

## The Call of Duty

*“So nigh is grandeur to our dust,  
So near is God to man,  
When Duty whispers low, ‘Thou must,’  
The youth whispers, ‘I can.’”*—Ralph Waldo Emerson



To generalize the reasons why people have stepped forward to serve their country is as mistaken as it is to ignore those reasons. Because one was drafted does not mean that one was forced.

Because one volunteered does not mean that one felt called. But if we are to attempt to serve both those who wear the uniform today, and those who have packed it away, it is important to recognize that all of them have responded to the call to duty. Few who were always-a-civilian understand the experience.

In the day of an all-volunteer military, in the days following 9/11 and frequent deployments to distant and dangerous places, few Americans enlist to get a paycheck and VA benefits. There is something else that draws these young people to become warriors.

As with many who take on the uniform of law enforcement or firefighting, many who don the military uniform as a protector-of-society feel they are answering a calling. Some feel it is a call from God. The phrase, *Pro Deo et Patria* (For God and Country) is a familiar one. It may strike us as reflecting a confusion of the roles of Church and State. For many, it may be just that. But not for all.

There are some faithful Christians who are in service to both God and Country. They believe they can serve their Savior by serving their nation.

They are not wrong.



Before we jump to the conclusion that then everyone who answers the call of patriotism must be a servant of God, we need to recall the factor of civic righteousness. The natural knowledge of God, including the conscience, can result in sacrificial actions for the good of society. By such actions, humankind has been blessed again and again. Non-Christians have lost their lives to protect others.

Even self-professed God-haters have come up with discoveries and inventions and practices that we must thank God for. But zeal and skill and success are not the qualifying marks of citizenship in the Kingdom of God. Neither is personal sacrifice. Only one Sacrifice makes a difference. Acceptance of what happened on the center cross of Golgotha is key. The one who says, “The Son of God died for sinners. He died for me.” is in service to the King. That one serves by carrying out the will of his Savior God. Faithfully serving to protect one’s nation is one such example. We might be surprised at the number of young people who rushed to enlist in the Wars we label I and II. In spite of the parades of anti-military protestors in the ‘60s, we must note that more than a few Christians voluntarily stepped forward for duty in Vietnam. More than a few who were drafted, nodded their heads in agreement and headed off to war feeling that this is what God expected of them.

Ralph Waldo Emerson is not a man we want to learn theology from. But his words capture the thoughts of many a Christian who has gone to war.

We dare not glamorize war. The military uniform is not the robe of righteousness. But we should not be surprised, and we surely should not be unappreciative of the fact, that many of those we want to serve in the name of Jesus believe they have served him in a special way by serving their country. They heard the whisper of the call to duty—and they answered.

***Now all has been heard here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind (Ecclesiastes 12:13).***

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