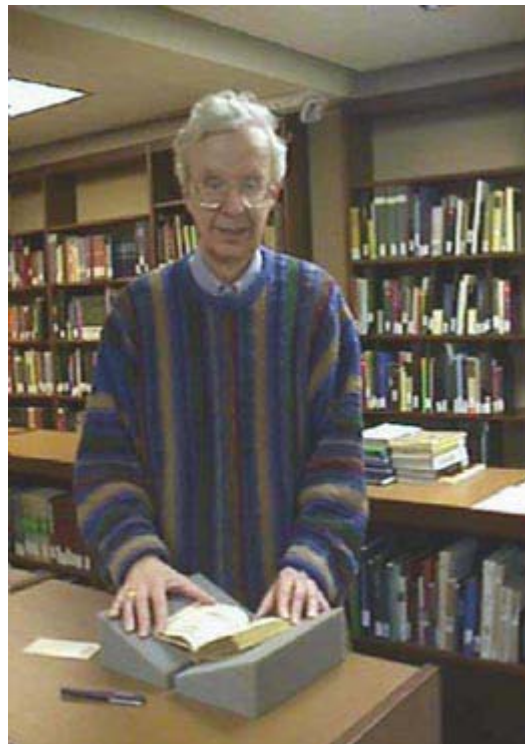


Librarian Bult discovers rare book

By Kathleen Minkner
Associate news Editor

Librarian Conrad Bult was in the back room of the Hekman Library examining some of Calvin's older uncatalogued books when he found one of only three existing copies of a Genevan catechism written by John Calvin. At first glance, the book does not seem unusual. It is an Italian play from 1547, missing its front and back covers. Bult, however, decided to inspect it from start to finish. It is a play called "The Tragedy of Free Will" by Francesco Negri. However, a new document, complete with title page and page numbers starting over again at one, lay hidden in the back. Bult also noticed scripture references in the margins which made him wonder if it was a religious work. "I don't know what made me look more closely at this book. I just have an innate love of books, a curiosity and knowledge of rare books.



photos by VanderKlippe

What made this book different was that I couldn't find any information about the book from other sources," stated Bult, who has been working in the library for 34 years. Because Bult cannot speak Italian, he decided to turn the book over to the Meeter Center for Calvin Studies which specializes in the works of John Calvin and has over 4,000 books. Director Karin Maag and curator Paul Fields did some research and discovered that this catechism by John Calvin was one of only three in the world (the others are in Europe). "Nothing of this importance has been found at Calvin before," stated Karin Maag. "It's really an incredible find."

Why the books were bound together is still a mystery. According to Maag, they could have been bound together in the 18th century, when it looks like it was rebound. Or, the two documents may have been bound together originally for concealment purposes. "In Italy in the mid 1500's," said Maag, "the Protestant Reformation was seen as a threat to the Catholic church. A catechism by John Calvin may have been controversial enough to be hiding behind something else." The book sat in the Hekman Library basement for more than 30 years, and it is yet another mystery as to how it got there. Bult believes that it came from Calvin's old Franklin Street campus during the 1960's.

The book, which could have ended up at the Calvin College Used Book Sale for 50 cents, is worth more around \$3,000. The book, of course, will not be sold. It will become a part of the Meeter Center collection. It will be available for students to see. "It has more value here. . . . one reason why the book has such great significance is because it embodies our heritage [at Calvin]," stated Bult. Perhaps the book puts it into the best words. At the beginning is the handwritten inscription that simply states: "To those who are adventurous only a little seed is necessary."

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