

Strategic choice of celibacy in the Catholic Church

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Abstract

Since the middle ages celibacy is a necessary commitment when considering becoming a priest in the Roman Catholic Church. In the ongoing discussions about reforms, a wide range of church members ask for the abolishment of celibacy in order to meet believers' changed social and moral standards and to increase the quality and the quantity of priests. However, this paper shows that from a rational point of view, there are good reasons for the Catholic Church to keep or even to increase the role of celibacy for its priests. Using celibacy as a resource selection device, it allows the church to signal credibly its religious orientation to believers. Based on a game theoretic model this paper analyses the optimal use of celibacy in the market for religious services. Additionally we discuss the relevant impacts of higher income levels, higher opportunity costs, increased aging or changed moral standards related to homosexuality.

Key Words: Religion, celibacy, strategic positioning

JEL Classification: D23, D83, L89

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