

Shock new bestseller in Norway is... the BIBLE! Secular nation turns to religious reading

New Norwegian translation of the Scriptures sold 120,000 copies in a year.
Academics cite increased immigration for renewed interest in Christianity



© Getty Images

A sudden burst of interest in God's word has meant that the Bible has become a best-seller in Norway, overtaking *Fifty Shades Of Grey*.

In a surprising move in what is one of the most secular nations in Europe, a new Norwegian language version of the Scriptures has become the country's best-selling book.

The country's fascination with God's message has also spread to the stage, with a six-hour play called 'Bibelen,' Norwegian for 'the Bible,' drawing crowds of 16,000 in a three-month run that recently ended at one of Oslo's most prominent theatres.

A new translation of the Bible is now Norway's best-selling book, having overtaken *Fifty Shades Of Grey*

Officials of the Lutheran Church of Norway say they see the new-found interest in the Bible as proof that it still resonates in a country where only one per cent of the 5m residents regularly attends church.

Author Karl Ove Knausgaard, who helped with the new translation, said the Bible was just as relevant to us today.

He said: 'Thoughts and images from the Bible still have an impact on how we experience reality.'

Norwegian academics said no-one should be surprised by the success of the new edition of the Bible in a nation of taciturn Scandinavians who like to withdraw from city life and spend holidays in remote solitude in the mountains, fjords and forests.

Thorgeir Kolshus, a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Oslo, said: 'Church attendance is a poor

measure of the Norwegian state of faith.

'Religion is a very private thing for Norwegians.'

Academics say Norwegians, who enjoy holidays in solitude in the mountains, enjoy contemplative reading

Anne Veiteberg, publishing director of Norway's Bible Society, said increased immigration had probably also been a factor.

More than 258,000 immigrants have settled in the country during the last six years alone, and the Church of Norway estimates that around 60 percent of immigrants are Christian, with the rest Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu.

She said: 'Now that we're exposed to other faiths, Norwegians have gotten more interested in their own faith.'

Released in October 2011 by the Norwegian Bible Society, the new translation replaces a 1978 edition, with the goal of improving readability and accuracy. For example, in the older version, Mary was called a 'virgin.'

In the new translation she is referred to instead as a 'young' woman.

The new translation of the Bible has even beaten the best-selling erotic novel *Fifty Shades Of Grey* in Norway

Norway's Bible Society promoted the new translation like a pop fiction novel, stirring anticipation by giving out teasers of biblical stories before its release.

It turned to poets and authors such as Knausgard to make the text sing for a new generation, and packaged it to appeal to various age groups, targeting teenagers with pink leather or denim covers, and adults with more sophisticated covers.

Helga Haugland Byfuglien, presiding bishop for the Church of Norway, said the new version was easier to read.

She said. 'There is no over-interpretation of the text.'

It has sold nearly 160,000 copies and was Norway's best-selling book in 2012, despite increasing secularisation as Norwegians have concentrated on other pursuits than religion.

They skiing, hiking and other outdoor activities, leaving little time other than Christmas or Easter to

fill the pews.

Last year, Parliament unanimously decided to end the Lutheran church's status as the official state religion.

But Erik Ulfsby, artistic director at Det Norske Teatret, which staged the 'Bibelen' play, said that even if Norwegians didn't go to church, they still saw the Bible as an important part of their literary heritage.

Daily Mail