

The Jack and Phyllis Middleton Memorial Award for Excellence in Bible and Theology

Adapted from remarks given by J. Richard Middleton at the close of the Jamaica Theological Seminary conference on “Biblical Interpretation for Caribbean Renewal,” September 9, 2017.

The award is given in memory of my parents Jack and Phyllis Middleton.

My father was born in 1918 in Nassau, Bahamas, to Jamaican parents (they moved back to Jamaica when he was an infant), and he died in Canada at the age of 93 in January 2012. My mother was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1924 and died at the age of 86 in December 2010 in Canada.

Jack Middleton was a police officer in Jamaica from 1948 through 1973. He was the first non-expatriate Commissioner of Police and served under Prime Minister Michael Manley (from 1970–1973).

He was a committed Christian, a quiet and unassuming man, with a particularly strong moral sense. As a police officer, he was non-partisan in the execution of his duties. In his role as head of Special Branch (in charge of security for the island), and later as Commissioner of Police, he was trusted by Prime Ministers from both major political parties—including Norman Washington Manley (Premier, pre-independence), Alexander Bustamante, Donald Sangster, Hugh Shearer, and Michael Manley.

Here are some interesting episodes in my father’s police career.

- In 1956 as head of Special Branch, he chased paparazzi, James Bond style, in a speedboat off the beach at Ian Fleming’s Goldeneye retreat at Oracabessa (he had been assigned to guard British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, who was recovering from a mental breakdown over the Suez crisis). I have often wondered if that gave Ian Fleming some of his plot ideas.
- A few years before, in 1953, he chauffeured Winston Churchill across the island, stopping for his frequent pees in the bush (too many drinks from the backseat bar, my father laughed).
- He first introduced U-Thant, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to rum and coke when he was visiting Jamaica; and then had to bring him one every afternoon at the Liguanea Club.

- In 1966 he deputized Mortimo Planno (senior elder of the Rastafari movement) to organize the crowd of thousands of Rastafarians on the tarmac at the Palisadoes Airport into orderly groups, to let H.I.M. Haile Selassie I deplane for his historic visit.
- Perhaps most importantly, he received the M.B.E. for averting a little-known coup attempt in 1960 pre-independence Jamaica, his name coming fourth after the Premier, Norman Washington Manley, destined for execution on a list discovered in the raided Red Hills camp.

I instituted this award in honor of my parents (while they were still alive) back in 2009, offered in an essay competition for undergraduate students I was teaching at Roberts Wesleyan College.

In 2011 I transitioned to full-time teaching at Northeastern Seminary at Roberts Wesleyan College and also became the president of the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association, the predecessor to the Canadian-American Theological Association.

Beginning in 2012, the award was offered in the context of theology conferences in Canada and the USA, co-sponsored by the Canadian-American Theological Association and various theological institutions. The award is intended to encourage theological thinking about the Bible among theological students and new and relatively unpublished faculty.

Previous winners of the award, with essay titles and conference information, are:

- Anthony R. Pyles, “Drowning in the Depths of Darkness: A Consideration of Psalm 88 with a New Translation” (2012 conference co-sponsored with McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON).
- Mary L. Conway, “‘The Wisest Might Err’: A Re-evaluation of Solomon’s Character as Revealed by His Prayer for Wisdom in 1 Kings 3:1–15” (Runner up: 2012 conference co-sponsored with McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON).
- Andrew Van’t Land, “(Im)Peccability amid the Powers: Christological Sinlessness and Systemic Evil” (2013 conference co-sponsored with Northeastern Seminary, Rochester, NY).
- Marina Hofman Willard, “Portrayal of the Female Figure in the Twelve: A Fresh Perspective” (2014 conference co-sponsored with the Institute for Christian Studies and Wycliffe College, Toronto, ON),
- Alexander Coe Stewart, “Heaven Has No Sorrow that Earth Cannot Feel: The Ethics of Empathy and Ecological Suffering in the Old Testament” (2015 conference co-sponsored with Tyndale University College and Seminary, Toronto, ON).

- Justin Mandela Roberts, “The Grotesque Will Save the World” (2016 conference co-sponsored with the Associated Canadian Theological Schools, at Trinity Western University, Langley, BC).
- Allison M. Quient, “Eve Christology: Embodiment, Gender, and Salvation” (2017 conference co-sponsored with Northeastern Seminary, Rochester, NY).

The winning essay at each conference receives a cash award and is published in the *Canadian-American Theological Review*, the academic journal of the Canadian-American Theological Association.

I am happy to announce that the Jack and Phyllis Middleton Memorial Award for Excellence in Bible and Theology for this conference in Kingston, Jamaica is given to Erica Campbell for her paper “The Parable of the Good Samaritan: A Political Reading from a Caribbean Perspective.”

This is the first time the award has been given at a theology conference outside of Canada and the USA. But it won’t be the last. Stay tuned for news about future theology conferences in the Caribbean, at which this award will be offered again.