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Typothesis: A Study of Warde's Crystal Goblet, Leeuwen's Typographic Meaning  
and How it Relates to the Bible

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“Type is saying things to us all the time.” — Rick Poynor

“See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!” — The Apostle Paul

### Abstract

The way readers interpret the written word is changing. We look for information almost as much in between the lines as we do in the words themselves. The internet and its tools offer ways for readers to engage the text like never before — can the printed word keep up? This thesis will look at the history of print through the eyes of typography and decide if multimodal methods of arranging type are appropriate or even possible in the modern book. Specifically, it will look at the Christian Bible and its already present use of multimodalism. This study will bring awareness to the possibility for a new method of meaning in Biblical typography.

## Typothesis:

A Study of Warde's Crystal Goblet, Leeuwen's Typographic Meaning  
and How it Relates to the Bible

Our world is a world of letters. We write with them, speak them, and see them continually. Nothing can be communicated apart from them. Letters, and consequently words, are the units from which cognitive meaning is given a "skin." Without this verbal and written flesh, the ability to communicate by sharing thoughts and ideas would cease to exist. In this thesis, I will focus on the written word – the visual symbols used to communicate meaning on paper (or computers).

Several words will be used interchangeably for these visual symbols – typeface, type, face and font will all be used synonymously with the written word.

Like spoken language, the visual representation of language can take many forms within the confines of one intended symbol or group of symbols. For example, ten different voices saying the word "water" will result in ten different pronunciations of that word. Someone from upstate New York will more than likely pronounce it "wata," while someone from eastern North Carolina will tend to say "wudder." Between these two extremes, a whole plethora of pronunciations would occur.

Some of these vocalizations are no doubt straying from the intended pronunciation, but even within a "correct" context of voicing "water," millions (maybe more) of variations exist. None of these are "wrong," but they are very different. In these differences, we find a "personality" of voices.

This is true with type as well. Infinite variations exist within the possibilities of letter representation. "Water" can "sound" very different on paper or screen depending on

the font used to display it. In the following paragraphs, I will give a brief overview of where the intended form of letters came from, the history of some typefaces' variations of these forms, and a look at where type is today.

The culmination of these observations is an appeal for revival in literary works, namely the Bible.

### **A Brief History – Pictographs to Gutenberg**

The history of type is long and complex, much more intricate than most people would realize. The English language we speak uses the Latin, or Roman alphabet. The entire western hemisphere, Australia, most of Europe and Africa and parts of Asia all use this letter system. This Latin alphabet, along with other forms of writing, can trace its history to long before its own inception.

As early as the end of the fourth millennium, BC, the Sumerians began to use imprinted symbols as a form of written communication. Early Cuneiform had approximately 1500 symbols in its library. Early Egyptians created a similar symbolic system. These “pictographs” eventually transformed into an easier to write form called “hieratic” which more closely resembles a written alphabet (Boardley, 2010).

Despite prior hypotheses, Semitic-speaking people residing in Egypt are credited for the first actual alphabet. This first alphabet can be traced around approximately 1800 to 1900 BC. These Semitic-speaking people were more than likely influenced by the pictographs found in early Egypt, where they dwelled (Boardley, 2010). These alphabets, along with the pictographs, were all still created to represent an object. Even the “letters” that they used were still directly symbolic (Boardley, 2010).

Eventually, a new alphabet was created, the “proto-Sinaitic” alphabet. These new

characters looked like pictographs, but they each represented different *sounds* instead of objects or ideas. Why this change took place, scholars aren't sure. Ouaknin theorizes that the change results from the culture transforming from a polytheistic one into a monotheistic one. This because of the Second Commandment in Exodus, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." This resulted in the alphabet's association with sounds instead of images (Boardley, 2010).

Phoenician merchants made an alphabet easier to write (and erase) thanks to their purple dye. The Greeks later added vowels to that alphabet, which was later picked up by the Etruscans. The Etruscans were shortly overtaken by Rome, but fortunately, their alphabet outlived them and was adopted by the Romans (Boardley, 2010).

This Roman, or Latin, alphabet was widespread due to Rome's mighty empire. The letters they used (though they only had 23 characters) are still used today, literally (Boardley, 2010). A font based off of a Trajan inscription circa 114 AD, rightly called *Trajan*, is pre-loaded on most personal computers today. It's known for "class" and "sophistication" and is widely used. The typographical identity of Liberty University is *Trajan*.

Martialis, the Latin poet, is attributed with the cursive, or script alphabet. He wrote this way because it "could be jotted down quickly." This script laid the foundation for the Carolingian miniscule, more commonly known as the lower-case letter (Boardley, 2010).

Charlemagne, who united most of Western Europe, is responsible for bringing order and a common form to our alphabet. With the backing of the Church, he helped to spread this Carolingian script across Europe (Boardley, 2010).

The next “big player” in the history of type is Gutenberg. Gutenberg, known for the moveable type printing press, made it possible to quickly reproduce large bodies of text.

### **A Brief History – Gutenberg to the Computer**

It took Gutenberg approximately 20 years to perfect the art of printing. We know little about his life, only a handful of facts from legal documents, most of which were burned in a fire in the 1800s. We do know that he was a man of ingenuity and persistence, hoping to make the written book widely available. Fine handwritten books in the middle ages cost almost four times the amount of yearly income for a laborer (Lienhard, 2005).

Beyond his contribution to widespread literature availability, we have a lot of aesthetic beauty to thank Gutenberg for. He made it possible to take one a conglomeration of similar typographic styles and make one “ideal” character set, or typeface. Because of this, we can attribute Gutenberg as being the “Father of Typefaces.”

After Gutenberg, there are numerous other type designers, but I'll focus on a few prominent ones, whose last names are still found on personal computers today. Nicolas Jenson was the one of the first to base cut fonts off of the Roman style of letters we use today (Gutenberg used a more Germanic style that I'll discuss later) (Haley, 1998).

Claude Garamond was the most prolific type designer of his time. He was an innovative printer and can is attributed with bringing the Roman style letter to France (Haley, 1998).

William Caslon was a former gunsmith. His type styles, not known for their preciseness, are considered to be true “gems” for their ability to “[appear] perfect in spite of the vagaries of each letter-form” when used in a large body of text (Haley, 1998).



Giambattista Bodoni is known for creating the most beautiful and majestic typestyles of all time. His letters are known for their mechanic-like characteristics, as they don't appear created by hand, rather by machine.

William Caslon IV, great-great-grandson of type designer William Caslon, was the first to create a “sans serif” (one without the “hooks” on the ends of letters) typeface. Thanks to Caslon IV, we have some of the most popular fonts today. The sans serif typeface grew in popularity with designers, claiming common names like *Futura*, *Helvetica*, *Eurostyle*, and *Gill Sans*.

### **A Brief History – Desktop Publishing and Beyond**

The next major player in type history isn't a person; it's a machine. Thanks to Adobe's PostScript in 1982 and Apple's Macintosh personal computer in 1984, virtually everyone now has the ability to become a type designer.

Much more than the Linotype machine or the typewriter, the personal computer and its software gives everyone the chance to set up type how he or she sees fit. This is a blessing and a curse. Those who have no interest in typography are assigned the task of printing fliers, reports and other pieces that were once restricted to trained professionals. This phenomenon could aptly be named the “Comic Sans Effect.”

Inversely, true designers now have at their fingertips centuries worth of fonts. They're not restricted to two or three typefaces because of the high cost; most computers come pre-loaded with dozens of fonts.

This gives us the responsibility to make type fit with the message being presented. Like the ancient Sumerians, we have to make sure that a bird *looks* like a bird. Even though letters now represent a sound, the way they are shaped and laid out should still

*look* like the intended idea of any given work. With such a vast number of typefaces available, we have no excuse for missing the mark.

### **Appropriateness and Context**

Of primary concern is the intention of the characters being used. Unlike the aforementioned “ideal” universal character set, we will instead refer to the ideal situational typeface. In other words, while there may or may not be a perfect model of characters on which we base all other character designs, there is a “right” font or set of fonts for virtually any scenario. Likewise, there is a wrong font or set of fonts (usually a very large set) for almost any circumstance.

In *Four Centuries of Fine Printing*, Morison (1949) describes this phenomenon: “The problem of the typographer is to achieve an individual book without doing violence to its essential purpose, or to any accidental character conferred by an artist or book-decorator. Thus the whole mystery of fine typography lies in the perfect reconciliation of these interests” (p. 12). What Morison refers to as the “essential purpose” of the book is of utmost concern. The essential purpose of any written work is the core idea or message that the author is wanting to convey. The typeface used, expressive as it may be, is constrained and subservient to the intent of the author.

In turn, it is the typographer's job to make sure that his typographical selections are based on keen observations of the text he's arranging. Famed type creator, Tobias Frere-Jones, says in the documentary, *Helvetica*, that “a designer choosing typefaces is essentially a casting director” (Hustwit, 2007). Much like the film director, we must not get carried away in picking flashy and popular “actors” for our designs, but rather the ones that best display the intended message: “The practice of varying the type with the

nature of the text goes farther back than the age of its invention, and there can be no doubt that in our own day the vast increase, not only of printing but of kinds of printing, requires the different kinds of type” (p. 12). Morrison who wrote that nearly 90 years ago could in no way have envisioned the explosion in the number of typefaces with the advent of the personal computer and the digital type foundry. Less than 75 years ago, many professional printers owned fewer than five faces (Warde, 1956).

### **Modernists and *The Crystal Goblet***

Many modernists would argue that the type is not only an instrument of the message, but of little or no aesthetic value in and of itself. Beatrice Warde (1956), author of the famed *The Crystal Goblet*, defined the modernist typographer as this: “[T]he first thing he ask[s] of this particular object [is] not, 'How should it look?' but 'What must it do?' and to that extent all good typography is modernist” (p. 12).

Warde's *The Crystal Goblet* is a collection of sixteen essays on that very subject. A renowned and widely acclaimed type theorist, Warde proposed that type was a “crystal goblet,” an invisible cup that holds the more important wine (the intended message). In her essay, “Printing Should Be Invisible”, Warde (1956) also compares type to the public speaker: “If books are printed in order to be read, we must distinguish readability from what the optician would call legibility. A page set in 14-pt. Bold Sans is, according to the laboratory tests, more 'legible' than one set in 11-pt. Baskerville. A public speaker is more 'audible' in that sense when he bellows. But a good speaking voice is one which is inaudible as a voice” (p. 13). Furthermore, she says, “[T]ype well used is invisible as type, just as the perfect talking voice is the unnoticed vehicle for the transmission of words, ideas” (p. 13).

Warde brings up a noteworthy reminder. The layout and typography of any work is always secondary to the author's ideas. Designers must be very purposeful to have balance (of course I don't refer to a half and half balance, but rather a healthy respect first towards the author) between function and aesthetic appeal. She says: "The ... typographer has the job of erecting a window between the reader inside the room and that landscape which is the author's words. He may put up a stained-glass window of marvelous beauty, but a failure as a window; that is, he may use some rich superb type like text gothic that is something to be looked at, not through" (p. 15).

### **Our Visual Culture**

Like Warde, we must be centrally focused on the meat of the message – graphically displaying what the author wants his audience to “hear.” However, as transparent as our “goblets” may be, we must remember that all graphic communication is speaking its own mind on some level. That is why we must play the role of the director, picking the typeface that *most perfectly* agrees with the author.

Frere-Jones says, “The sort of classical modernist line on how aware a reader should be of a typeface is that they shouldn't be aware of it at all. It should be this crystal goblet there to just hold and display and organize the information. But I don't think it's really quite as simple as that. I think even if they're not consciously aware of the typeface they're reading, they'll certainly be affected by it, the same way that an actor that's miscast in a role will affect someone's experience of a movie or play that they're watching. They'll still follow the plot, but, you know, be convinced or affected” (Hustwit, 2007). In that respect, today's typographer has the precarious job of crafting a layout that appeals yet doesn't distract, that invisibly entices readers.

In a culture that reads fewer and fewer books and relies more than ever on pictures, graphics and the like, the bridge between type and message steadily shortens. We gather information in ways that Warde's generation would have never dreamed. We have less time to read what something *says*, which increases our tendency to see how something *looks*.

Of course, the readability of any given passage is the foundation. This can't change, but the rise in visual communication has made it possible for the average person's capacity to understand layout and type variation to greatly rise: "The immediacy of television and electronic media, and new trends in printed communication have in recent years raised the level of typographic literacy among the general public. What was considered unreadable yesterday is readable today. The public is more visually sophisticated and typographically savvy than ever before" (Carter, 1997, p. 7). This means that, as people's type meaning "vocabularies" increase, the designer's ability to communicate more deeply and intimately increases.

David Carson (2007), world-renowned graphic designer, says not to "confuse legibility with communication. Just because something is legible doesn't mean it communicates and, more importantly, doesn't mean it communicates the right thing."

This new phenomenon is important in that even those least familiar with the way fonts work look for fonts to *tell* them something – even if they're not aware of it. We look for information intertwined with decoration. "What does this mean?" instead of "What does this say?" As promising and exciting as this may be for graphic designers and typographers, it complicates our role as information-givers. Where do we draw the line between detracting from the intended message and adding to the emotion?

Part of this expectation can be traced to our association with letters and logotypes. The increase in branding and marketing creativity over the last few decades has trained our eyes to look for meaning in places that we may not have noticed before. Consumers have been trained to look for “the look.” Companies invest millions of dollars each to make sure that their company-used typefaces match *who* they are as a company – what they believe in and stand for.

It's not that our culture has necessarily *added meaning* to typefaces, but rather we've begun to tap into the potential of what letters actually *mean* to us on a subconscious level. With this newfound consciousness, our responsibility to do justice to the message increases.

For example, a child's book in the modern era will have a more difficult time appealing to its audience by using a traditional book type like *Garamond* or *Century Schoolbook*. Kids, prone to a number of media produced stimuli will have a more difficult time relating with the text than their century-old counterparts.

A better approach would be one that emulates what the author wants to say by choosing a typeface and typographical layout that reflect that voice. A good example of this put into practice is the series “Diary of a Wimpy Kid.” Instead of a traditional approach, the designer chose a handwritten style font that resembles what this diary would look like if it were real. By matching the type with the message, the book creates less confusion and a more intimate connection with the book. If a traditional font had been used, it would not have been harder to read, but harder to *understand* and associate the meaning of the font with the meaning of the book. Traditional book fonts can carry a scholarly connotation that wouldn't fit well with the subject at hand. (Kinney, 2009)

The *Wimpy Kid* series goes beyond simply adjusting the type, instead opting to associate meaning by using a paper that looks like diary notebook paper and even includes pictures to further build the bridge between story and layout. While this may seem like an example of novelty, the implications carry far beyond the children's book. Reference books, adult fiction and Bibles can all greatly benefit from a layout overhaul that uses typeface, color and layout to help the reader become more equipped to digest the information at hand.

Readers, more than ever, are aware of what layout is saying to them. If layout designers fail to facilitate association by choosing typefaces and layouts that don't reflect the work at hand, they will more than likely fail to grasp the attention of the reader. More importantly, they will probably fail at helping the reader to truly connect with the author.

### **Leeuwen's Connotation and Metaphor**

With this new “power,” we can begin to use letters in ways that will mean more for the reader. The end goal being to provide an experience that goes beyond the monomodal tradition of literary text. We have to begin taking the *meaning* that shapes and styles afford us and matching it with what the author's message says. It's no longer a concern of *if* the typeface has meaning, but rather *what* does it mean. Once again, readability must be the first concern for any literary or reference type. As stated before, all design is subservient to the intended message of the author. Everything that can be achieved in layout and typographical design must be done in order to point the reader to the message.

Warde's Crystal Goblet is a key starting point in realizing the potential and danger of associating typefaces with meaning. She warns that if we get carried away in type design, we'll begin to focus on the “golden goblet” of type rather than the “wine” of the

message.

While this is true, we must not fail to use the hidden powers of type because of fear that we will be too blatant in our approach. We have to be intentional in letting the layout of type and design of type reflect the beauty of the message. Instead of the Crystal Goblet, we can think of this as the wine bottle itself. We associate the kind of wine and the value of wine with the shape of the bottle and the design of the label. Because of the bottle, we can see classy wine, cheap wine or exotic wine – all of which are exactly the same wine.

We don't use the same kinds of bottles for each kind of wine and expect the consumer to judge *before* tasting. The bottle and its design have virtually become a necessity. There are not wine bottles due to the fact that we need eye-appealing designs, but rather there are wine bottles because the wine *needs* a container to be held in to be consumed.

In much the same way, the message of the mind needs a vehicle in which to be fleshed out. That vehicle is letters. So, even though we shouldn't create outrageous bottles and ridiculous labels for wine, we need a design that will help the consumer know what it is he is about to consume. We don't spoil the taste by distracting him from the wine with some other-worldly bottle or design, but we want to give him an idea of what he's consuming. We want to entice without being a distraction from the wine. This is good typography: reflecting the beauty of the message without distorting it or distracting from it.

Unfortunately, this is largely an untapped potential in literary and reference works. Norgaard (2009) refers to this as “a general tendency in literary criticism to disregard the



semiotic potential of typography in literature by focusing monomodally on word-meaning only” (p. 141).

Leeuwen (2005), in his essay, *Typographic Meaning*, describes three principles of meaning in typography. The first, connotation, is the association of a typeface with a particular “domain.” This domain can be a historical period, a people group, an age group, a political movement or any cluster of subjects that conjure a specific ideal or common goal: “meanings are then formed by the associations that exist, within the domain *into* which the signs are imported, with the domain *from* which they are imported” (p. 139). For example, using a typeface connotatively for a piece of literary work on the women's rights movement would mean using a typeface that has qualities previously associated with the movement. This could be achieved by using a typeface that is first from that era and secondly contains properties already associated with the movement. This, for example, could be type that was used in a women's rights poster in that era.

This type of connotation relies on the reader's ability to identify the meaning of the font being used and apply it to the group in study. Subconsciously, the reader is required to identify the meaning of the font – why it's shaped the way it is, why it's from the early 1900s era – and apply that to the women being written about. This is a tricky business, in that the layout designer must be careful to pick a typeface and an arrangement of that type that clearly and accurately portrays these women to a wide audience - being careful to pick arrangements that are widely known to be in association with the movement, avoiding symbolic meaning not known to the wider umbrella of the women's right movement. Understandably, “[n]ot all typefaces can be understood on the

basis of connotation, because it is not always possible to ‘place’ typefaces, to understand them on the basis of ‘where we have seen them before’, ‘where they come from’”

(Leeuwen, 2005, p. 140).

Leeuwen's second principle of typographic meaning is that of *metaphor*.

Typographical metaphor can be understood in the same way as literary metaphor – the goal being to associate “specific features of letterforms” with the literary work in a way that represents them based on visual association. Norgaard (2009) refers to typographical metaphor as being “based on a principle of similarity between the visual form of the signifier (the letterforms) and the signified” (p. 146).

In this case, the example of the work on the women's rights movement would benefit from a typeface selection that physically embodies the qualities of the group being documented. This could be achieved by picking a geometrical and round face to display the femininity of the group, but also a heavy weighted font that speaks to the bold determination of the women.

Leeuwen compares his concept of typographical metaphor to the phonological study of phonemes. Phonemes are “considered to be the basic distinctive units of speech sound by which morphemes, words and sentences are represented” (*Random House Dictionary*). A work of Jakobson and Halle (1956) broke phonemes down into smaller parts called “distinctive features.”

These distinctive features are further broken down units of letter characteristics. These 12 units include features such as “vocalic,” being described as “voiced, with free passage of air through the vocal tract” or “sharp,” a “reduced oral cavity and widened pharynx.”

Leeuwen asserts that Jakobson and Halle's "building blocks for meaning" can be features that are meaningful in and of themselves. For example, the pronunciation of (p) can be described as a "small explosion." This "explosion" of sound associates a second degree of meaning beyond the mental concept of words that begin with the letter (p), like "pop."

Leeuwen (2005) says that typography is much the same way. The shapes, weights and styles of letters can all contribute to a "second meaning" of written communication. Unfortunately, linguists and writers have virtually no input on the building blocks of phonology. Words that begin with (p) will always be pronounced with a "small explosion" of the tongue. However, the typographer and layout designer have almost a "free reign" over the fonts they pick and the way that they arrange them on the page. This opens the doors to a whole new dimension of visual reinforcement and association.

I would argue that not only do designers have the *ability* to help associate visual meaning with verbal meaning, but the *responsibility* to do so. If a typeface is particularly juvenile in its appearance, it must be chosen to not use that font for a book that is to be taken seriously, like a doctor's reference manual. Inversely, an "old style" font may take away from important meaning in a kids' reading book.

While designers have been lauded for their ability to interpret meaning through the vehicle of typography in posters, advertisements and experimental works, it should be argued that very little has been done in the field of book layout.

This is a tricky territory. Books are designed to be read, not visually critiqued. But somewhere in this search for legibility, we must also realize that type design carries meaning whether we like it or not. We *do* have the opportunity to choose which layouts

and which fonts are associated with literary works, so we must choose those which most perfectly reflect the intent of the author.

Referring back to Frere-Jones and his assertion that type designers are essentially film directors, the director's job is to cast roles reflective of the storyline, not roles that distract or depart from it. This is most true in regards to a historical movie, or in this case a book of non-fiction. The layout designer must be especially careful to resist imparting his own artistic expressions of the work in an effort to inform the audience without persuading it in a manner that history doesn't afford itself.

Film directors must work within the confines of human actors. These actors can carry connotative meaning from past movie roles. Directors have to make sure that an actor's "reputation" based on his other movie roles won't affect the audience's perception of him in his current role.

Directors also have to make sure that they pick someone who acts in the way that best represents the story he's trying to reflect in the film. Careful time, research and experiment is done to ensure that they pick actors who carry qualities that the audience will interpret most closely with the intended message or story. This careful choosing should serve as a reminder to designers of typographical metaphor.

Leeuwen's (2005) third principle of typographic meaning is multimodality. Multimodality is the idea that "colour, three-dimensionality, material texture, and (...) movement" of type also carries a great deal of potential meaning-making. While true, the breadth and scope of this analyzation far outreaches the traditional study of typography which will be addressed here.

In conclusion of Leeuwen's (2005) principles, he deduces that "this inevitably

requires the development of concepts and methods” (p. 141) which he refers to as a “grammar” of typography. While much can be debated about the implementation of such a framework into an otherwise “free-spirited” domain, a set of rules could be of great help to the novice type-setter of which all computer users have become. (maybe add more about everyone becoming a typesetter.) These rules would be in no way binding, but rather a healthy reference point. Grammar rules are consistently broken by writers that choose to do so for effect. The same would be true for a typographical grammar. Books would greatly benefit from a system that guides designers and type-setters to a meaning that more closely associates readers with the original ideas of the author.

This would be no easy task. Authors and designers would have to be willing to collaborate and share ideas. Standards of meaning would have to be defined. The road would be long and tedious, but great advances in meaning could and should be made.

### **Where Do We Go From Here?**

On a practical level, what exactly can be done? Experimental typography, arranging letters in a way that breaks traditional type “rules” for deeper communicative meaning is growing in popularity. The book, *Experimental Typography*, gives a definition of its function: “The role of typographic experimentation is to extend the boundaries of language by freely probing visual and verbal syntax and the relationships between word and image. Syntactic exploration enables designers to discover among typographic media an enormous potential to edify, entertain and surprise. As in other forms of language typography is capable of infinite expression. The only limits to typographic discovery are those imposed by the designer himself” (Carter, 1997, p.11).

Great work has already been achieved in this field. As far back as the early 1900s,

the “Dada” and “Futurism” movements (among others) began experimenting with what type can actually do on the printed page.

Pioneers of modern day experimental type include the ranks of designers such as Johanna Drucker, author of many essays including “Letterpress Language: Typography as a Medium for the Visual Representation of Language.” In the essay, Drucker (1984) says that even though she breaks the traditional rules of type: “this deviation is intended to call attention to the structure of those norms, as much as to subvert them” (p. 66). She also says that experimental type “is extending the communicative potential of writing, not eliminating or negating it” (p. 66).

Unfortunately, as brilliant as her and other contemporaries’ works are, they have little value in the field of everyday literature. Full of complex rules and hard to grasp techniques, the genius of Drucker is far more appreciated in private works and poetry. I would argue that little has been done in the area of typographical meaning and literature. The vast majority of this movement, like Drucker’s, finds its home in works of fine art, magazines, etc. Book publishing and printing has been a historied and respected profession of which the ranks of experimental designers have had little or no part.

Warde (1956) says that every aspiring book printer is “taught in the shop how to make handbill look like a handbill...not like a frightfully clever design for a handbill” (p. 73). She also warns that if people who are taught as such leave the profession and make way for the more design-inclined type, mayhem would ensue. She sarcastically says that these new designers will “be tempted to play the giddy goat with printed words in the frantic hope that the public will cry ‘Who, *who* designed that too frightfully amusing piece of typography?’” (Ward, 1956, p. 61).

This is grounds for concern. If designers do “play the giddy goat” it must be in order for the readers to grasp the meaning of the text in a more relevant way. It must not be in an effort to create a great work of art for art’s sake. Not that it shouldn’t be artistic, but it should be artistic in a way that brings edification to the reader, not the designer. This new breed of type meaning will best be achieved if designer and author work together in a synergetic collaboration of meaning. How can a designer interpret the text visually unless he is truly “on the same page” as the author?

Some may ask, “With such a long piece of literature as a book, how can one experiment in a way that flows congruently?” This is a concern, and probably the reason why so little has been done. However, if we know that all type communicates in its own way, the rules of traditional printing and the challenges that ensue from such large literary works shouldn’t keep us from making progress.

If we keep readability as the foundation, as we should, we will use it as the eyepiece through which we view and make decisions for type experimentation. We have to find a place in-between the rigidity of Warde and the playfulness of Drucker. We should be able to open a page in a book and realize it as a book – a window to see through, not a “stained glass” as Warde would say. Inversely, we should be able to read that same page in a much more meaningful way that we have in the past.

These changes more than likely won’t occur in the in-your-face manner that experimental typographers of the past have encouraged. They will most likely be accepted in soft, somewhat unobtrusive ways like the bolding or resizing of key words or phrases, color experimentation or maybe the use of different fonts in given passages.

One unexpected, but well-known example of this is the Christian Bible. The

words of Jesus are printed in red ink in many traditional Bibles; a practice which started at the beginning of the 1900s. This may seem like a simple consideration in comparison to the more extreme examples, but it makes a huge difference. Simple variations from the norm are often much more influential. Erik Brandt (1997), a pioneer in the field of modern experimental type, says in the book *Experimental Typography*, that simplicity is the key: “Letterforms are the architectural elements of our being-toward-reality. As such, they can be treated as both syntactic and semantic vehicles. These pages are simple attempts to isolate and experiment. They are intended as quiet moments to consider: How much experimentation is actually necessary? I urge that simplicity achieves both maximum clarity and maximum entropy” (p. 9).

These red letters serve as a good example of experimentation in practice. Due to the breadth, complexity and seriousness of the Bible, I will use it as an example in the following considerations.

### **The Bible and Type**

The Word, the Holy Bible, is our starting point and the final authority on truth. With that in mind, it is of utmost importance and concern to stay true to the text. Any deviation or variance from the intended meaning of the text is not only wrong in a literary sense, but could lead to misinterpretation. This is no small deal in matters of faith.

Even so, the variation of text in an effort for more clear understanding is evident even in the Bible. In Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, he writes near the end of his book, “See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!” (Galatians 6:11, New International Version).

The question we have to ask ourselves is if this possible instance (questions have



arisen regarding translation) of multimodality in the New Testament allows for modern interpretive layout variations. The best starting point is the history of the printed Word.

In 1450, Gutenberg's printing press was the first to print the Bible, or any other book, in a quantity large enough for distribution. Even though Johan Gutenberg was obviously concerned with printing efficiency and making books available on a mass scale, he was surprisingly interested in the aesthetics of his 42-line Bible.



Figure 1. Sample of the 42-line Bible.

He wanted his printed Bible to have the same look and feel of the handwritten Bibles before him.

These ornate, intricately inked Bibles were the only manuscripts that readers of

the time had access to. The exquisite detail no doubt had an effect on how readers connected with the Scriptures they were reading.



Figure 2. Sample of the Book of Kells.

To accomplish his task of achieving legibility, keeping a handwritten style and maintaining beauty, Gutenberg created the first font using a variation of a handlettering style called *Textura*. The calligraphic characteristics helped readers transition from the wholly organic process of handwriting to a more mechanical one.

This transition is more than meets the eye. The connection we make with one's handwriting influences how we read their letters. Leeuwen's concept of connotation explains this. We find a second layer of meaning when we relate the shapes of the letters to the author who wrote it. It gives the text an authenticity that couldn't be there if it wasn't handwritten.

Beyond this inherent honesty, we see the character of the author reflected in the style and shape of his letters. The way we write offers clues to our personalities. When the message and personality of the author intersect, we can find depth and meaning that are very hard to replicate in automated printing. For example, the early Christian reading Paul's letter to the Galatians and reading his very personal ending would have truly connected with what Paul was saying. "This is Paul! We see him in his letters!"

The next prominent example we find of multimodal typographic meaning in Bibles is in the sixteenth century. Martin Luther, in his German translation of the New Testament (first completed in 1534), purposefully picked its style in an attempt to associate the Reformation with German ideals. *Schwabacher*, the technique he used, was an influential German style prior to Luther's translation. Luther, wanting to reject Roman Catholicism and all things associated with it, dismissed Roman type that was popular in Italy to prove a theological point (Eskilson, 2007).

One extreme account of Luther's blackletter style type going beyond the traditional, monomodal meaning of type, was an early edition of his bible. In this version, a German, blackletter typeface was used as the first letter of any verse dealing with salvation or other topics that were "positive." The Roman type, *Antiqua*, was the used as the first letter of any verses dealing with hell and other related topics (Walden Font,

1997). Luther quickly terminated these special Bibles.

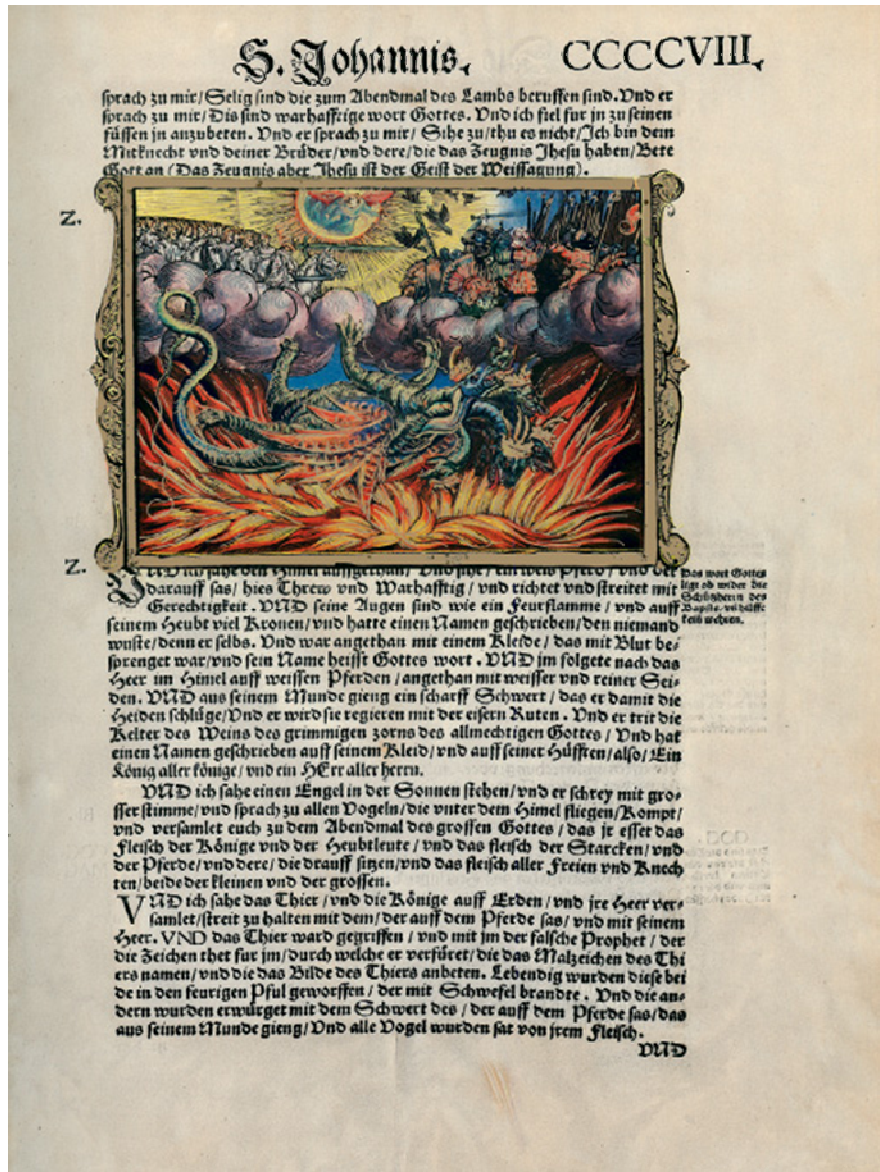


Figure 3. Luther's "double font" Bible

Someone reading one of Luther's blackletter Bibles was likely influenced in a deep way subconsciously. Even though the reader may not have been aware, he was learning to identify the Word of God with a movement – the Reformation. Obviously, the

connotation of the Bible with a human movement of any sort is a very slippery slope.

Beyond Luther, we have relatively few examples of multimodality in the printed Bible. As economics became more of a concern, Bibles became tighter and less book-like. Verses were added which made the text difficult to read like other literary works and printers generally used two columns of text to secure more space from being lost to leftover sentences and new paragraphs.

We stand at an age of digital limitlessness and a culture that relies on visual association more than ever before. We see the dangers of multimodality being used for man's purposes and goals. We have to decide if we're willing to use the power of type to create meaning in ways that reflect the beauty of Scripture. Type that accentuates universally agreed upon truths of Scripture. Type that opens the window to the light of Scripture. Type that refuses to conform to a movement or association of human invention.

As the church body, we've done a poor job of using the light of Scripture to move us to create art that opens our minds to the light of heaven. We've abandoned it in fear that we'll be too "out there" or maybe even idolatrous.

Instead of running from artistic expression, I propose that we embrace the beauty of Scripture by expressing it through our type.

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