Bibles in Burling:

A Selection of Bibles That Demonstrate the Art of Printing

An exhibit in the Iowa Room of Burling Library, Grinnell College, Grinnell, Iowa
May 29-June 5, 1998
The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments.

Along with Baskerville's 1763 folio Bible and the Doves Bible (1903-05), Bruce Rogers' Lectern Bible is one of the finest examples of Bible typography in the 500 years since Gutenberg produced his 2-line Bible. Rogers was a noted American printer who was asked by the Oxford University Press to design a Bible suitable for reading in churches. This is the result. The Cambridge History of the Bible noted: "the scale, the grace, the quality of workmanship lift it to the highest plane." The luxurious, hand-made paper; the perfect spacing; of the lines of type; and the placement of the text on the page have combined to produce this magnificent Bible.

Grinnell College is honored to have received the Lectern Bible from Marie-Louise Rosenthal in 1997. We at Burling Library hope this display will honor Mrs. Rosenthal's gift.

The exhibition and catalog were prepared by Leslie Czechowski; printing of the catalog was designed by Jim Powers.

Special thanks to the Mayflower Home for the loan of the lectern and to Cheryl Neubert.
Printing:

"God's highest and extremest act of grace, whereby the business of the Gospel is driven forward; it is the last flame before the extinction of the world."

—Martin Luther
Johannes Gutenberg is credited with creating the first printed book: the 42-line Bible published in 1455. Before that time books were meticulously and laboriously hand copied, often by religious clerks. The finest of these illuminated manuscripts were beautifully illustrated with colored letters and elaborate designs that entwined the written text. But this was time-consuming and expensive—a bound manuscript in the 15th century cost the same as a monthly wage of a court official.

As the Renaissance became widespread throughout Europe, common people were eager to have the opportunity to own printed books. By 1500 more than 90 Bibles had been published, mostly in Latin. Although copies of the Bible in the vernacular were available by that time, Martin Luther’s versions in German (New Testament, 1522) were a high point in vernacular Bible printing to that time.

Since then, printing of the Bible has been continuous—full Bibles, parts published separately (especially Psalms and the Gospels), beautifully-illustrated Bibles and unadorned, practical editions. The Bible is the best selling book in the world, has been issued in the largest number of editions, and now exists in about 850 languages.

Further information about the printing of Bibles may be found in many books on the history of the art of printing and the chapter by M.H. Black, “The Printed Bible,” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day,”* 1963.
Maius.

*A Spanish apocalypse: the Morgan Beatus manuscript.*

926 A.D.

We do not, unfortunately, have an illuminated manuscript in the Burling collection, but this fine reproduction exemplifies the wonder and beauty of a hand-written, hand-decorated book. The 8th century Spanish monk, Beatus, compiled this commentary on the apocalypse that was written and illuminated in the 10th century by Maius, another monk. In f(olio) 76 v(erso) and f.77 note the use of red and green ink to highlight sections of the text; the elongated blue and red “I” beginning the word “incipit;” the elaborate letters “M” (?) and “A”; the decorative device that fills the bottom of the second column of f.76v; and the colorful illustration of the Angel of the Lord bearing a message to the Church of Laodicea. Some of the 20th century Bibles that appear later in this exhibit will use similar decorative features.

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*The Booke of Psalmes.*

London: Imprinted by Robert Barker, 1611.

This portion of the Bible may be from one of the original Bibles authorized by King James I. It exemplifies the typical “Lutheran-style” popularized by Martin Luther nearly a century earlier. The text is in the vernacular and most of the letters are in the old-style, blackletter typeface that is reminiscent of hand-lettered manuscripts. Note, however, that the commentary at the beginning of each psalm is in the newer, roman print. Also note the differing, decorated initials at the beginning of each psalm (see the “G” with the squirrel for Psalms LXXXII and LXXX and the “G” with a fleur-de-lis design for Psalm LXXVIII).
Biblia Sacra.
Londini: E.T. et A.M., 1656.  (in case)

This palm-sized Bible is a good example of the "Genevan-style" Bible popularized in Europe in the 16th century. The text is in Latin and used the Roman typeface; there is no ornamentation. Perhaps the printers made the older style Latin Bible, more popular with Catholics, because of Queen Mary's ascendancy to the throne in 1653. Note the bookplate of Robert Louis Stevenson on the front board.

The Holy Bible.

This practical, unadorned Bible is typical of those printed for The American Bible Society in the mid-1800s, a philanthropic institution established in 1816 for the purpose of placing a copy of the Good Book in every household.
The Revelation of Saint John the Divine.

Blair Hughes-Stanton excelled as a wood engraver and his skills are wonderfully evident in this fine edition. Gregynog Press books focused on initials, wood engraving, and bindings, and in this volume we are immediately impressed by the turkey red calf cover with Hughes-Stanton's special printer's device for this book: the twin Gs incorporated over the cross. The dark red ink used for titles, significant sections of text, and for the paragraph markers guide the reader's eye. But most wonderful are the wood engravings (thought too "realistic" by some critics at that time) that tell the story and engage the viewer's attention. Note especially the word "AND" set into the engraving at the beginning of Chapter VI.

In Princípio.
Hammersmith, Doves Press, 1911. (in case)

The Doves Press was the simplest and purest of the private presses, focusing on unadorned printing to create their elegant books. This tiny edition of the Book of Genesis was printed a few years after the press's magnum opus, The Doves Bible (one of the three finest Bibles ever printed). Their typographers used well-made paper, perfect type, classical spacing, a touch of color, and a simple paragraph symbol for this lovely book. (Cobden-Sanderson, the printer for the Press, threw his type into the Thames when the Press closed so no one else could ever use them!)
The Book of Ruth.
San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1927. (in case)

The Book Club of California hired noted printers to make beautiful books for its members. This lovely little volume was created by the noted Grabhorn Press. Valenti Angelo, following the traditions of monks centuries earlier, illuminated by hand the initials in this book, plus creating the pleasing sunrise that begins the book. The pseudo-medieval style of lettering is reminiscent of the blackletter print used in the early printed Bibles.

Ecclesiastes.
Iowa City: The Prairie Press, 1951. (in case)

Fine private presses also exist in Iowa. This simple, beautifully-set edition (“a little gem of typography and printing”) reflects designer Carroll Coleman’s adherence to the standards set by John Baskerville (whose 1763 folio Bible was the first of the three finest Bibles ever printed). The use of red ink and simple devices to separate verses is reminiscent of Doves Press books, and the fine typography will also be seen in Bruce Rogers’ great Bible, which is the final book in this display.

Ecclesiastes.

The artist of this powerful edition, Ben Shahn, had been preoccupied with Ecclesiastes since his childhood. The handwritten text, colorful Hebrew titles, and striking lithographs were reproduced by colotype and hand-stencilling. It is a unique, artistic version, bound in a handsome, evergreen morocco cover. Note the contrast to The Prairie Press version!
Schultz, Herbert C.  

**French Illuminated Manuscripts.**  
San Francisco: Grabhorn Press, 1958. (*in case*)

Although not a Bible, this gem from the Grabhorn Press includes a leaf from a 15th century illuminated Book of Hours, a fashionable religious book owned by many noblemen and women. The blue and gold ink remain brilliant and the fine brushwork is remarkable. Equally pleasing is the design the Grabhorns created to show it off: the orange-inked frames with the understated brown italic lettering subtly complement the leaf.

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**The Four Gospels of the Lord Jesus Christ.**....  

“Subtle power”—“vibrant”—“passion and restraint”—phrases used by critics to describe this magnum opus of The Golden Cockerel Press, created by master typographer/sculptor/engraver Eric Gill. Gill’s work brings together the art of the handwritten manuscript and the art of the printed book. Note the representation of Saint Luke as a lamb on the title page for the Book of Saint Luke, a device used in early manuscripts such as *The Book of Kells*. On the first page of that chapter the letter “T” is intertwined with illustrations and text as in the old manuscripts. The use of various font sizes, letters, and printer’s devices that grow from the text help to make this an extraordinary volume.
Now we move into the 20th century with beautifully designed books created by some of the most illustrious of the small, fine presses.

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**Le Livre D’Esther.**

The rare book collection in Burling Library consists mostly of Bibles in Latin and English. This edition of the Book of Esther is in French and Hebrew, finely printed on heavy-weight paper with a soft cover. The brilliantly-colored, rich illustrations by Arthur Szyk lend a Middle Eastern air to the book, and the elaborate designs in the Hebrew text—the lion design and the Hebrew soldier on p. LII—add an elegance to the book.

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**The Psalter or Psalms of David from the Bible of Archbishop Cranmer.**

C.R. Ashbee founded the Essex House Press to perpetuate the traditions of William Morris’ Kelmscott Press, and the Arts and Crafts elements are wonderfully evident in this fine edition of the Psalms. Note especially the intricately-designed initials, woodcuts designed by Ashbee that are similar in intent to those in Barker’s 1611 *Book of Psalms*, but vastly different in style. Ashbee’s use of titles in red Endeavor type; the red leaves between verses that cause the reader to pause between lines; the printer’s device in red on the last page of the book; and the Angel of the Lord on the title page are additional elements that make this such a lovely book. Unfortunately the glue used to attach the endpapers to the vellum covers has shrunk and hardened with time. *Please do not re-tie the book.*