

# Biblical Narrative in a Century of newspapers

A Digitized Past Pointing to the Future?

Terje Stordalen, University of Oslo

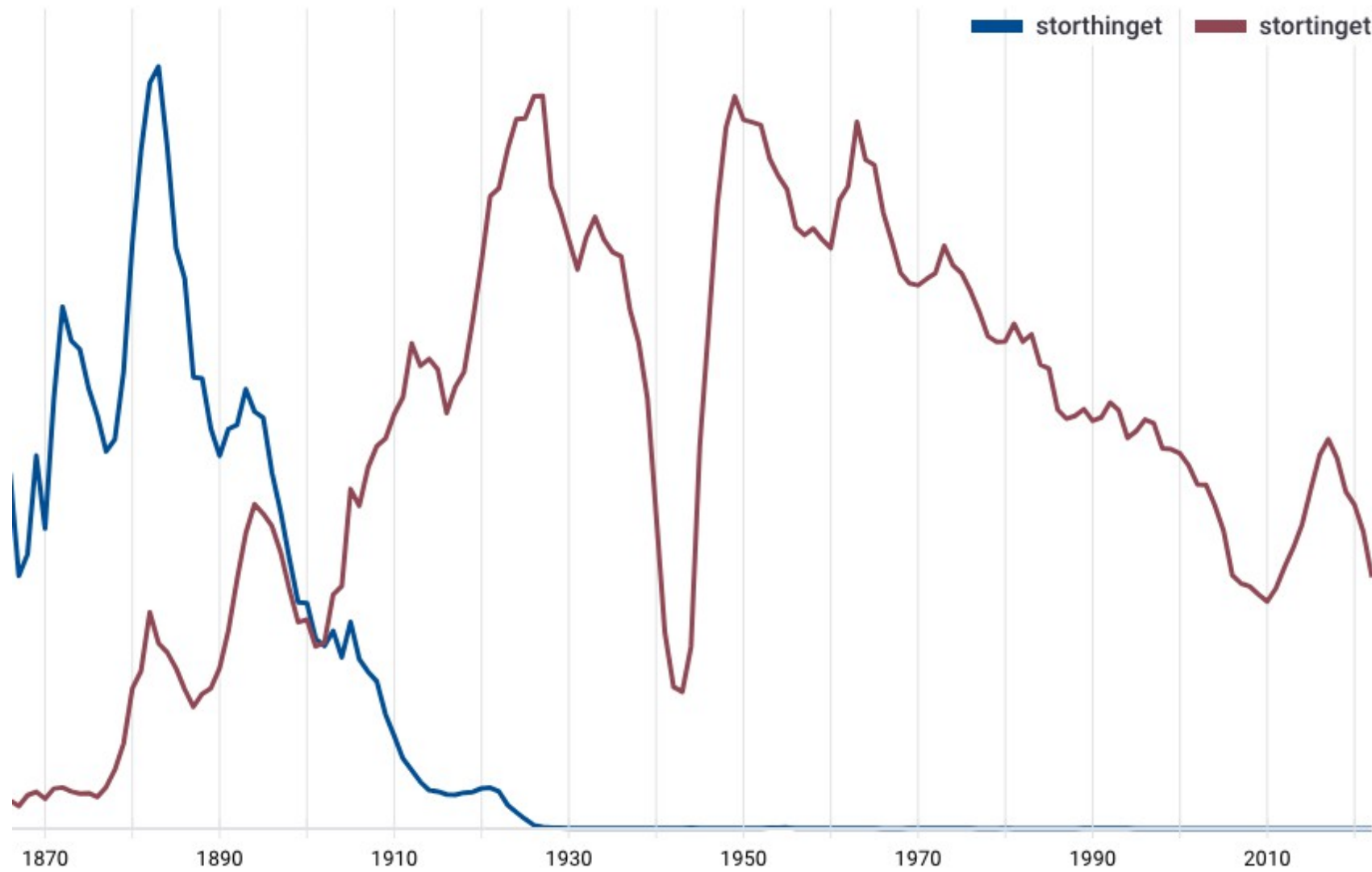


Automatized digitization of newspapers at the National Library of Norway, Mo i Rana, January 2018. Photo: Maja Atterstig © The National Library

# Challenges for digital Research

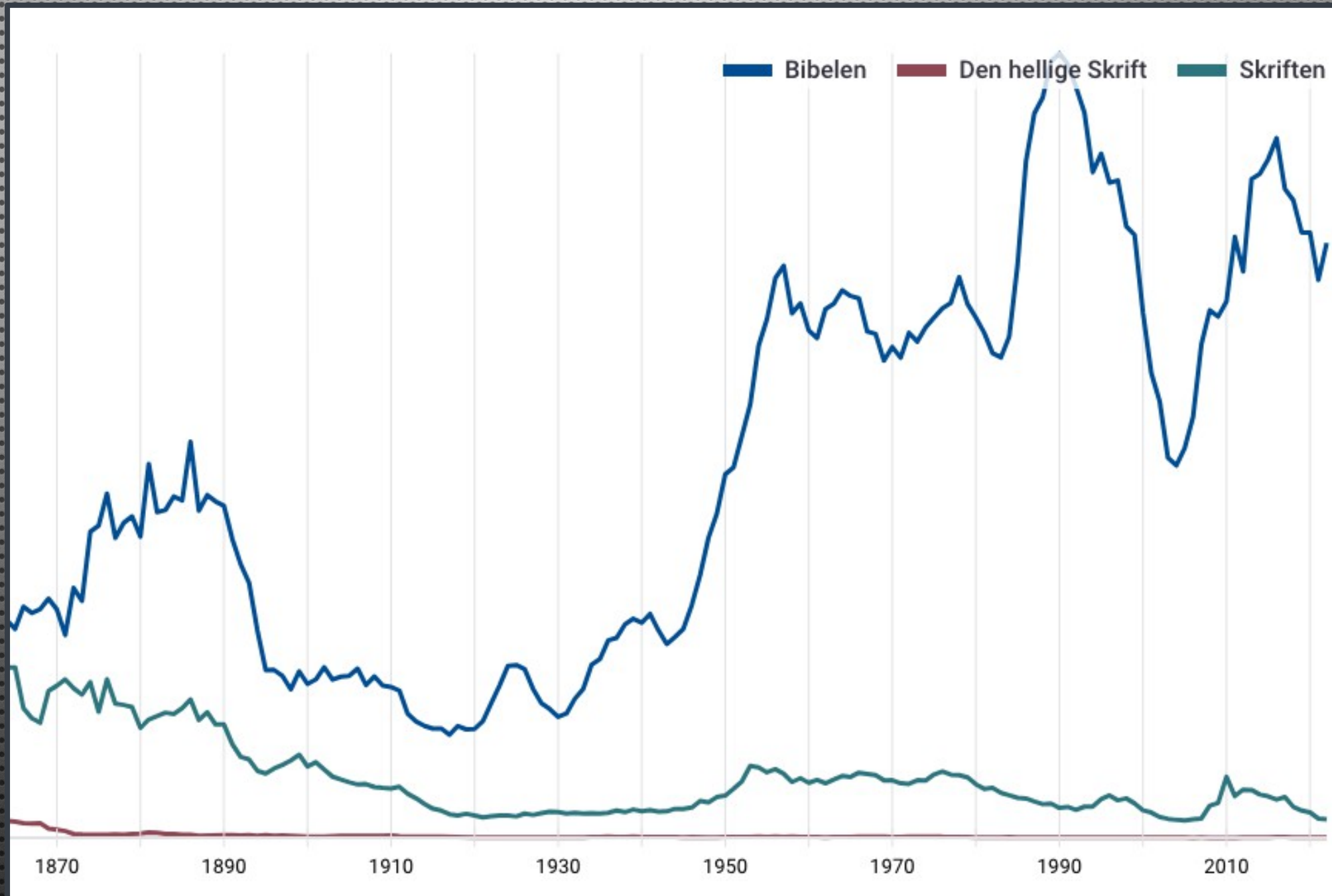
- Context and materiality of originals lost
- Distinction between the archive and the canon is blurred
- Computers «think» differently...
- Newspaper texts are not innocent «data»
- Graphs only count word hits...
- In this case, some graphs give relative counts, other absolute numbers

■ storthinget ■ stortinget



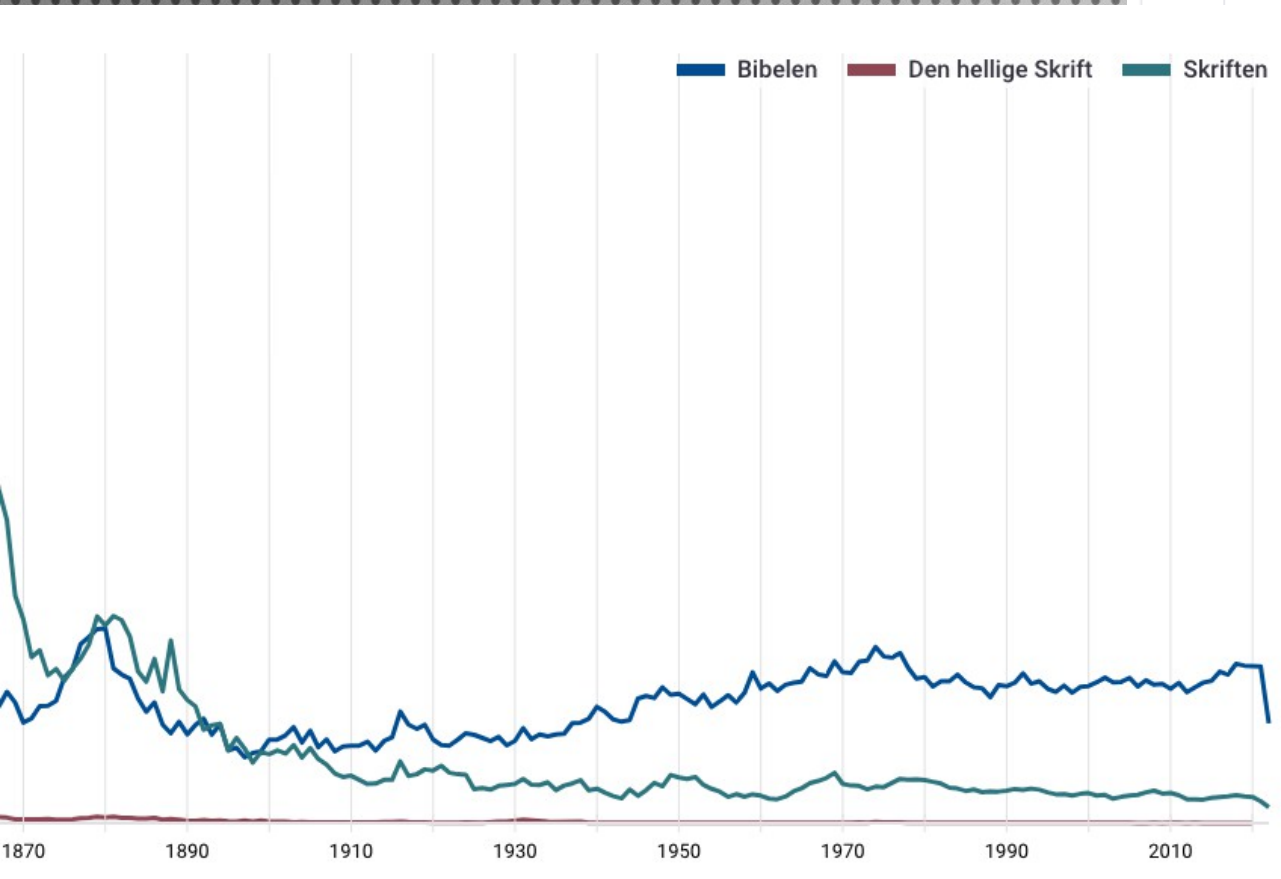
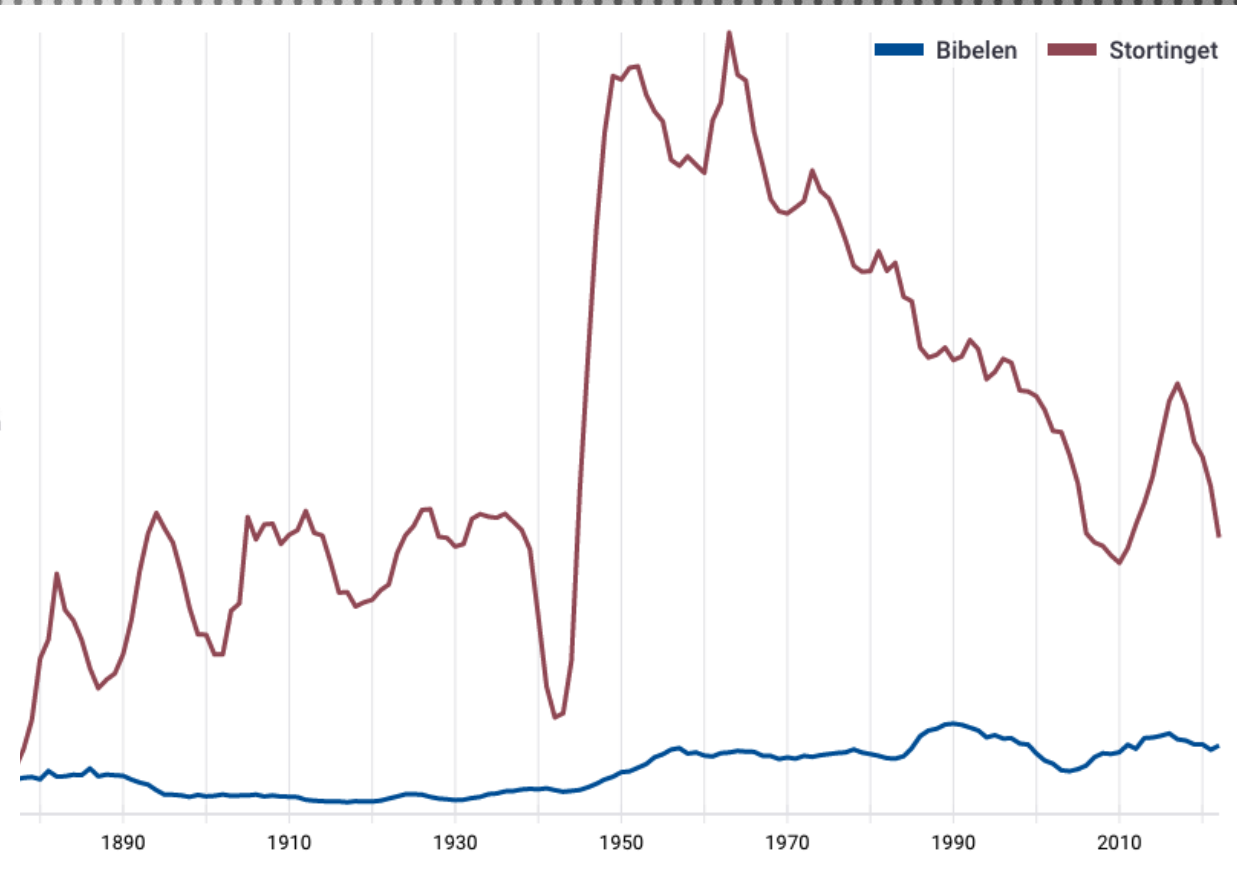
Most common Norwegian words referring to the Bible over this period. Case sensitive, relative hit count-

NLN Web Ngram.



# Contextualizing the hits graph for the Bible:

## 1) The Bible and the Parliament.



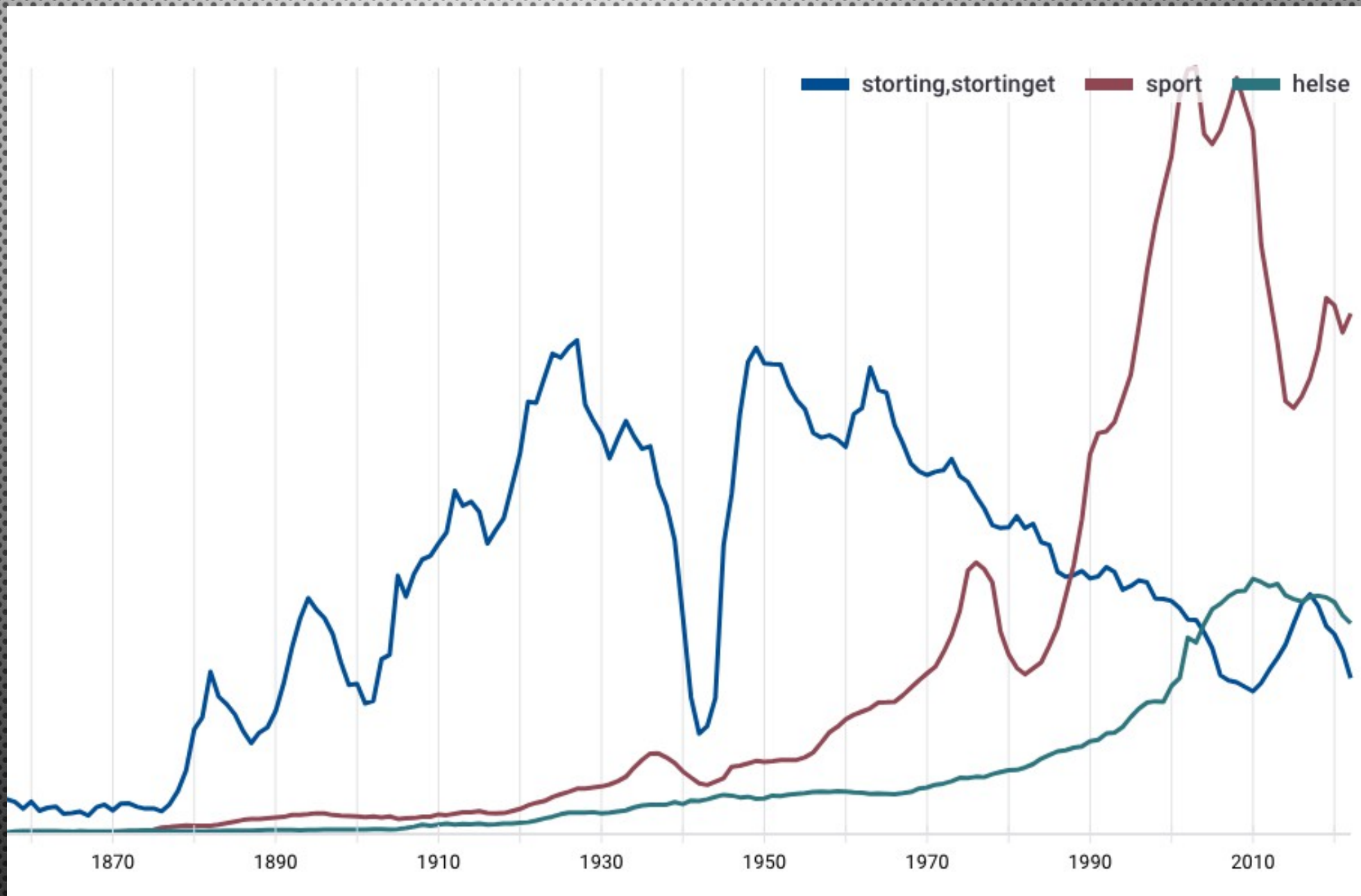
## 2) The Bible in the *book* repository.

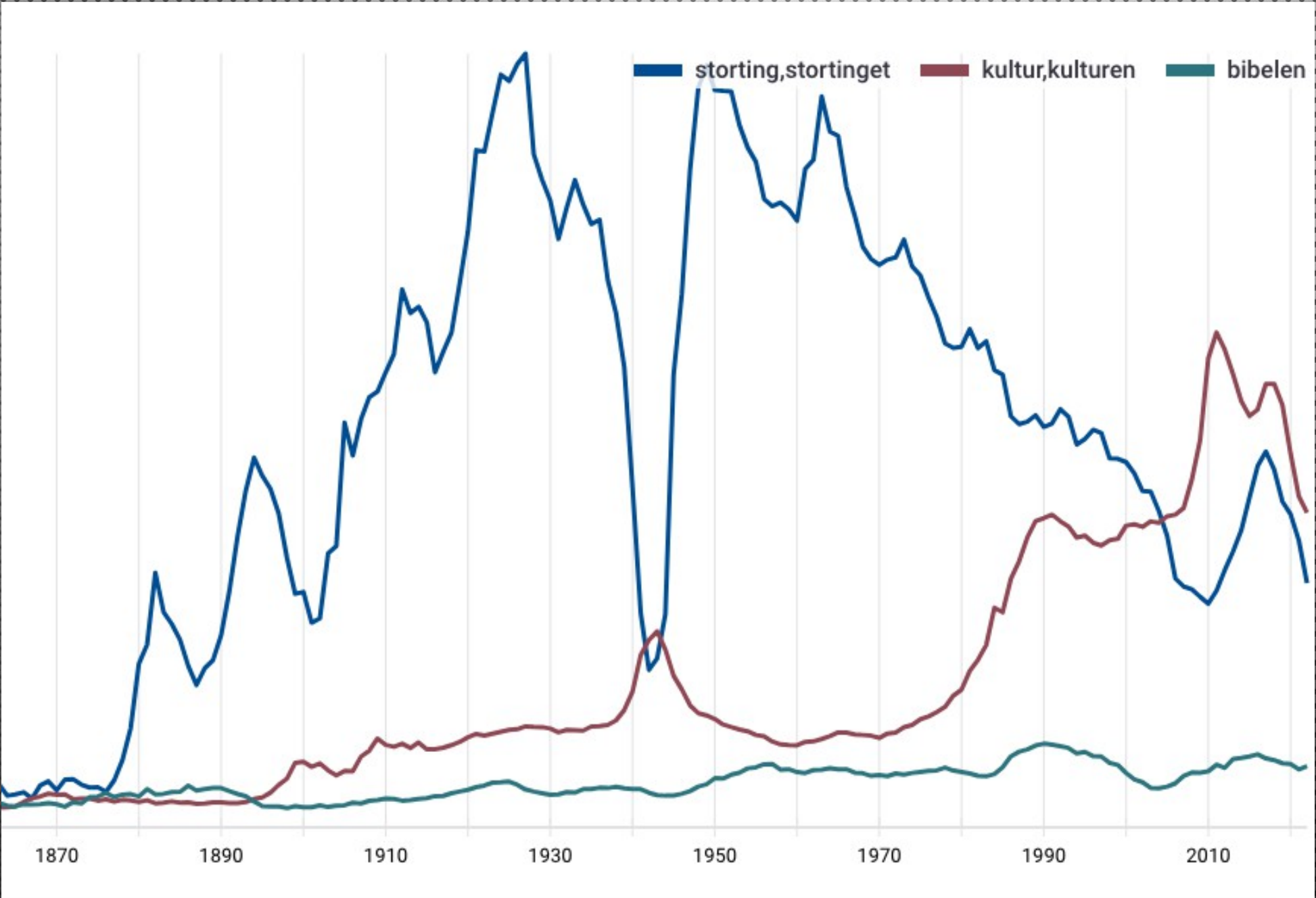
“Newspaper  
schizophrenia”

The populariza-  
tion of the  
Norwegian press,  
mirrored in  
frequency of  
themes:

Sport and health  
on the rise...

NLN Web Ngram.





Popularized Bible?

More focus on culture is part of the popularization of the press.

Is this what caused a rise in references to the Bible?

NLN Web Ngram.



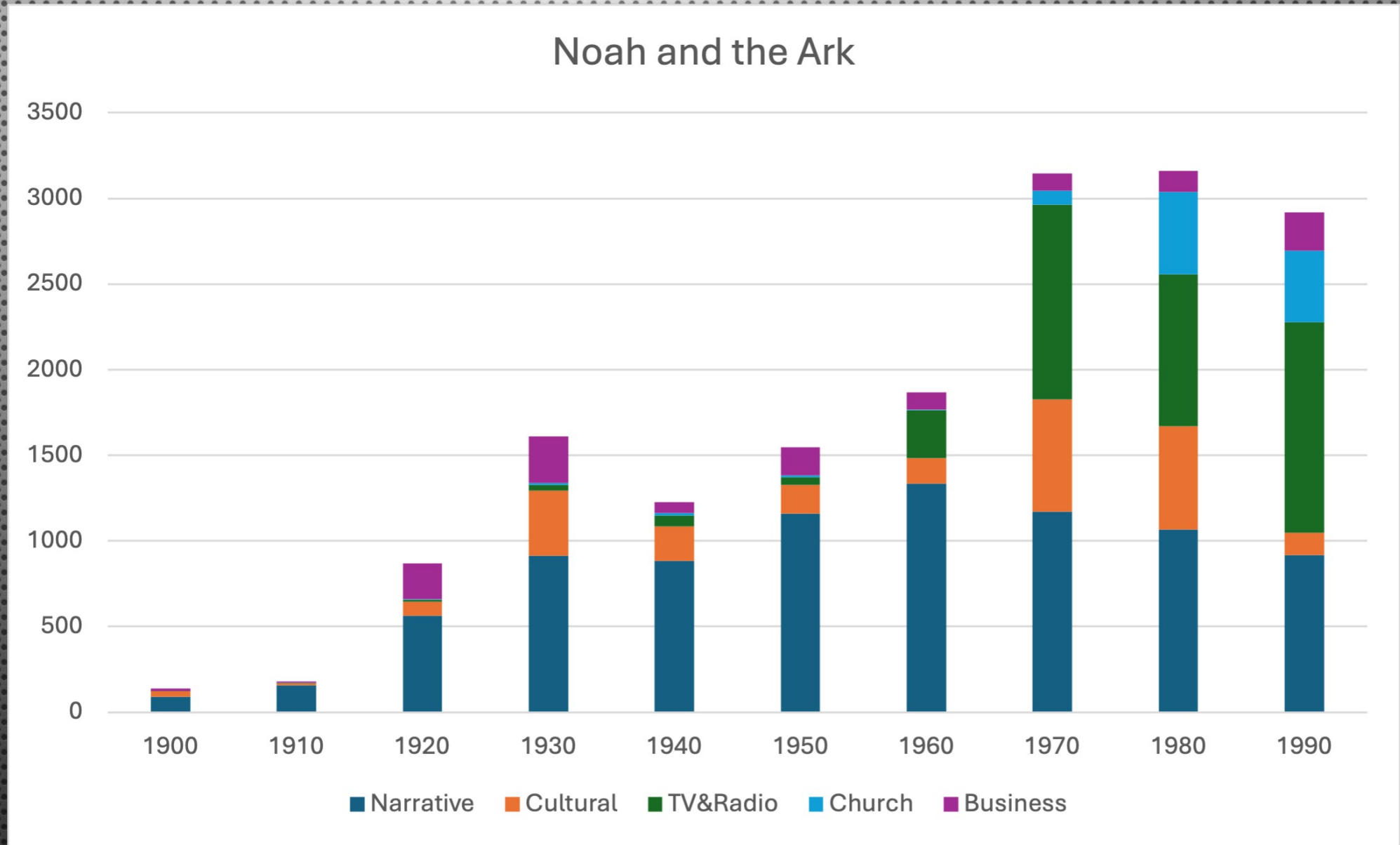
# Ten Old Testament Narratives

- Adam and Eve (Genesis 2–3)
- Cain and Abel (Genesis 4)
- Noah and the ark (Genesis 6–9)
- The Tower of Babylon (Genesis 11)
- Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22)
- Joseph and his brethren (Genesis 37–50)
- Moses and the Israelites passing through the Sea (Exodus 14)
- Moses and the tablets of the law (Exodus 20, cf. Exodus 32–33)
- David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17)
- David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11)

Statistics for each narrative: see the handouts

# Noah and the Ark

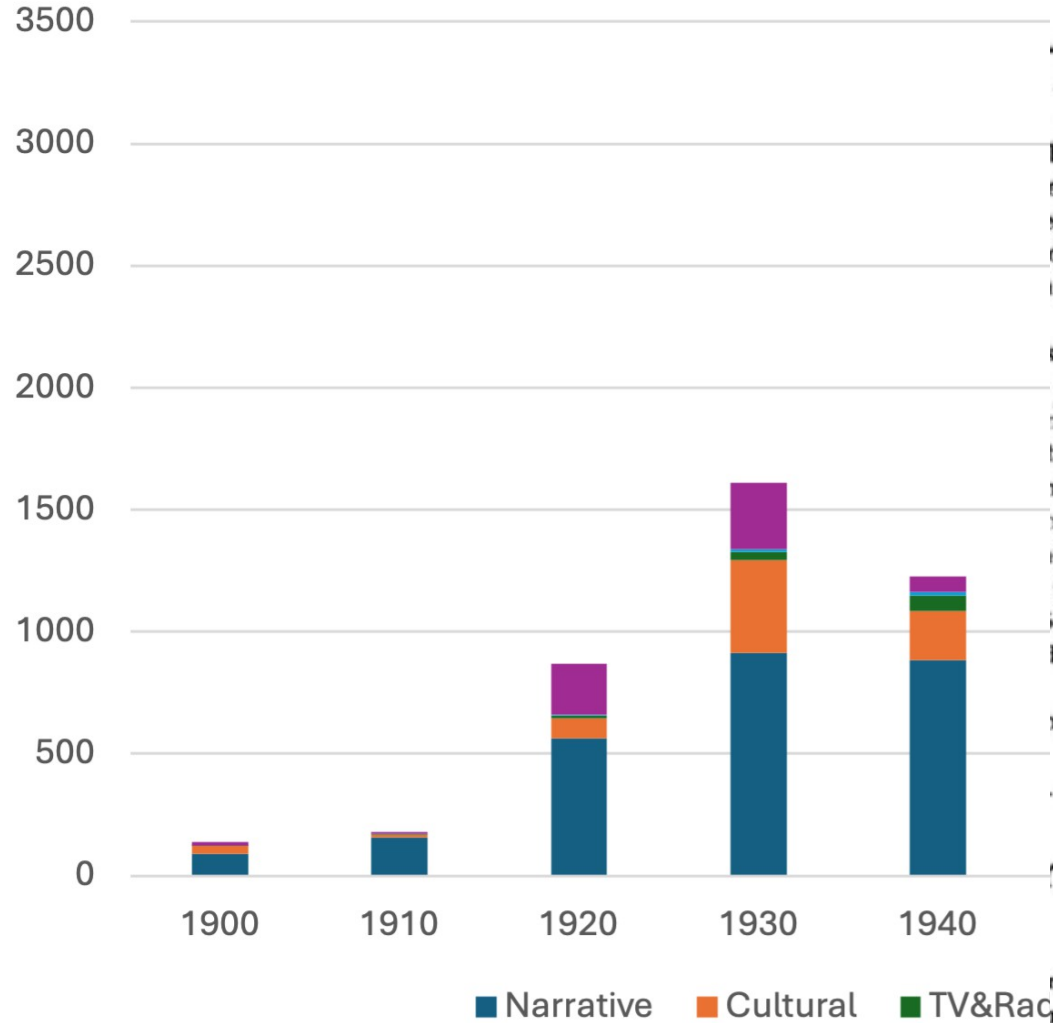
- Early peak in the 30's (no radio / TV)
- Massive use in culture and radio/TV 1970–1990



# Noah and the Ark

- “Business-friendly”!

## Noah and the Ark



Nr. 4

### Noahs Ark i Oslo.



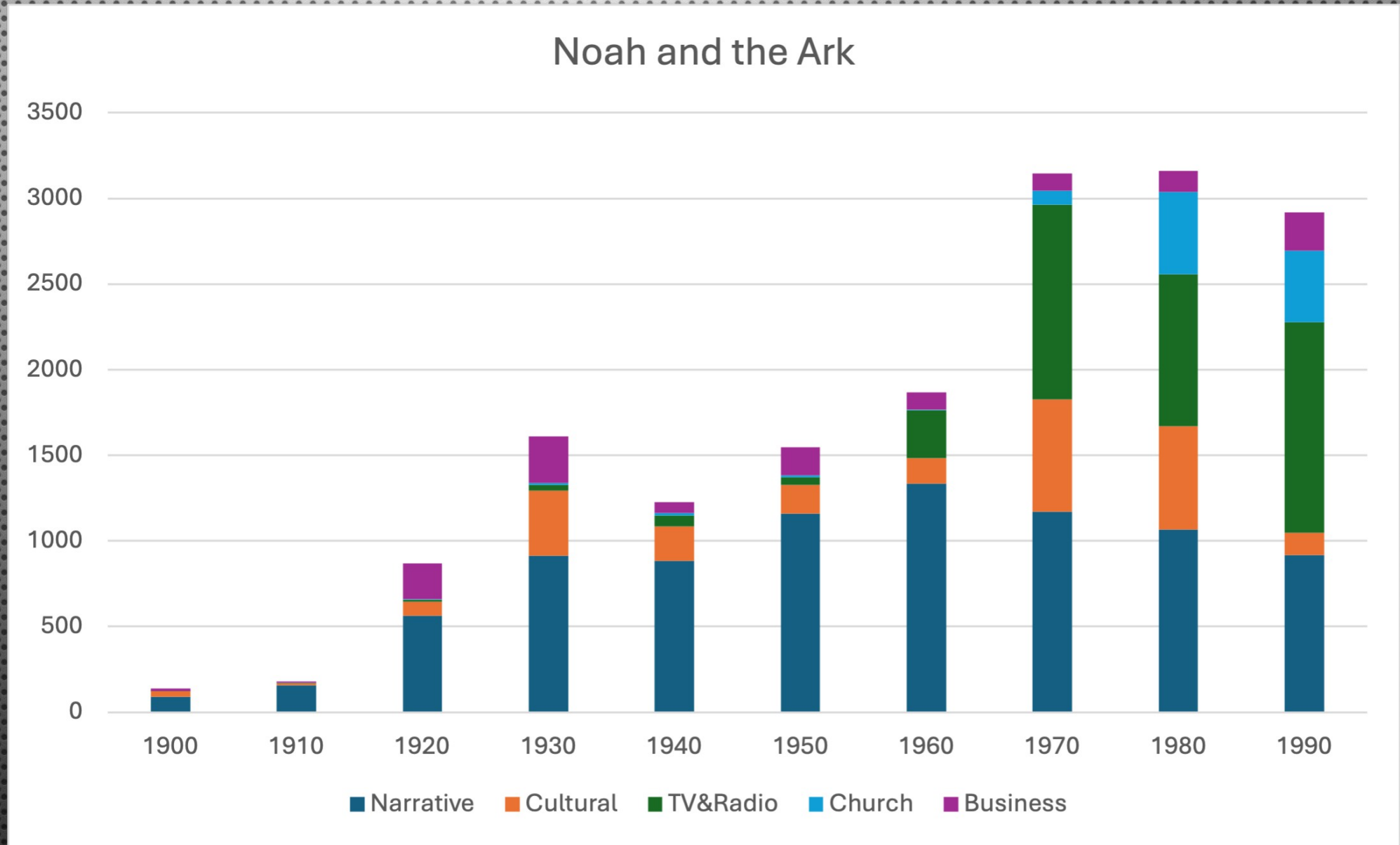
Ved 13-tiden i formiddag kom «Noahs Ark» til Oslo og stanset på kysten i passende dagsmarsjer, og alle dager med styggevær har den Ararats berg som for anledningen ligget stille. Derfor er alle dyr, både var representert av Pipervikens innerste kai. Den var ventet av en betraktelig del av sitt trofaste publikum, som tappert holdt stand i det sure vær omkring berget.

Arken er kommet holt fra Kirkenes denne gang. Den har «gjort» kysten i passende dagsmarsjer, og alle dager med styggevær har den ligget stille. Derfor er alle dyr, både de rene og de urene, i full vigør.

«Noahs Ark» har denne gang både løve, leopard, bjørn, apekatter ulver, rev — kort sagt som sig bør og bør det erverdige sjoens sirkus hvis navn det bærer.

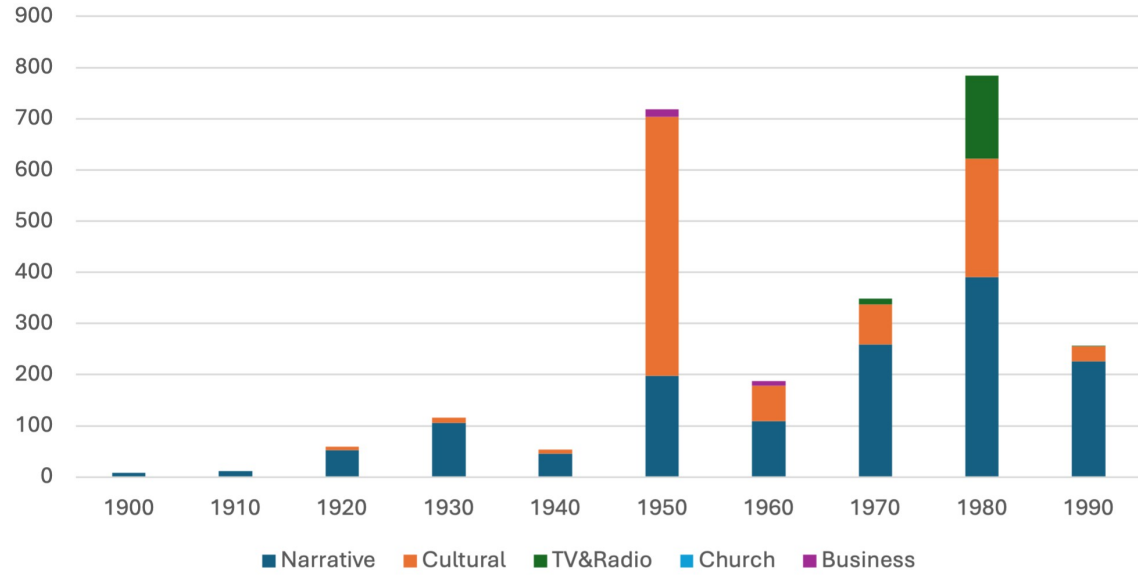
# Noah and the Ark

- Early peak
- Massive use in culture and radio/TV
- “Business-friendly”!
- Not much reflection of church use (Noah has the most of all ten narratives...)

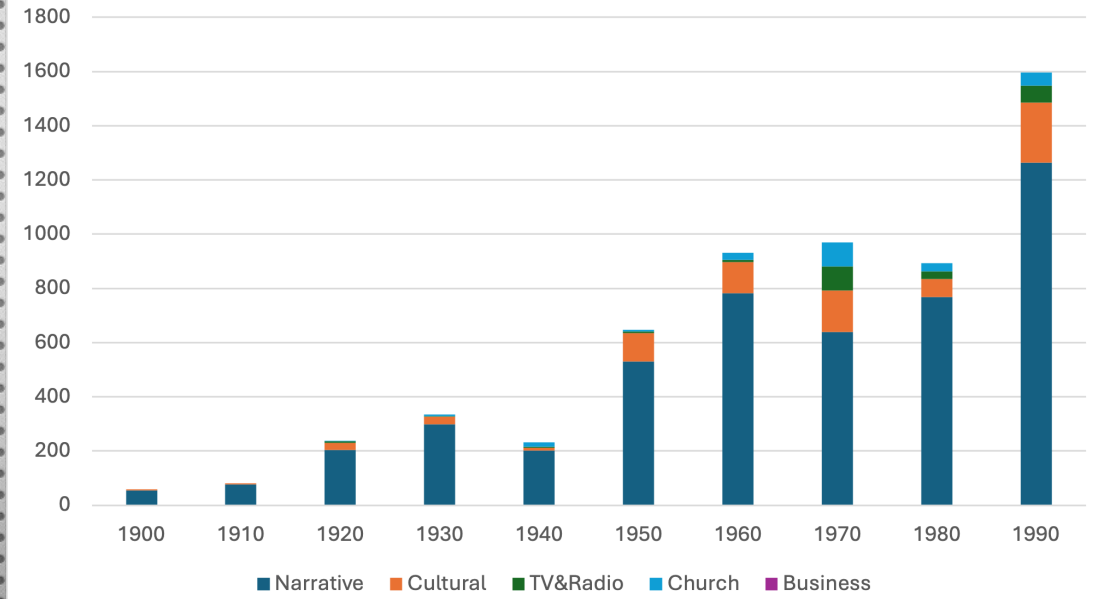


# The popular Bible...

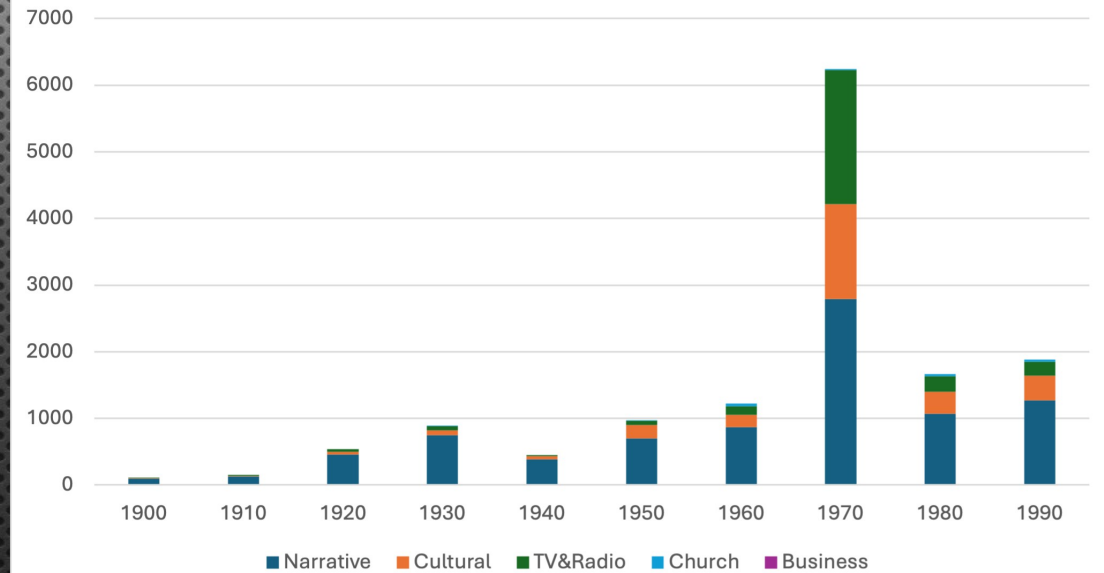
## David and Bathsheba



## Moses and the Law

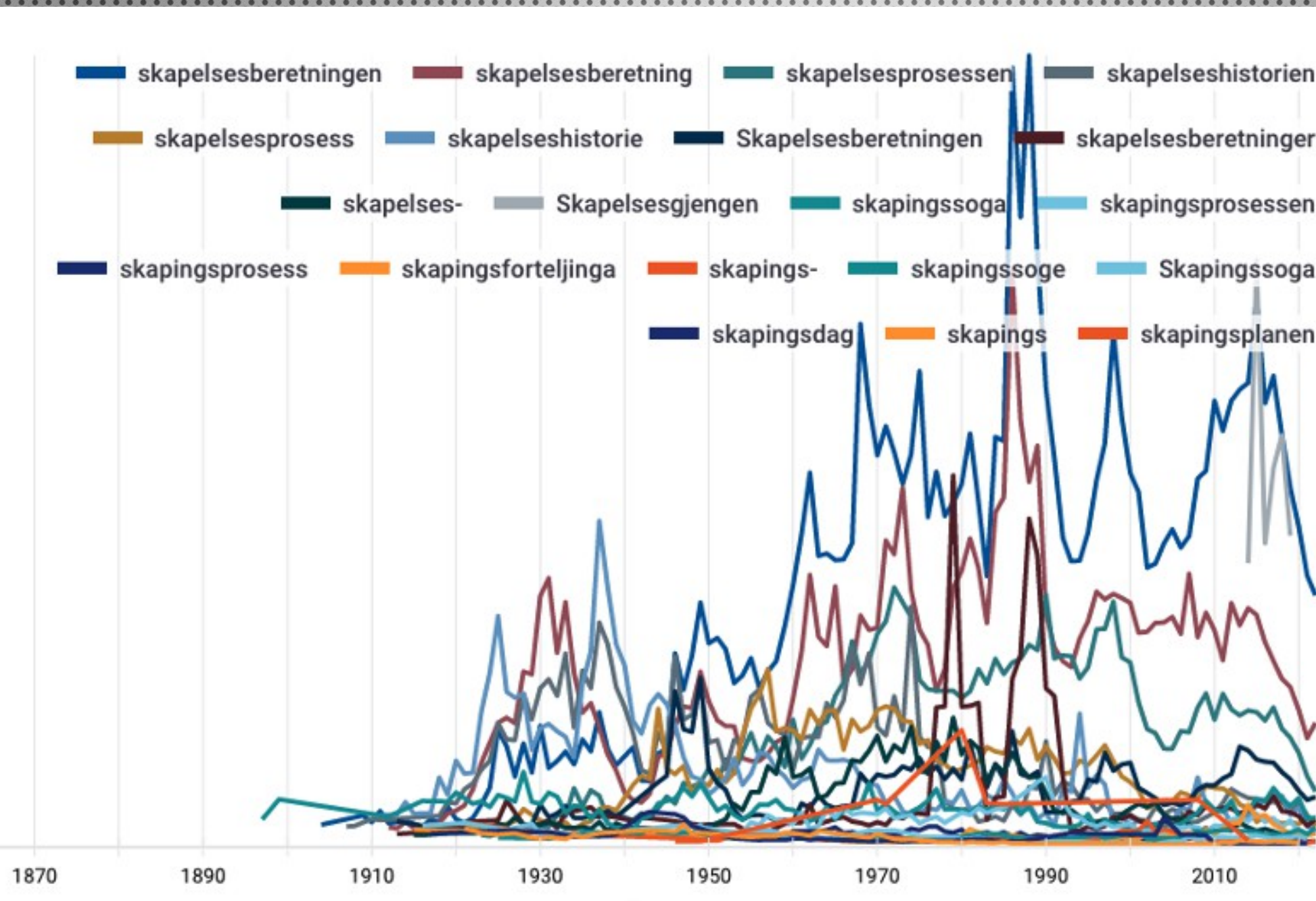


## Joseph and his Brothers



# Biblical Narrative, Public Education, and Everyday Language

- Church of Norway Lectionary: OT text for preaching only from 1977 (and then only infrequently).
- Public-school curriculum for “religion” from 1839 to 1977: “Bible History”.
- Volrath Voght’s textbook: 17 editions, more than 3 mill. copies between 1858 and 1965.  
[Total population in Norway passed 3 mill only in 1942.]



## “Creation”

A chart of the most frequent words related to “creation” in the newspaper repository...

NLN Web Ngram.

# What is next?

- Improving and expanding upon the work presented above
- Analyzing the late 20th and 21st Century (Born-Digital sources)
- Profiling the contents of **Norway's public Bible**



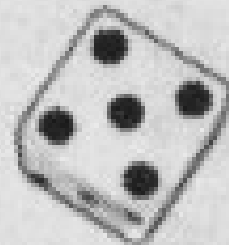
# How does the Public Bible Work?

- Mediation changes that which is being mediated
- How is Biblical narrative used rhetorically?
- What is implied about the standing of Biblical narrative with the audience?
- How would newspaper texts affect the validation of the Biblical narratives?  
Positively, negatively, and value – for what / whom?

Cf. following examples...

# Bibelsk hit

The Prince of Egypt



I tre tusen år har mennesker latt seg fascinere av historien om den hebraeiske babyen som adopteres av Egypts hersker, for som voksen å lede hebreerne ut fra slaveriet i Egypt. Historien om Moses er blant de mest filmatiserte, og det var vel ikke for tidlig at den ble animert også. At det ble Dreamworks, og ikke Disney, som gjorde det, bekrefter bare at Walts studio for alvor har fått konkurranse. For om Disneys «Mulan» er aldri så bra, så kommer den ikke opp mot «The Prince of Egypt» i intensitet.

Dagbladet,  
4 May 1922, p. 6.

t Ivarsson (h) fremhevet at valget  
- stod mellem riksmaal eller landsmaal,  
e noget annet alternativ forelaa ikke.  
r Elevene vilde i begge tilfeller ha ad-  
g gang til aa benytte de valgfrie for-  
n mer. Der maatte, naar avgjørelsen,  
- skulde tas, legges vekt paa hvilket sprog  
t der brukes i barneskolen i vedkommen-  
- de distrikt. Det naturlige for Øst-  
- landsgymnasiene var forøvrig at riks-  
n maalet blev hovedmaalet. Kirkemini-  
sterens svar angaaende sprogformen  
n var svakt og svevende. Hvis man skul-  
- de ha adgang til aa bruke hver sin  
- dialekt, vilde der inntre en **babelsk**  
t **forvirring.**

var den første som brukte stål i sine brukonstruksjoner og han var den som først benyttet komprimert luft.

Han hadde flere hederstegn fra flere tekniske- og ingeniørsammenslutninger og akademier.

Eiffel var altså vel teknisk utrustet for å utføre det nye Babels tårn som så mange før hadde drømt om. Han forteller selv hvordan han fikk sin idé:

— I 1885 kom mine ingeniører og jeg, da vi holdt på med noen kalkyler over høye jernpillarer til den store jernbanebrua ved Garabit, til



**Magasiner. 16-24 Tlf. heimsv. 137**

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**- Club Adam og Eva -**

**Seriøs Swingers klubb**

**Parkveien 62. Tlf. 90 04 44 70**

**[www.swingers.no](http://www.swingers.no)**

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# Preliminary observations & Questions

- Biblical narratives in newspapers can carry notions of credibility, relevance, or argumentative force, and illustrative value.
- Cf. the presence of “unconscious” biblical stories, above.
- Should we call this religion?  
Or belief?  
Or cultural heritage?  
Or perhaps language?

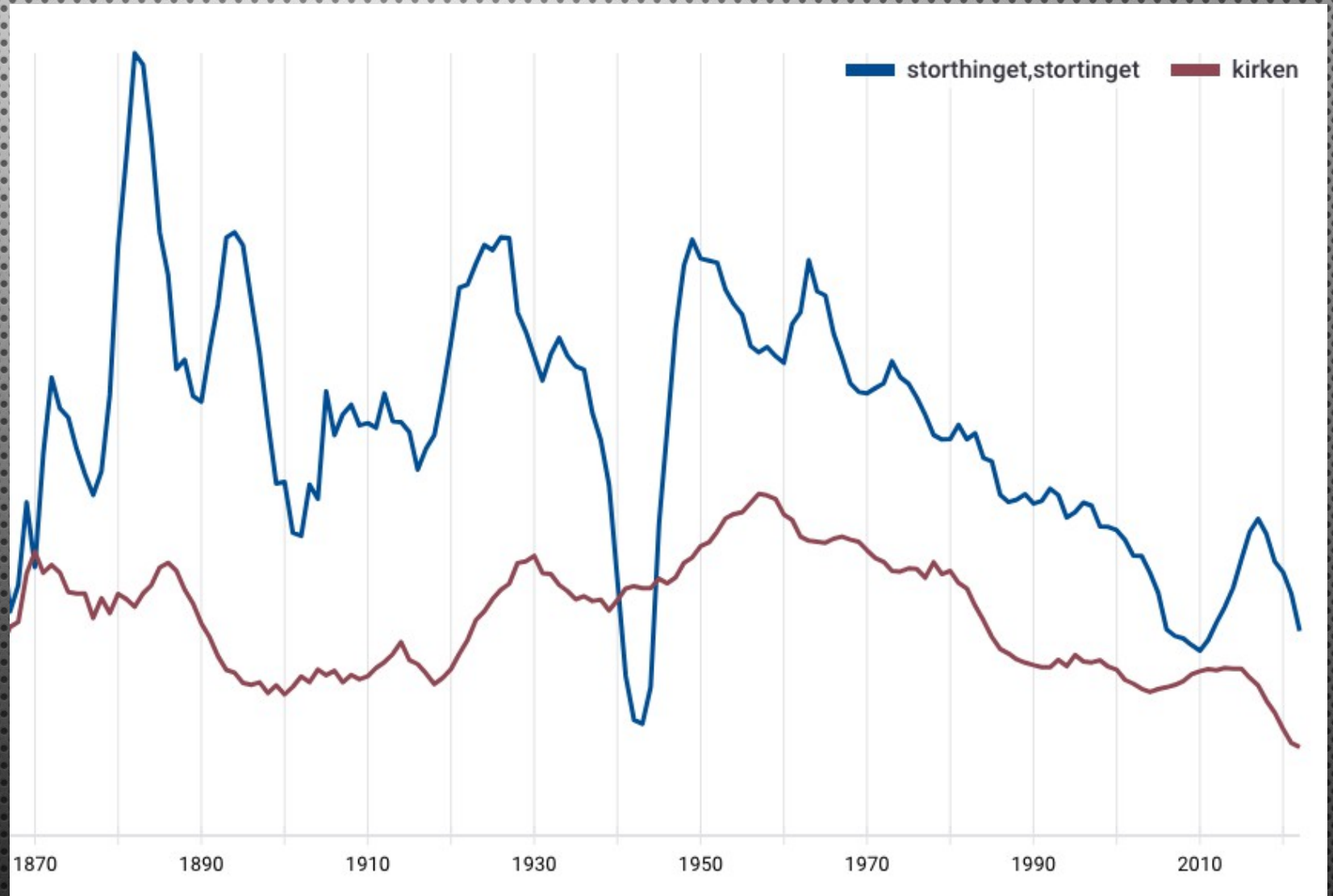
# Bible, Newspapers, and Canonical Ecologies

- Canons of education, music, art, best practices...: A common human phenomenon
- Needed to *produce* a given collection as a canon: canonical institutions, agents, practices, attitudes, memory – and more: a **Canonical Ecology**.
- **Two distinct canonical ecologies can live in symbiotic existence, claiming different significance in one and the same canonical collection.**
- **What are the canonizing institutions and agents in the canonical ecology of the popular Bible? What are their political profiles, their interests? What are their responsibility to shared Cultural heritage?**
- **What are the relationships between the canonical ecologies of the religious and the cultural Bible?**

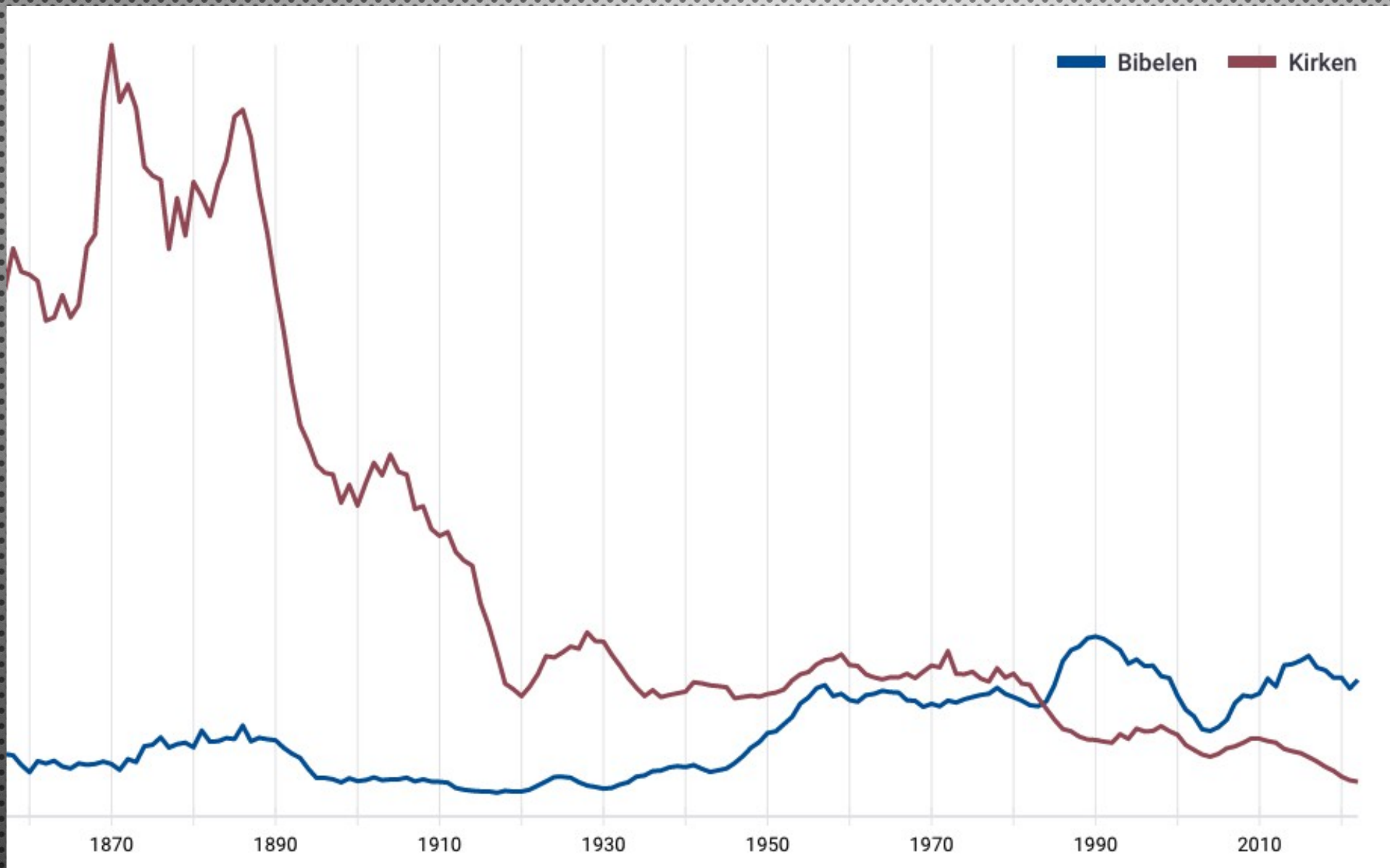
# Configuring Biblical Studies at the University

Hits for the Parliament  
(old and new spellings)  
and the church (both  
non-case-sensitive)

NLN Web Ngram.







Hits for the Church  
and the Bible  
(both case sensitive)

NLN Web Ngram.

thank you

For your attention!

And once again a huge  
THANK YOU to the Faculty of Theology,  
and to Lund University, for the Honour!