

**Biblical Interpretation for Caribbean Renewal
Theology Conference
Jamaica Theological Seminary
September 9, 2017
Presenter Bios and Paper Abstracts
(Listed alphabetically by surname)**

Yves Bergeron, PhD



Yves Bergeron is Head of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology and he also lectures at Midland Bible Institute (May Pen, Jamaica). Born in Quebec, Canada, he taught at Université d'Etat d'Haiti and Fondation pour la Santé Reproductrice et l'Éducation Familiale in Haiti before moving to Jamaica. He has a PhD in Psychology from Ecole de Psychologie Humaniste du Québec (Sherbrooke) and a PhD in Theology from Séminaire de Théologie Interdenominationalle de Montréal; he also did E-Learning through Bakke Graduate University (in Washington, USA). He is married, with four children.

The Biblical Interpretation of Demonic Possession and Voodoo-Like Possession as the Identity of Evil In Haiti

In expressing their faith, some people groups in the Old and New Testament practiced demon possession. Some characteristics of those expressions of faith are similar to those practiced by some Caribbean religions and religions linked to some African cultures. This study contends that many of those practices seen today in Loa and Voodoo are forms of expression that allow people to express their own identity.

Even a cursory study of history will indicate that the Caribbean was influenced by a variety of cultures. This has resulted in a kaleidoscope of ethnicities, cuisines, and religions. This study will identify and describe these influences and define key terms like demonization, demon possession, animism, Loa, Voodoo and Caribbean religions.

Erica Campbell, MA, Mdiv



Erica Campbell is Head of the Department of Humanities and Lecturer in Humanities, Theology, and Biblical Studies at Jamaica Theological Seminary, where she has taught since 1994. Prior to that, she taught Spanish and French at Convent of Mercy Academy (Alpha Academy) and the Queen's School. She has been involved with Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Jamaica Bible Translation project and has been active in promoting the value of Jamaican Creole as an issue of social justice. Her essay on language and identity is published in *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology* (2013).

The Parable of the Good Samaritan: A Political Reading from a Caribbean Perspective

The concept of the *Good Samaritan* is a well-known one. Even the biblically illiterate use the expression in a contextually relevant way. It is usually applied to situations where significant or even sacrificial help is

given; the giver of such aid is deemed a *Good Samaritan*. That application is one derived from a simple reading of the text that informed the coining of the term: Luke 10:25–37. And it has been bolstered by the exposition of many a biblical scholar and expositor.

One exposition of the text comes from Martin Luther King Jr. As was to be expected, King interpreted the parable in a way that applied to the issues of his day and advanced his cause. I plan to analyze King’s understanding in relation to others, in order to lay a foundation for my examination of Luke 10:25–37 in light of Caribbean political reality.

My exposition of the parable itself will draw on Luke 15 and Luke 8:26–39 and make a link to the mission statement of Christ in Luke 4:18–19. I will be advancing the argument that we cannot limit the parable of the Good Samaritan to a purely individual interpretation. Rather, this parable both challenges the clientelistic relationships entered into by politicians in the region and calls government to its responsibility to be neighbour and to see the people of the Caribbean as neighbour. I will seek to show that that is not only a legitimate understanding of Luke 10, but a necessary perspective from which to examine it in light of Caribbean political systems.

Christopher Duncanson-Hales, PhD



Christopher Duncanson-Hales teaches in the Departments of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Sudbury and at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada. His PhD is from Saint Paul University (Ottawa) in the field of postcolonial theological hermeneutics in the context of globalization. He has written articles on hermeneutics and Rastafari and is one of the authors of *Effective Social Learning: A Collaborative, Globally-Networked Pedagogy* (2015). Chris currently co-chairs Northern Ontario’s ecumenical commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. He also co-chairs the American Academy of Religion’s International Development and Religion Program Group and serves on the editorial board for The Routledge Research in Religion and Development series, both of which focus on the diverse ways in which religious values, teachings, and practices interact with international development.

Word, Sound, and Power: The Religious Imagination of Rastafari Hermeneutics

Theologian Jürgen Moltmann identifies Rastafari as “one of the most interesting modern forms of expression of the ‘religion of the oppressed’” (*Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology* [Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press 2000], 199). An important vehicle that Rastafari consciously deploys to globally proclaim word, sound, and power is reggae music, most famously by Rastafari superstar Bob Marley. With the release of *Burnin’* in late 1973 Marley assumed the mantle of prophet whose music, performances, and persona proclaimed his livity in Jah Rastafari. This paper engages Rastafari discourse to gain a deeper understanding of how the experience of oppression interpreted through the biblical trope of *Babylon* prompts insight into what Paul Ricoeur terms the religious productive imagination’s capacity to construct hope, seen by Rastafari as *Zion*.

Using the reasoning of Rastafari elder Mortimo Planno’s unpublished text, *The Earth Most Strangest Man: The Rastafarian*, along with the biblical signification of a representative selection from the music of his most famous postulate Bob Marley, this paper applies Paul Ricoeur’s schema of the religious productive imagination to conceptualize the verbal and iconic tropes of Rastafari’s hermeneutic of word, sound, and power. The hermeneutical task proposed is to seek in this religious language of Babylon and Zion a “unique kind of reply to the confession of radical evil [that] mediates between the experience of radical evil

and the promise of hope” (Ricoeur, “A Philosophical Hermeneutic of Religion: Kant,” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*, ed. Mark Wallace [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995], 92).

Ajilon Ferdinand, MA, DMin



Rev. Ajilon Ferdinand is an Ordained Bishop of the New Testament Church of God in Jamaica. He has a bachelor’s degree from Bethel Bible College, an MA from the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology, and a DMin from Northeastern Seminary in Rochester, NY (his dissertation was supervised by J. Richard Middleton). Originally from St. Vincent, Ajilon is a lecturer at Bethel Bible College and presently serves as the Associate Pastor at the New Testament Church of God, Waltham Park Road. He is married to Kareen, and they have one son, Josiah.

Contextual Interpretation and the Canonical Narrative: Toward a Holistic Understanding of the Bible

Biblical interpretation is inherently contextual. Various social forces, ideas, and experiences shape the process of biblical interpretation. That admission also acknowledges the Bible’s own particular historical, social, and religious contexts. Proper biblical interpretation is carried out in light of both the biblical and contemporary contexts.

However, it is possible to attend so resolutely to context that we miss the integrated theology that holds the Bible’s grand narrative together. God conveys the biblical message as a unified story that begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation. The narrative develops through various plot structures that bring the message into focus. The Bible tells the story of God’s boundless love for creation and his plan of redemption, centered in the life of Christ and whereby we are active participants, awaiting a final renewal. That story gives structure and meaning (and even correction) to a vast assortment of theological formulations. By recognizing the novel ways the biblical story unfolds, we can allow its message to have a holistic impact on Caribbean life and theology.

Current practices of biblical interpretation in the Caribbean need to take the whole biblical narrative into greater consideration. This paper addresses the need for a genuinely holistic reading of the Bible by exploring an approach that pays attention to the canonical storyline. A holistic reading of Scripture is not a hindrance to contextualization but is an indispensable component of biblical interpretation for the sake of the church.

Eric Flett, PhD



Eric Flett is Professor of Theology and Culture at Eastern University, in Philadelphia, where he has taught for the past 13 years. His interests revolve around the intersection of Trinitarian theology, contextual theology, economic development, and interdisciplinary theological reflection. He is the author of *Persons, Powers, and Pluralities: Toward A Trinitarian Theology of Culture* (2011) and has an essay on a Caribbean theology of culture published in *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology* (2013). He gave the Zenas Gerig Memorial Lecture at JTS in 2015. Eric is married to JoAnn Flett, a Trinidadian, who also teaches at Eastern in the fields of business and social entrepreneurship. They have two adult sons.

Food for Thought: The Work of the Spirit and the Dynamics of Disgust in Acts 10

British social anthropologist Mary Douglas asserted that one of the universals of human cultural activity is the establishment and maintenance of the categories of “clean” and “unclean.” These categories are used to *sociologically regulate* the moral boundaries of a cultural group and express the moral integrity of a larger narrative that shapes and guides human action (a point made by Christian Smith).

In addition to sociologically regulating the boundaries of a cultural group, the categories of clean and unclean also inform the emotions of disgust and contempt. These are expulsive emotions that serve to *psychologically regulate* the actions of a social group, alerting members to threats that might contaminate the purity (and thus the legitimacy) of their moral world, a moral world that confers upon members of the group the critical needs of physical security and social significance.

Social psychologist Paul Rozin identifies three disgust domains: 1) Core Disgust (revulsion centered on eating and oral incorporation); 2) Sociomoral Disgust (revulsion centered on moral and social judgments); and 3) Animal Reminder Disgust (revulsion centered on death reminders). Although all three forms of disgust are related, Core Disgust is concerned primarily with threats to the physical wellbeing of a person while the latter two forms are concerned primarily with threats to the social and ontological security and significance of persons.

This paper will utilize the categories of clean and unclean and the dynamics of disgust as a lens through which to interpret the story of Peter’s encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10 in order to more deeply understand the inclusive nature of the atonement, the ethics of the Kingdom preached by Jesus, and the identity and work of the Spirit in the world. Suggestions will be made as to how this story might inform the role of language, music, and the arts in worship, the criteria used to determine who has access to the Eucharist, and the posture of the church toward the poor.

J. Richard Middleton, PhD



J. Richard Middleton is a Jamaican Old Testament scholar living in the Diaspora. He has a BTh from Jamaica Theological Seminary and is currently Professor of Biblical Worldview and Exegesis at Northeastern Seminary, in Rochester, NY. Middleton is the author of *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (2014) and *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (2005). He co-edited (with Garnett Roper) *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology* (2013) and is coauthor (with Brian Walsh) of *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (1984) and *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (1995). His research and writing focuses on Old Testament theology, with particular emphasis on creation theology and the dynamics of human and divine power in the Bible.. He is currently working on a book entitled *The Silence of Abraham, the Passion of Job: Explorations in the Theology of Lament* (for Baker Academic) and another entitled *Portrait of a Disgruntled Prophet: Samuel’s Resistance to God and the Undoing of Saul* (for Eerdmans). Richard is married to Marcia, a public health nutritionist, who is also a Jamaican; they have two adult sons.

The Inclusive Vision of Isaiah 56 and Contested Ethical Practices in Scripture and the Church: Toward a Canonical Hermeneutic of Discernment

The inclusive vision of Isaiah 56 (welcoming eunuchs and foreigners into the congregation of Israel) may be understood as addressing (and critiquing) certain practices of exclusion in postexilic Yehud mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah. While both Isaiah 56 and Nehemiah 13 seem to interact with the same Mosaic

legislation concerning the exclusion of certain categories of people from full participation in the community of Israel (Deuteronomy 23), their response to this legislation is widely divergent.

This divergence is only one example of diverse ethical perspectives evident in both Old and New Testaments. Given a commitment to the Bible as authoritative Scripture meant to guide faithful living in a complex world (a commitment characteristic of the Caribbean church), this paper will explore a hermeneutical framework for understanding the ethical diversity of the Bible, without acquiescing in relativism.

Beginning and ending with the case study of Isaiah 56, the paper will draw on the issue of Kosher food laws in Leviticus and their rescinding in the New Testament, Jesus's teaching on divorce in explicit contradiction to Mosaic legislation, and the debated status of women in the Ephesian household code, in order to develop a biblical vision of social justice for the contemporary Caribbean church.

Delano Palmer, PhD



D. V. Palmer is adjunct lecturer and deputy president emeritus, Jamaica Theological Seminary. He is a member of CAFU (Christian Ambassadors Footballers United), and a Bible Teacher at Swallowfield Chapel, Kingston, Jamaica. He is the author of *Messianic 'I' and Rastafari in New Testament Dialogue: BioNarratives, the Apocalypse, and Paul's Letter to the Romans* (2010) and *Romans in Context: A Theological Appreciation of Paul's Magnum Opus* (2011).

Chiastic Contours, Caribbean Hermeneutic, and the Book of Acts

Well aware of his place in the divine plan of cosmic liberation, Luke artistically constructs in the book of Acts a Pentateuchal/ five-panelled composition (an ancient construct) to further assure Theophilus that his commitment to the gospel of Jesus is worth the while, and worthy of sharing in the seat of Empire.

The composition includes a Precept (1:8), Persecution (8), Portent (16), and Providence (28); with chapter 15 as centre. Apart from its centre, this ancient Pentateuchal construct appears to be a further reflection on, and redaction of Mark 13:27 (gathering the elect from the ends of the earth), in terms of the labour of God's messengers working on behalf of the people of God.

This paper highlights Luke's use of an ancient construct, which has the potential of informing Caribbean Mission. It explores the bearing of this construct on peoples within and without the Messianic community, with a view to understand better Luke's second volume. The paper also applies a distinctive Rasta hermeneutic (I-deology), which focuses attention on significant I-statements in some of the speeches, to carry out the aforementioned purpose.

What we find in Luke-Acts, then, are bio-narratives. In the first volume, the dominant figure is the Messiah himself, with others in the background. In the second, Peter takes centre stage in chapters 2-11, while Paul makes his salvific entrance in chapter 9, and maintains his prominence until the end. The conviction here is that the Lucan plot is no mere narrative, but a story that invites us to share its world, the commitment of its leading characters, and its enthusiasm for life.

David Pearson, MA



David Pearson is acting Academic Dean at Jamaica Theological Seminary, where he has taught since 1994, full-time since 2002. He is also a community trainer in areas of conflict resolution, mentoring, communication, and forgiveness. His passion is contextual theology, and he takes his cue from Dietrich Bonhoeffer that theology must be practiced in the cut and thrust of life's daily uncertainties if it is to be worth more than mere reflection. His essay on Jesus's healing of the paralytic is published in *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology* (2013) and he blogs at church2deworl.wordpress.com.

The Anatomy of a Church Healing

Although Jesus prays for the unity of the church in John 17:20-21, church unity has often been difficult to attain in the practicalities of everyday life.

In 1977 there was a split between the Midland Missionary Conference of Christian Brethren Assemblies in Central Jamaica and Alpha Gospel Hall, one of their most successful assemblies at the time. Their reunification in 1993 is one of the few examples of church healing of this sort in the history of Evangelical churches in Jamaica.

This paper attempts to analyze the causes of the split and the subsequent reunification. Besides utilizing various theories from conflict studies, the paper draws on personal interviews of some of the characters involved in the split and reunification, as well as others well affiliated with the events, and also revisits relevant historical data of trends and issues related to Christian Brethren Assemblies in Jamaica in the mid-1970s.

Although couched as a matter of fidelity to biblical doctrine, the split was more about personal disappointments and decisions arrived at in anger and frustration, and reunification came about when the principal character behind the split had passed away and his lieutenants lacked the fight to carry on a divisive agenda.

Though the study of a specific conflict, this paper raises implications for other such conflicts, and offers simple suggestions for unity in keeping with the biblical ideal of John 17:20-21.

André Scarlett, MA



André Scarlett holds a BA in Theology from Jamaica Theological Seminary and an MA from the United Theological College of the West Indies. Since 2012 he has served in various roles at JTS, including teaching assistant and lecturer.

Black Identity in Light of Slavery, God's Sovereignty, and Scripture

Transatlantic slavery has impacted human worldviews deeply and lastingly. Amidst many other effects, the history of the slave trade within the Caribbean has influenced the view of Black people concerning God and concerning Black identity, and rightly so.

The author of this work holds that God is sovereign; and as such, there are lessons to be learned about God in all of life's experiences and happenings. That is, because God holds the power to allow or disallow human activity, pleasant and unpleasant, good and evil, it is therefore sound for us to seek understanding about Black people are in view of slavery's occurrence under God's sovereignty.

The intention of this work is to present a useful reflection and functional analysis concerning how Black identity may be understood in the narrative of Caribbean slavery and colonialism in view of God's sovereignty. This work is deemed useful for the micro-identification of one's Black self; also, it is relevant for the influence of Black Caribbean culture. At core, our perspective on who we are, in relation to our Creator, is pivotal in what we aspire and how we pursue aspirations.

The history of Israelite enslavement in Egypt is evidence that prolonged cruelty against a people does not imply that the people are rejected by God. This awareness is doubtlessly critical, as a people's theology unavoidably bears fruit in how the people live. Like all other peoples, the Black people of the Caribbean are the apple of God's eye. This truth must be believed and effectually understood.

Nicholas Smith, MA (cand.)



Nicholas Smith is a licensed pastor with the Missionary Church Association in Jamaica. He has an undergraduate degree in theology from Jamaica Theological Seminary, with a minor in leadership and ministry, and is currently pursuing a Master of Arts (by Research) in Public Theology and Bible, also at JTS. He recently returned from India, where he participated in a program of the Council for World Mission called "Building Life-Affirming Communities: Face to Face with the Many Poor and Many Faiths in Asia."

Pastoral Priorities for Biblical Interpretation in the Caribbean

The pulpit is invariably where biblical interpretation is most impactful and far-reaching. It is where theology meets its most impressionable and largest audience. The pulpit has the power to shape thoughts and lives for good or for ill. It is for this reason that careful consideration must be made for that which is proclaimed from its rostrum, including the emphases of the proclamations.

This paper proposes six pastoral priorities for biblical interpretation in the Caribbean: 1) Biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be contextual before universalistic. 2) Biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be communitarian before individualistic. 3) Biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be populist, not rarefied. 4) Biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be existential before doctrinal. 5) Biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be ecologically sensitive, especially environmentalist. 6) Biblical interpretation in the Caribbean should be activist, not quietist.

By providing concrete illustrations of the requisite sort of preaching described above, it is the hope of the writer that discussion will be spurred to produce sermons and lessons that enrich the lives of ordinary people and inspire them to participate in the ongoing project of Caribbean development and renewal.