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A [new study](#) (pdf) into the correlation between religious belief and contentment and security shows that the less religious a society is the happier and more secure it becomes.

The study, by Gregory Paul, published in *Evolutionary Psychology Journal* puts paid to the widely touted notion that without religion society would collapse. According to Mr Paul, the reverse is true. Religion flourishes where a society is dysfunctional and poor. When affluence is present and people feel secure through the provision of health care and social services, religion quickly loses its hold. In other words, those societies that have moved furthest away from religion have higher levels of contentment, stability and affluence.

Unlike many others in his field, Paul does not think that humanity is hardwired for religion, nor that belief in a higher being is necessary for a society to achieve a high level of functionality.

“Popular religion,” Paul says, “is a coping mechanism for the anxieties of a dysfunctional social and economic environment.” Simply put, it means that without safety nets such as universal healthcare (which more prosperous democracies have), people depend on the “supernatural entities that could be petitioned for aid and protection.”

“In view of the reduced levels of religiosity consistently extant in populations that enjoy secure middle class lives,” Paul writes, “it can be postulated that if socio-economic conditions had been similarly benign since humans first appeared, it is unlikely that religion would have developed to nearly the degree seen in actual human history, and atheism would have been much more widespread and possibly ubiquitous since the beginning.”