

Spiritual Awakening Continues to Shake BIOLA University in California

One-third of the students at the Los Angeles school have responded to a movement of prayer and repentance

A spiritual awakening and campus revival continues to rock The Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA) University, a leading Christian university started 92 years ago to teach Azusa Street converts about the Bible. Some 1,000 students from a student body of 3,000 have repented during ongoing, impromptu chapel services—reminding graduates and faculty of a similar awakening that occurred in the 1970s, the student ministries office reported.

During a regular campus chapel service last September, the speaker ended by telling what God had done at past revivals on college campuses. At that point, a student shouted: “Why can’t God do it here?” He challenged the student body to confess their sins and get right with God—a hallmark of college revivals.

Suddenly, students began to file toward the front of the 2,000-seat gymnasium to confess sin. Men confessed treating women wrongly. Women confessed jealousy and gossip.

Others confessed pride, hatred, immorality and use of pornography as God brought conviction. The confession of sin, repentance and prayer hasn’t stopped since. Subsequent chapel services have followed the same pattern, with students staying after to continue prayer and repentance on a 24-hour basis with noontime prayer meetings.

A similar awakening occurred during the 1977-78 school year. Former students from that era have been praying for years for God to “do it again.”

In 1977, revivalist J. Edwin Orr challenged students to believe God, and many students began praying. As some graduated or left, others took up the mantle of prayer. Today, “Pray for Revival” posters are everywhere.

During the 1977-78 school year one of the students was killed in an accident. That announcement in chapel caused the student chaplain to kneel down at the altar. He was soon joined by the whole student body confessing sins.

The move often was criticized as being simple emotionalism. But many students said their lives were changed forever. Shortly after, opposition by the administration to the student-led move quietly dissipated. The seed had been sown, and the movement to see God “do it again” began.

At a current service, one student said: “We have prayed for this for

such a long time it hardly seems real. God is doing something very special, and we want to go all the way.”

Another said: “I have never witnessed so much pain and tears ever before. Many students expressed shame, guilt and fear for their struggle with sin. I ask—even plead—that you would pray for BIOLA. Pray for a revival that would purge our community of sin and would awaken us to God’s heart for the lost, the poor and the unreached.”

Students could be seen in agony, weeping for sins that would not normally trouble even the most earnest Christian. It was as if the standard had been raised, and what previously would not have bothered one's conscience suddenly became unbearable—so strong was the convicting power of God.

BIOLA was co-founded in 1908 by Lyman Steward, co-founder of the Union Oil Company. It is the only Christian institution that is both a fully accredited university and fully accredited Bible school. Each student is required to take 30 units of Bible classes.

BIOLA was founded at The Church of the Open Door, a famous church in downtown Los Angeles that, until it was taken down some years ago, had a large, well-known “Jesus Saves” neon sign on its facility. BIOLA was founded in 1908 as a series of Bible classes to handle the mass of conversions in the wake of the Azusa Street Revival of 1906.

J. Edwin Orr in his original address had mentioned what he believed to be the process of revival: “Prayer, followed by revival, resulting in mission.” Sharing the view of the great revivalist Charles Finney, who believed, too, that revival was a natural result of sustained prayer and for the cause of mission, Orr challenged the students to believe God that the results would reach the world.

BIOLA students are praying that the move of God will continue and that it will spread to other schools through student teams giving their testimonies. They want to see students being called into full-time Christian service.