

Common Sense or Coincidence? Navy Turns Down Atheist as Chaplain

Jason Heap, 38, passed all the physical tests for the chaplaincy. He looked good on paper—a self-proclaimed “scholar of religion” with graduate degrees from Oxford University and Brite Divinity school.

He’s also an atheist—or, as he characterizes himself, a humanist.

So, it was little surprise when the U.S. Navy denied his application.

Though it’s unclear whether or not the denial was directly due to his secularism, there is little doubt over the inherently religious nature of the chaplaincy.

Heap has heretofore considered himself able to provide legitimate pastoral counseling, according to a *Los Angeles Times* article.

“My purpose and focus as a chaplain will be for holistic well-being of anyone who is in need of pastoral care,” he was quoted as saying.

Still, however, the idea of nonbelieving pastoral counselors, contradictory as it may seem, is gaining traction on the left.

An unsourced writer on Wikipedia claims that, “Just as the theory and philosophy of pastoral care does not depend on any one set of beliefs or traditions, so those administering pastoral care receive training to relate gently and skillfully with the inner world of individuals from all walks of life, and with the elements that go to make up that person’s sense of self, their inner resources, resilience and capacity to

cope.”

In contrast, the North American Mission Board, an arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, notes that “Chaplains perform the roles of pastor, teacher, evangelist, counselor and administrator as they represent the church and the denomination[.]”

In the same vein, Christian outcry has been vocal. Louisiana Republican Congressman John Fleming called the idea of an atheist chaplain “total nonsense” and “an oxymoron.”

Retired serviceman Ron Crews of the Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty commented, “You can’t have an ‘atheist chaplain’ any more than you can have a ‘tiny giant’ or a ‘poor millionaire.’ “