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A Theory on the Evolution of Religious Norms and Economic Prohibition

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Abstract

This paper provides a theory of religious prohibition against usury and innovation and its consequences on economic activities and occupations. As an economic prohibition from the majority religion is sustained by a threat of social exclusion from that cultural group, it has less effects on religious minorities. It then creates an occupational pattern where only the religious minorities choose activities that transgress the prohibition. By creating resentment against the religious minorities, this occupational pattern strengthens the diffusion of the majority religion in the population. An economic prohibition is then instigated by the clerics in the majority religion, because it allows them to consolidate their norms and to increase the scope of their control over popular masses. This work also demonstrates that an economic prohibition lasts longer when religious clerics can legitimize secular rulers and when the competition on the religious market is weaker.

Keywords: Cultural Evolution, Cultural leaders, Religion, Political Economy, Prohibition, Religious Legitimacy, Religious Competition.

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