Can Too Much Religion Really Harm the Economy?

Too much religion can harm a society's economy by undermining the drive for financial success, according to a new study in the journal Social Psychological and Personality Science.

The study of almost 190,000 people from 11 religiously diverse cultures is raising eyebrows among some of England's religious leaders for suggesting Judaism and Christianity have anti-wealth norms.

Written by academics at University of Southampton in England and the Humboldt University of Berlin, the study found that religious people in religious cultures reported better psychological adjustment when their income was low.

The study cites the Bible to show how Judaism and Christianity turn upside-down the belief that the highest possible income leads to the highest possible happiness and psychological adjustment.

It quotes biblical examples such as Jesus' teaching, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," from Matthew 5:3.

The academics conducted their interviews in 11 countries, Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands and Turkey.

"What the great faiths condemn is the irresponsible use of wealth, not wealth itself," said Michael Nazir-Ali, the former bishop of Rochester in the Church of England. "The worship of money is the root of all evil and not money on its own."

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