

Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2018



Christmas lights sparkle in Rome on November 25, 2018. — AFP

In the #MeToo era, theologians publish 'Women's Bible'

Tired of seeing their holy texts used to justify the subjugation of women, a group of feminist theologians from across the Protestant-Catholic divide have joined forces to draft "A Women's Bible". As the #MeToo movement continues to expose sexual abuse across cultures and industries, some scholars of Christianity are clamoring for a reckoning with biblical interpretations they say have entrenched negative images of women.

The women we know from translations and interpretations of Bible texts are servants, prostitutes or saints, seen dancing for a king or kneeling to kiss Jesus' feet. But while many feminists have called for The Bible, Christianity and religion altogether to be cast aside, an eclectic group of theologians instead insists that if interpreted properly, the Good Book can be a tool for promoting women's emancipation.

'Feminist values'

"Feminist values and reading the Bible are not incompatible," insisted Lauriane Savoy, one of two Geneva theology professors behind the push to draft "Une Bible des Femmes" ("A Women's Bible"), which was published in October. The professor at the Theology Faculty in Geneva, which was established by the father of Calvinism himself in 1559, said the idea for the work came after she and her colleague Elisabeth Parmentier noticed how little most people knew or understood of the biblical texts.

"A lot of people thought they were completely outdated with no relevance to today's values of equality," the 33-year-old told AFP, standing under the towering sculptures of Jean Calvin and other Protestant founders on the University of Geneva campus. In a bid to counter such notions, Savoy and Parmentier,

57, joined forces with 18 other woman theologians from a range of countries and Christian denominations.

The scholars have created a collection of texts challenging traditional interpretations of Bible scriptures that cast women characters as weak and subordinate to the men around them. Parmentier points to a passage in the Gospel of Luke, in which Jesus visits two sisters, Martha and Mary. "It says that Martha ensures the 'service', which has been interpreted to mean that she served the food, but the Greek word diakonia can also have other meanings, for instance it could mean she was a deacon," she pointed out.

Overturning religious orthodoxy

They are not the first to provide a more women-friendly reading of the scriptures. Already back in 1898, American suffragette Elizabeth Cady Stanton and a committee of 26 other women drafted "The Woman's Bible", aimed at overturning religious orthodoxy that women should be subservient to men. The two Geneva theology professors say they were inspired by that work, and had initially planned to simply translate it to French.

But after determining that the 120-year-old text was too outdated, they decided to create a new work that could resonate in the 21st century. "We wanted to work in an ecumenical way," Parmentier said, stressing that around half the women involved in the project are Catholic and the other half from a number of branches of Protestantism. In the introduction to the "Women's Bible", the authors said that the chapters were meant to "scrutinise shifts in the Christian tradition, things that have remained concealed, tendentious translations, partial interpretations."

'Lingering patriarchal readings'

They take to task "the lingering patriarchal readings that have justified numerous restrictions and bans on women," the authors wrote. Savoy said that Mary Magdalene, "the female character who appears the most in the Gospels", had been given a raw deal in many common interpretations of the texts. "She stood by Jesus, including as he was dying on the cross, when all of the male disciples were afraid. She was the first one to go to his tomb and to discover his resurrection," she pointed out.

"This is a fundamental character, but she is described as a prostitute, ... and even as Jesus's lover in recent fiction." The scholars also go to great lengths to place the texts in their historical context. "We are fighting against a literal reading of the texts," Parmentier said, pointing for instance to letters sent by Saint Paul to nascent Christian communities. Reading passages from those letters, which could easily be construed as radically anti-feminist, as instructions for how women should be treated today is insane, she said. "It's like taking a letter someone sends to give advice as being valid for all eternity."

The theologians' texts also approach the Bible through different themes, like the body, seduction, motherhood and subordination. The authors say they consider their work a useful tool in the age of #MeToo. "Each chapter addresses existential questions for women, questions they are still asking themselves today," Parmentier said. "While some say that you have to throw out the Bible to be a feminist, we believe the opposite." — AFP



Rapper Oxxymiron performs during a concert in support of rapper Husky, whose real name is Dmitry Kuznetsov, at a Moscow club. — AFP photos

Top Russian rappers unite for protest gig over star's jailing

Three of Russia's top rappers on Monday gave a concert protesting against the jailing of a fellow star and calling for an end to intimidation by authorities and curbs on their artistic freedom. The packed concert in a Moscow club was organized by rapper Oxxymiron, who told the audience that the sold-out gig was about "freedom of creativity." The concert expressed solidarity and raised funds for rapper Husky, who last week was sentenced to 12 days in jail over a performance on the street in southern Russia. His case has prompted rappers to sound the alarm over a clampdown on their artistic freedom, including frequent concert cancellations under pressure from the authorities and conservative groups.

In a surprise ruling, Husky, whose real name is Dmitry Kuznetsov, was released hours before the concert after his lawyers asked for his sentence to be reduced. Oxxymiron told the audience that the concert highlighted "the situation with music in our country, which is currently not moving in the best direction, to put it mildly." The 33-year-old rapper, whose real name is Miron Fyodorov, studied at the University of Oxford and is known for his participation in "rap battles" with other stars. Opposition leader Alexei Navalny went to the concert with his family, posing for selfies with supporters.

Most attending were in their teens and early 20s and expressed fears the authorities are targeting the rap artists they listen to. "We support this because in Russia there's bloody censorship," said 21-year-old student Ivan Lotman. "They are starting to tighten the screws and trying to scare certain artists, like Husky," said Denis Zabuzov, also a 21-year-old student. "He was jailed for nothing." Oxxymiron performed with Basta, a rapper and radio host from south-

ern Russia and Noize MC, who has mocked police corruption and brutality.

The concert was titled "I will sing my music," a lyric that Husky performed from a car roof after the venue where he was due to perform cancelled at the last minute. Husky said several of his concerts have been cancelled in recent months, after law

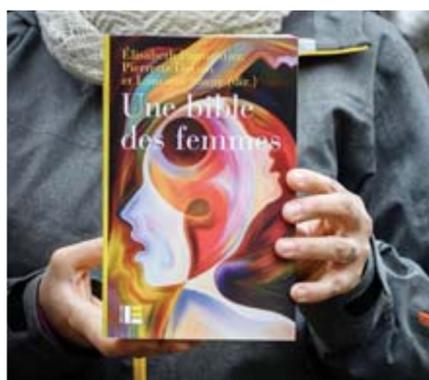


Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny attends a concert of Russia's top rappers in support of rapper Husky, whose real name is Dmitry Kuznetsov, at a Moscow club.

enforcement agencies put pressure on organizers. "They've found in my songs insults to the feelings of believers, propaganda of Nazism and sexual perversion," he wrote on social media, rejecting the claims. Husky, 25, was born in eastern Siberia. One of his first songs, written when he was still at school, was critical of President Vladimir Putin. He has also appeared in a play directed by Kirill Serebrennikov, currently on trial on fraud charges that supporters say are part of a crackdown on artistic freedom. However he is not a straightforward opposition figure, having also expressed sympathy for Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. — AFP



Geneva theology professors Elisabeth Parmentier (left) and Lauriane Savoy pose under the reformation wall with an edition of "A Women's Bible" in Geneva. — AFP photos



Geneva theology professor Lauriane Savoy holds an edition of "A Women's Bible".