

SIR WILLIAM BLACKSTONE (1723-1780) and REVEREND WILLIAM E. BLACKSTONE (1841-1935)

The right of colonists as Christians may be understood by reading and carefully studying the institutes of the great Law Giver and Head of the Christian Church, which are to be found clearly written and promulgated in the New Testament.

“By the act of the British Parliament, commonly called the Toleration Act, every subject in England, except Papists, &c., was restored to, and re-established in, his natural right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. And by the charter of this Province, it is granted, ordained, and established (that is, declared as an original right) that there shall be liberty of conscience allowed in the worship of God to all Christians, except Papists, inhabiting, or which shall inhabit or be resident within, such Providence or Territory. Magna Charta itself is in substance but a constrained declaration or proclamation and promulgation in the name of King, Lords, and Commons, of the sense the latter had their original, inherited, indefeasible natural rights, as also those of free citizens equally perdurable with the other. That great author, that great jurist, and even that court writer, Mr. Justice Blackstone, holds that this recognition was justly ordained of King John, sword in hand. And peradventure it must one day, sword in hand, again rescued and preserved from that destruction and oblivion.”

“All persons born in the British American Colonies are, by the laws of God and nature and by the common law of England, exclusive of all charters from the Crown, well entitled, and by acts of the British Parliament are declared to be entitled to all the natural, essential, inherent and inseparable rights, liberties, and privileges of subjects born in Great Britain or within the realm. Among those rights are the following, which no man, or body of men, consistently with their own rights as men and citizens, or members of society, can for themselves give up or take away from others.”

These statements are followed by this paragraph: “Here is embodied the whole philosophy of human rights, condensed from the doctrines of all time, and

applied to the immediate circumstances of America. Upon this paper was based all that was written or spoken on human liberty in the Congress which declared independence; and the immortal instrument itself is, in many features, but a repetition of the principles here enunciated, and of Joseph Warren's list of grievances, which followed the Rights of the Colonists in the report...."

WILLIAM E. BLACKSTONE (1845-1935) is the other Blackstone, the forgotten founder of Biola Bible College or the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. It was Paul W. Rood, who was Biola's president in the midst of a deep national depression, chose to celebrate Biola's heritage with a special commemoration of Reuben A. Torrey. This commemoration involved the establishment of the annual "Torrey Memorial Bible Conference" and the ceremonial unveiling of a large bronze plaque honoring the services of R. A. Torrey, a giant figure of Biola's founding era. Unfortunately, the plaque included the statement "Biola's first dean.

But who was William Blackstone? It turns out that this "forgotten founder" of Biola has a fascinating story and legacy of fruitful ministry, global adventure and historical impact. William E. Blackstone (1841-1935) was a successful Chicago business who at midlife followed Jesus' advice to the rich young ruler, literally giving it all away – including his savings and luxurious home – to devote himself fully to a life of Bible teaching, global evangelism and writing. W.E.B., (as he referred to himself) belonged to a prayer group of Chicago business men who financially supported the start of Moody Bible Institute in the 1880's. He came to the attention of Biola founder Lyman Stewart following the publication of his widely read prophetic book "Jesus Is Coming" (1878), which sold millions of copies and was translated into more than forty languages. He founded the first mission for Jewish evangelism in America, the Chicago Hebrew Mission, in 1887, and in 1888 he took a nine month trip to the Holy Land that would change the direction of his life and greatly influence the modern history of the Jewish people and the Middle East. While there, he witnessed great throngs of suffering Jews

who had recently been expelled from Russia, and was moved to support humanitarian efforts to resettle Jewish refugees in their ancient homeland.

(see: (<http://magazine.biola.edu/article/13-fall/the-forgotten-founder>)).

W.E.B.'s concern was so great that in 1890 he held a "Conference of Christians and Jews on the Past, Present, and Future of Israel," attended by many of America's most prominent Christian and Jewish religious leaders. The following year he issued: "A Proclamation for a homeland for Persecuted Russian Jews in Palestine", which was signed by over four hundred of America's leading politicians and religious leaders and presented to U.S. President Benjamin Harrison and other heads of state.

Blackstone advocated a brand of Zionism that would carefully work to foster cooperation between Jews and Arabs to benefit all of the inhabitants of the region. He was aware of the potential for conflict and hoped that with good will and compassion, compromise would lead to blessings for all.

Twenty-five years later, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis called Blackstone "the father of Zionism", and asked him to reissue his 1891 petition – known as the "Blackstone Memorial" – to President Wilson because it was, in his view, the best expression of humanitarian compassion toward the persecuted Jewish refugees and their human rights claims for a secure national homeland.

Today, Blackstone's deep compassion for the Jewish people is commemorated in Jerusalem in the "Blackstone Grove" in the Jewish National Forest. The Israel State Archives holds a Hebrew Bible given by Blackstone to Theodore Herzl, the founder of Zionism. In it Blackstone had marked for Herzl reference all the passages concerning the future fulfillment of the spiritual promises and blessings a restored Israel would experience in their own homeland when they recognize their Messiah.

BLACKSTONE'S BIOLA YEARS – after relocating to Los Angeles in 1902, **W.E.B.** began his long partnership with Lyman Stewart. On February 25, 1908,

W.E.B. was among a small group of evangelical leaders in Los Angeles who met together in a prayer meeting for the founding of Biola. W.E.B. served as a trustee officer and dean of the educational program. The practical ministry programs of Biola were already significant, with street evangelism, rescue missions and urban ministries to dockworkers, homeless, factory workers, and the Hispanic and Jewish communities. The educational program was relatively simple Bible instruction, practical Christian worker training and basic Christian doctrine.

W.E.B. gave special attention to the development of a “Jewish Department” and taught a weekly missions course to train “colporteurs” and “witnessing bands” to serve Los Angeles and the wider world as ambassadors of the Gospel message of salvation to doomed humanity.” From late 1909 to early 1914, W.E.B. was stationed as the representative of Biola and the Lyman and Milton Stewart World Evangelization Trust in China, posting generally in the cities Nanking, Kuling, and Shanghia. During those years, W.E.B. traveled widely throughout China, Korea, Burma, India, Persia, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Egypt, Turkey, and Eastern Europe, where he identified and paid many young indigenous Christian leaders to come to Biola for training in gospel work to bring back to their home countries.

W.E.B. also served as Biola’s liaison to the evangelical “faith” missions, helping to establish Biola’s graduates as missionaries and Bible institute teachers in the foreign fields. One of his projects involved the translation and printing of Scripture portions and the distribution by trained “witnessing bands” into every village and home in two inland provinces in China: Hunan and Kiangsi. From this project, under the leadership of veteran missionary Frank Keller, the Hunan Bible Institute was started, a Biola sister institution in interior China.

In 1912, while W.E.B. was stationed overseas, Stewart recruited the prominent evangelist and educator R. A. Torrey to become Biola’s dean, with responsibilities over an expanding program of training that would be incorporated into the magnificent new Bible Institute building that was being constructed. When W.E.B. returned from China in 1914, he continued to serve as an active trustee, helping Biola through many of its early challenges. He also served as a

member of the governing 'Society' that elected the trustees and had sole authority over the bylaws and articles of incorporation.

For the following two decades, W.E.B. served as the trustee of the Stewart Evangelization Trust, determining how assets would best be invested for global Scripture translation and distribution, the establishment of a local Bible training school and support of missionaries primarily to the unreached Asians, Muslims, and Jews. At the time of his death in 1935 W.E.B. was the patriarch of a large multigenerational family of committed Christians, including those serving on the mission fields in China. He is remembered for his devotion to God's people Israel, his longing for Jesus' return and for his deep humility.

Even while his name has not been prominent in Biola's memory we are sure he would not mind, for he deferred all acclaim and frequently closed his letters with the statement, "I am an errand boy for Jesus." It was Paul Rood, a retired corporate executive and lecturer in politics and economics at Biola, is currently writing a comprehensive biography of Lyman Stewart, founder of Biola and the Union Oil Company. Rood's grandfather, Paul W. Rood, served as Biola's third president from 1935 to 1938. In the course of his research, he has presented papers and published articles on other figures who played a prominent role in the founding era of Biola.