Norie Akiyama, represent the
three major groups of Reformed church life in Japan. All of these men are exceedingly well qualified for sponsorship, either through their linguistic skills (French, Latin, Japanese, English) or theological acumen.

Also among the sponsors is Tetsuo Kohmoto, president of the foremost Protestant publishing house in Japan. Of course a project of this magnitude takes a considerable sum of money, especially in view of the fact that the whole purpose of the Society is not in making a profit, but in a wide dissemination of Calvin’s writings. This means, in effect, that publication will be subsidized. The sum of $10,000 is necessary to get the project under way, after which the sale of the commentaries will be sufficient to provide the funds for additional publications.

Most of us are able to have Calvin’s commentaries in our libraries through the efforts of The Calvin Translation Society which over a century ago had its headquarters in Edinburgh, and whose translations the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. have reprinted for us. Having been so blessed by the efforts of others, let us not let the struggles of our Japanese brethren go unaided. Funds are needed, and are needed now as Romans and Hebrews are to be published in 1959. Your checks can be sent either directly to Mr. Tetsuo Kohmoto, Calvin Translation Society in Japan, c/o Shinkyo Shuppansha; 1, 3 Chome Shin-Ogawa-Machi; Shinjuki-ku, Tokyo, Japan or to their American correspondent, Donald J. Bruggink, 2705 Reservoir Avenue, New York 68, N. Y.