**Gary Badcock Module**

**Reading**

Gary Badcock, “Choosing,” in *The Way of Life: A Theology of Christian Vocation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 134-42. Included, with permission, in Mark R. Schwehn and Dorothy C. Bass (eds.), *Leading Lives that Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 164-70.

**About the Author**

Gary Badcock is a prolific scholar who has made important contributions to systematic theology, ethics, and philosophy. He was born in 1961 in Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, Canada. He graduated from Memorial University of Newfoundland (B.A., 1981; M.A., 1984). He then received his Bachelor of Divinity degree from the University of Edinburgh in 1987 and his Doctor of Philosophy degree at Edinburgh in 1991.

As he tells us in the selection from his book on the ethics of vocation, he might have chosen to become a businessman or a commercial fisherman or a parish pastor or any number of other ways of life. He chose instead to become a teacher, a scholar, and a university administrator. Badcock started his career at the University of Aberdeen, taking the position of a teaching fellow from 1991-1993. He then moved to the University of Edinburgh as the Meldrum Lecturer in Dogmatic Theology in 1993, becoming an associate dean of the divinity faculty in 1997, holding that position till 1999. He has since then held the Peache Chair of Divinity at Huron University College, affiliated with the University of Western Ontario in Ontario, Canada.

Badcock published his book *Light of Truth and Fire of Love* in 1997, followed by *The Way of Life: A Theology of Christian Vocation* a year later. His book *The House Where God Lives: The Doctrine of the Church* was issued in 2009.

**Commentary**

Like any living tradition, Christianity contains a number of unresolved controversies that help both to enliven and to sustain it. One such ongoing argument involves the question as to whether Christians have two calls or just one. All agree that Christians are called out of a pagan way of life and into a Christian one, a call ritually realized in the sacrament of Holy Baptism. But only some Christians believe that there is also a calling to particular stations as parents, children, citizens and employees. This is the so-called “secondary calling.”

Gary Badcock clearly believes that Christians have but one calling, namely, to share in Christ’s mission of love, service, and obedience wherever they find themselves stationed. For Badcock, there simply is no “secondary calling.” He finds this view liberating, since it frees people from the sometimes excruciating process of discerning exactly what God is calling them to do in their specific life choices.

Badcock takes great pains to acknowledge the often difficult stage of maturation that involves the choice of career or geographical location or other priorities. Nevertheless, according to Badcock, God is not concerned with particular choices of where to live or what to do or who to marry, so long as the life these choices bring is one that is lived out in love, service, and obedience to Christ’s summons to discipleship.

**Discussion Question**

Do you agree with Badcock that he could have been just as faithful to his divine summons to a Christian way of life as a fisherman or a businessman as he is as a professor of theology?

Do you think that, as a congregation, you have only one call, the same as every other congregation? Or do you think that your social, historical, economical, and geographical location suggests as well a “secondary calling,” a summons to certain particular collective tasks?

At the end of his essay, Badcock makes a claim that will doubtless startle many Christian people. “. . . The will of God does not extend down to the details of career choice.” Do you agree? Do you find this claim liberating?

Badcock’s view would seem to free the Christian from certain often painful spiritual crises by suggesting that the choice of what to do is not spiritually significant at all. But doesn’t his view lead to other sources of spiritual struggle and anguish? What exactly does it mean to conduct your business operation or your household in a way that shares in Christ’s mission of love and service to others? And can you be a cigarette manufacturer in a Christ-like way at all? Are some careers inherently unchristian?

If Badcock is right, how do you understand the so-called “call narratives” in the Bible? The summons to Moses to go to Egypt as God’s prophet? The summons to Mary to bear the Christ child? The summons to Jonah to save Nineveh?

Badcock does an excellent job of showing how each of his three possible futures would have enabled him to be a better or worse son and citizen than the other two. Had he chosen to be a fisherman, for example, he would doubtless have been a better son, and he would surely have been at his father’s bedside when he died instead of teaching somewhere far across the sea. What are we Christians to make of the fact that no matter what we choose to do, no matter what vocations are laid upon us, our choices will lead to tragic consequences of one kind or another relative to other choices we might have made?