



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on June 10, 2013

Bible Becomes Runaway Bestseller in Secular Norway

Is one of Europe's most secular nations in the midst of a spiritual revival? It may be a stretch to predict just yet that Norway's five million citizens are turning back to God *en masse*. But the fact that a new Norwegian-language translation of the Bible has become a runaway bestseller in the country is causing many to wonder if there is a renewed interest in the Christian faith in the Scandinavian nation.



According to the [Associated Press](#), the new edition of the Bible released in 2011 by the Norwegian Bible Society, which replaced a previous 1978 edition, has sold at least 160,000, making it by far the country's best-selling book. For the updated version the Bible's editors turned to national authors and poets "to make the text sing and resonate for a new generation," reported AP. And they changed up some of the language, describing Mary, Jesus' mother, as a "young woman" rather than a virgin. (According to the AP, the "U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops also made this change in its latest Bible translation from 2011, saying the change didn't alter teaching about Mary, but was meant to address the possible different meanings of the Hebrew word 'almah' in the text.")

"It's easier to read," Helga Haugland Byfuglien, presiding bishop for the official Lutheran Church of Norway, conceded of the new translation. "There is no over-interpretation of the text."

A strong marketing campaign also helped to give the updated Bible a needed push in the country, where the formerly official Church of Norway (Parliament took away its official status last year) says only one percent of residents regularly attend church. The new Bible is bound with pink or denim covers for teens and young adults, and with more sophisticated, literary-themed covers for older generations. The Norway Bible Society also "promoted the new translation like a pop fiction novel," reported AP, "stirring anticipation by giving out teasers of biblical stories before its release."

The heightened interest in Scripture even prompted production of a six-hour play entitled *Bibelen* (Norwegian for "Bible"), which enjoyed a three-month run at one of Oslo's top theaters, and drew some 16,000 people. Not surprisingly, the theater-version of Scripture offered interpretations at odds with a literal reading of the Bible. For example, instead of dying on the cross, which is a non-negotiable tenet for true Christians, in *Bibelen* Jesus lands in a mental hospital and ultimately dies by lethal injection — with no apparent resurrection so vital to the faith of true believers.

Nonetheless, the highly secularized Norwegians appear to be gaining a new interest in spiritual things. "Church attendance is a poor measure of the Norwegian state of faith," offered one post-doctoral theologian, Thorgeir Kolshus, of the University of Oslo. "Religion is a very private thing for Norwegians."

Anne Veiteberg, publishing director of Norway's Bible Society, speculated that increased immigration to the country over the past decade has fueled Norwegians' increased fascination with the inner life. More than a quarter million immigrants have settled in Norway in the last half-dozen years, sixty percent of them Christian. "Now that we're exposed to other faiths, Norwegians have gotten more interested in their own faith," Veiteberg said.



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Over the past several years there has been a steady increase in attendance and membership in Norway's Catholic and Evangelical churches. With a combination of both outreach and immigration, membership in Norway's Catholic Church has increased from just over 50,000 to 200,000-plus, according to an article in the [National Catholic Registry](#). And through the influence of Christian television outreaches like the Trinity Broadcasting Network, many Norwegians are being exposed to Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity.

[Views and News From Norway](#) noted that, according to a 2011 survey by DAWN Norge, which tracks Christian trends in the country, there are now at least 91 Christian congregations in Oslo alone, with weekly worship services in over 30 languages. The DAWN survey found that there are some 6,000 active church members in congregations formed by immigrants, with a majority of the congregations having been established over the past ten years.



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