

In the Name of God! Religiosity and the Transition to Modern Growth

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Abstract :

We document the impact of religiosity on the development of science and education during the past millennium. We measure historic religiosity - or the intensity of religious upbringing - by exploiting that given names reveal the preferences and identities of parents, including their religious identity. We confirm that individuals who share first name with a major religious figure engage in more religious behaviors, reflected in their choice of studies, loyalty towards the church, and authors' writing topics, as well as response to natural disasters. We do so using data for more than 40.000 university students throughout the Holy Roman Empire and 330.000 authors writing during the past millennium. We proceed to document that knowledge production was slower in areas across Europe with more intense religious upbringing. To establish causality, we compare individuals that are very similar (university students or authors), born in the same area, and exploit that religiosity is measured at the parental level, while outcomes are measured at the level of the child. Our results contribute to a growing literature on the societal impact of differences in religious intensity.