

Biola in the American Evangelical Story

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Douglas A. Sweeney's *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* is a masterpiece of concise storytelling. In introducing the movement, Sweeney combines an insider's sympathetic understanding with an objectivity and sense of perspective about what to report. The result is a short, readable book that can serve multiple audiences well. I am particularly interested in using Sweeney's *American Evangelical Story* to help new Biola faculty understand their own institutional heritage more fully. If Biola is going to equip and empower its faculty for the task of integration, one of the resources it should provide is a grasp of the school's identity that is not just superficial.

However, Sweeney's volume scarcely mentions Biola, its development, or the key players in its institutional history. The omission is understandable: In a survey of the entire phenomenon of American evangelicalism starting as far back as the eighteenth-century revivals, Sweeney has to omit many people and places in order to retain the story-like quality of the book and rescue it from devolving into a series of lists. Furthermore, it is only in the last third of the book that Biola could be mentioned at all, since the school officially came into existence only in 1908, and its history is primarily a twentieth-century story. Yet as I consider using *The American Evangelical Story* to introduce new faculty to Biola's institutional history and its place in the longer evangelical story, I find that it will need to be supplemented in some way. What follows is a first draft of that kind of supplemental, local history. It would not work well as a stand-alone history, but my hope is to develop it into a useful tool for faculty development that can

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connect a comprehensive survey like Sweeney's to more local concerns. I am not master of this material yet, and as I struggled to reduce the blocks of material to a single readable narrative, I was even more impressed with Sweeney's deft treatment of a much larger mass of content. I eventually settled for pulling together some notes toward a history of Biola, having benefited from the opportunity to study with a real historian for a few days.

I. The Three Founders of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles

Counting on Sweeney's history to bring the story down to the Moody era of American evangelicalism, the Biola story should pick up with the founding generation, and among the founders, the top three are Lyman Stewart, T. C. Horton, and R. A. Torrey.

Lyman Stewart, President

Lyman Stewart (1840-1923) was the first president of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. Stewart was a Civil War veteran, having served for four years in the Pennsylvania Cavalry. Along with his brother Milton Stewart, he made millions of dollars in the oil industry, and gave generously to a variety of Christian causes. Because of his importance to the early oil industry, Stewart's story has been told in several places, including in Union Oil's institutional history. I pass by his story here, except to note that this "concerned layman" was the prime mover in bringing together the work of the Bible Institute. His will, dated April 14, 1921, bequeathed his estate as follows: "To the Bible Institute of Los Angeles twenty five per cent; To the Bible House of Los Angeles five per cent; To my dearly beloved wife Lula M. thirty three and one third per cent," et cetera. It is interesting that though Biola did not receive the largest percentage of his fortunes, the school was named first in his legal and financial considerations.

T. C. Horton, Superintendent

Thomas Corwin Horton (1848-1932) was the least famous of BIOLA's three great founders, so I recount the facts of his life

more completely here. Horton was born August 3, 1848, in Cincinnati, Ohio. He became a Christian at a young age and had a career in business. At age 27, he entered full-time Christian service, and the offices in which he served show how well prepared he was for the work of the Bible Institute. He worked first as Secretary of the Indianapolis Y.M.C.A., but moved to St. Paul Minnesota in 1883 to direct rescue mission work for the House of Hope Presbyterian Church (later known as the Goodrich Avenue Presbyterian Church). In 1884 Horton began serving as Associate Pastor at Bethany Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, under Dr. A. T. Pierson. Horton worked primarily with young people and evangelistic projects, and also organized what would later become the John Chambers Memorial Church. In 1888 Horton returned to St. Paul as Secretary of the Y.M.C.A., and organized the Northwestern Bible Training School. The Y.M.C.A.'s board of directors was interested in becoming less evangelical and developing a more liberal social program, which led Horton to resign in May 1892. For the next eight years he organized a number of evangelistic and teaching ministries, including the Gospel Tabernacle independent church. In 1900 Horton moved to Dallas, Texas. For three years he served as pastor of the Scofield Congregational Church, and for three years he was Secretary of the Dallas Y. M. C. A.

In 1906, Horton was called to Los Angeles to serve as the Assistant Pastor (under Dr. William J. Chichester) of the Immanuel Presbyterian Church. The influential ruling elder who brought Horton to Los Angeles was Lyman Stewart, who had asked for recommendations from prominent ministers (including Wilbur Chapman). Horton and his wife Anna Horton shared a genius for organizing groups of committed workers. Horton was the guiding spirit of The Fishermen's Club, as Anna was of the Young Women's Lyceum Club and The Bible Women. Horton was superintendent of the Bible Institute, and was listed among the faculty as teaching "Practical Methods of Work, Pastoral Theology" and "Work for Young Men."

It is not tokenism to include among Biola's founders the name of a woman, Anna Horton. Though neither she nor any other woman held the highest offices at the school in the founding generation, Anna was thoroughly involved in the ministry of the Institute. She started the Lyceum Club, and became known as

"Mother Horton" to the girls there. She began the club because she thought that young women needed a "motherly oversight" that could not be supplied by the churches. Anna died in 1921, and the February issue of *The King's Business* records a special service held to honor her memory. Four hundred girls attended this special service and many of them gave testimony to the great influence of Mother Horton in their lives. All of Biola's founders were transplants from the eastern states, and both Stewart and Torrey had their remains buried back east in ancestral plots. The Hortons alone were buried in southern California, in two Forest Lawn plots.

R. A. Torrey Before Biola

R. A. Torrey (1856-1928) was the first academic dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, serving at the school from 1912-1924. Torrey is bigger than Biola. That is, he is one of the figures from our history which has a historical significance greater than that of the school itself (I would rank the publication of *The Fundamentals* as similarly "bigger than Biola"). I tell his story more fully here as an experiment in how major figures ought to be handled in an institutional history.

Torrey was born in Hoboken, New Jersey, on 28 January, 1856. He graduated from Yale University in 1875 and Yale Divinity School in 1878. Both of Torrey's parents died when he was 21 years old. Following graduation, Torrey became a Congregational minister in Garrettsville, Ohio in 1878, marrying Clara Smith there in October, 1879. From 1881 to 1893, the Torreys had five children. After further studies of theology at Leipzig University and Erlangen University in 1882-1883, Torrey joined Dwight L. Moody in his evangelistic work in Chicago in 1889, and became superintendent of the Bible Institute of the Chicago Evangelization Society (now Moody Bible Institute). Five years later, he became pastor of the Chicago Avenue Church (now The Moody Church) in 1894. In 1898, Torrey served as a chaplain with the YMCA at Camp Chicamauga during the Spanish-American War. Later, during World War I, he performed similar service at Camp Bowie (a POW camp in Texas) and Camp Kearny.

During 1902 and 1903, he preached in nearly every part of the English-speaking world, and with song leader Charles Alexander conducted revival services in Great Britain in 1903–1905. During this period, he also visited China, Japan, Australia, and India. Torrey conducted a similar campaign in American and Canadian cities in 1906–1907. Throughout these campaigns, Torrey utilized a meeting style that he borrowed from Moody's campaigns of the 1870s. On June 20, 1907, he was honored with a Doctorate degree from Wheaton College. In 1912, he served as Dean of Bible Institute of Los Angeles (now Biola University) and in 1915, pastor of the Church of the Open Door, Los Angeles. His last evangelistic meeting was in Florida in 1927. Future planned meetings were canceled due to his failing health. He died at home in Asheville, North Carolina on October 26, 1928, having preached the world over and having left a legacy of over forty books. Torrey Auditorium, for decades the main auditorium at Moody Bible Institute, was named in his honor.

Torrey was from a wealthy family, and graduated from a private high school in New York at age 14. He had to wait another year to be eligible for college, and then he enrolled at Yale. His family was Christian, and Torrey's mother wanted him to be a minister, but Torrey planned to become a lawyer. In high school, Torrey contemplated what it would mean to become a professing Christian and a member of the church. As he read the church membership requirements closely, he recognized that to be Christian meant to surrender both will and future plans to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Unwilling to surrender his sovereignty and self-possession, Torrey set aside the question of becoming a member of the Christian church.

Rejecting the claims of Christ apparently took a toll on him. In his junior year at Yale, Torrey, wracked with guilt over his rejection of Christ's rightful claims, actually attempted suicide. Unable to find the razor with which he planned to kill himself, he instead fell to his knees and surrendered to Christ; "I dropped on my knees beside the open drawer and promised God that if He would take the awful burden off my heart I would preach the Gospel."^[1] His doctrinal views continued to be liberal on many fronts: he doubted the full deity of Christ, and rejected eternal punishment and the inerrancy of Scripture for several more years, but what marked his life from that point on was the absolute surrender to Jesus.

Torrey went on to Yale Divinity School in 1878, and was licensed for ministry in the Congregational church. In one of his early pastorates, Torrey met and married Clara Belle Smith. With his wife and their infant daughter Edith, Torrey resigned his pastorate in order to spend a year doing graduate studies in Germany. Torrey chose very conservative German theological schools, Leipzig and Erlangen, at which to study, and worked through subjects such as Old Testament, apologetics and doctrine. When he returned from Germany, he was decided about investing his life in the work of a pastor. In America, Torrey threw himself into his ministry in the new Open Door Church in Minneapolis, and later at The People's Church. For the next several years, Torrey and his family embraced a life of total dependence on God for financial support, following the model of George Muller's "Life of Faith," not making his needs known to anyone but God. During this time, he solidified his views on baptism (believing immersion to be biblical), experienced divine physical healing, and prayed for a number of people who were also healed by God. He became increasingly committed to preaching social reform, especially temperance. Torrey held unusual views regarding what the state of the Church should be:

- That revival was the normal state of church life.
- That every church member should be engaged in personal work for the salvation of those around them.
- That denominational differences should be strictly subordinated to a unified effort of all Christian churches in any given city to glorify God and help the community thrive.

In his pastorates after his return from Germany, Torrey pursued all these goals.

Torrey first encountered Dwight L. Moody during his time at Yale Divinity School, and had recognized this uneducated former shoe salesman as a man who knew what mattered. When Moody asked Torrey to join him, Torrey subordinated his own ministry to the needs of Dwight Moody for as long as Moody needed him. Torrey drafted a curriculum for the Bible Institute and oversaw the massive evangelistic work connected with the World's Fair, while pastoring and chairing a number of non-denominational

organizations. In his work, Torrey devised new ways of training large numbers of laypeople in Bible knowledge and personal evangelism.

Torrey's approach to street evangelism is certainly direct, even confrontational. Torrey had pondered the deep mysteries of Christianity, grappled with the whole Bible, led many people to Christ, and seen the work of God in the lives of numerous church members. Torrey believed that a Christian should engage directly with people he meets, quickly discern their spiritual needs, and bring the ideas and words of Scripture to their attention in a definite way. In his training books on evangelism, Torrey emphasized the need for guidance from the Holy Spirit in discerning the needs of people encountered.

When Dwight Moody died in 1899, many Christian leaders felt that a great age of the church had passed away with him. R. A. Torrey, who had as good a claim to being Moody's second-in-command as anybody, had a different view of the matter. Torrey began preaching that the death of Moody was not a sign that great things were past, but that greater things were coming. Just as the death of Moses was a call for the generation of Joshua to move on to the land of promise, Torrey viewed the death of Moody as a call for the next generation to seek even greater things from God. Along with preaching this message, Torrey began organizing prayer groups to ask God to awaken the church and save the lost.

Soon after Moody's death, Torrey received a call to go preach in Australia. Taking with him song-leader Charles Alexander, Torrey began, at age 45, an evangelistic journey that would take him around the world in the next few years. The Torrey-Alexander revival started in Hawaii and Japan, but when Torrey hit Australia, his preaching began to attract enormous crowds. Australia, New Zealand, India, London, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and other European locations experienced revival. Amazingly, "this Torrey-Alexander juggernaut" was in motion during the years immediately before the Welsh Revival of 1904, the Azusa revival of 1906, and the Pyongyang revival of 1907.

One of the keys to Torrey's success was the way he presented himself as intellectually credible and serious, with a message that spoke directly to the mind of his listeners as well as their hearts. He was well-educated and respectably dressed; one friend noted that

he often wore a tall hat, but always spoke as if he were wearing a tall hat. The typical R. A. Torrey sermon was a list of reasons or arguments, briskly stated and vigorously argued, driving toward one conclusion. One of the best examples is his sermon, “How God has Blockaded the Road to Hell,” reprinted in his *Revival Addresses*. He begins thus:

If any man or woman in this audience is lost, it won't be God's fault. God does not wish you to be lost. God longs to have you saved. ...God has filled the path of sin—the road that leads to hell—with obstacles. He has made it hard and bitter. ... God has filled it full of obstacles, and you cannot go on in it without surmounting one obstacle after another. I am to talk to you tonight about some of the obstacles that God has put in the path of sin and ruin.

The rest of the sermon is a list of ways in which God has blockaded the road to sin and hell:

Number 1. Godly Parents. They are a good influence on you, but you ignore them and seek your own way.

Number 2. Christian influence in your country. It surrounds you on all sides, but you persist in sin.

Number 3. This sermon. It is being spoken in your presence and applied to your conscience. Do not seek to climb over this barricade.

Number 4. The Bible. You know what it says.

After Torrey's sermon, Alexander would lead congregational singing. The typical Alexander hymn was a sentimental Victorian song about heaven, Mother, and the old-time religion. A song that even Alexander was hesitant to use was “Tell Mother I'll Be There.” But once he did sing it, the audience responded so powerfully that he made it a normal part of the repertoire. Here are some key lyrics:

When I was but a little child, how well I recollect
How I would grieve my mother with my folly and neglect;
And now that she has gone to Heav'n I miss her tender care:

O Savior, tell my mother I'll be there!

Tell mother I'll be there, in answer to her prayer;

This message, blessed Savior, to her bear!

Tell mother I'll be there, Heav'n's joys with her to share;

Yes, tell my darling mother I'll be there.

In the context of an R. A. Torrey sermon, an Alexander song facilitated a great many people responding wholeheartedly to the call of the gospel. The sermon-song combination must have been effective, for it called more than hundred thousand souls to Christ. In many cities, Torrey and Alexander displayed a huge banner that said simply "GET RIGHT WITH GOD."

R. A. Torrey at Biola

The revival lasted for ten years. After returning to the United States, Torrey founded a retreat center, conducted a number of American revivals, and took a few more trips abroad to preach. After a few years, Torrey settled down to preach, teach, and write. One thing he had learned from the great revival was that preaching the simple Gospel message was enough and resisted the temptation to recapture the large numbers of his golden days by any means necessary. Instead, he drew this lesson:

The Real Gospel, when preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, produces the same effects in individual lives to-day, and in the transformation of families and communities, that it has produced throughout all the centuries since our Lord Jesus Christ died on the Cross of Calvary and rose again and ascended to the right hand of the Father and poured out His Holy Spirit upon His people. Practical results prove that that Gospel does not even need to be restated, though of course it is desirable to adapt the illustrations and method of argument to the thinking of our own day.

In London, for two continuous months, six afternoons and evenings each week, I saw the great Royal Albert Hall filled and even jammed, and sometimes as many turned away as got in, though it would seat 10,000 people by actual count

and stand 2,000 more in the dome. On the opening night of these meetings a leading reporter of the city of London came to me before the service began and said, "You have taken this building for two consecutive months?" "Yes." "And you expect to fill it every day?" "Yes." "Why," he said, "no one has ever attempted to hold two weeks' consecutive meetings here of any kind. Gladstone himself could not fill it for two weeks. And you really expect to fill it for two months?" I replied, "Come and see." He came and he saw.

George Marsden has rightly called Torrey "one of the principal architects of fundamentalist thought." The term "fundamentalism" has taken on a new meaning over the course of the twentieth century; the nineteenth century origins of those institutions were originally brought forth by the conservative evangelical movement for reaffirming fundamentals of the Christian Faith. Taking a view from the nineteenth century, Torrey was a fundamentalist; in fact he and his associates invented fundamentalism as a response to the creeping liberalism of the mainline denominations in the early twentieth century. They formed the interdenominational anti-modernist coalition that contributed to *The Fundamentals*, a series of twelve small books widely distributed in the second decade of the twentieth century. R. A. Torrey was the final editor of that series, which was financed by oil magnate Lyman Stewart and his brother Milton.

Torrey's belief that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a second act of grace often has him associated with Pentecostalism and its ideas. Torrey denounced certain practices of Pentecostal movements, however, being skeptical of the theatricality of their services, and he was critical of what some called "McPhersonism." However, during most of Torrey's tenure as dean of Biola, the Institute maintained a neutral position towards faith-healing meetings.

Stewart and Horton intended to replicate what Moody Bible Institute was accomplishing in Chicago with a similar school in Los Angeles. Stewart and Horton invited R. A. Torrey to come to BIOLA in 1912, and he answered the call, spending twelve years as the figurehead and a dominant intellectual force on campus. One of the conditions of his hire was that BIOLA would enable him to

start a non-denominational congregation on the Institute's premises, and this came into being as the Church of the Open Door, with Torrey as pastor.

In 1924, Torrey left Biola to devote time to other ministry opportunities in the last four years of his life. He died in 1928 and was buried on the grounds of the Montrose Retreat Center which he founded in Pennsylvania.

II. The Most Important Women of BIOLA's Early Years

Sweeney's history is, in part, thematically organized. He selects a few of the most important topics (missions, race, the holiness and charismatic movements) and investigates them as a way of moving the evangelical story along. A Biola history should do likewise. It would be especially interesting to sketch Biola's history from the point of view of race; I have gathered some notes on this topic and in general they line up with Sweeney's description of "crossing the color line without working to erase it." But in this essay I have selected the role of women as a special topic for investigation. Three topics emerge: founder Anna Horton, the astonishing Bible Women, and Anna Dennis, the first female Bible teacher at the Institute.

The Bible Women

We have already noticed Mother Horton, who belongs among the founders in a unique way. But one of the groups she founded, the Bible Women, deserves special attention. The Bible Women were a group of women who were devoted to full-time work as witnesses for Christ. The Bible Women were a select group that existed within the Young Women's Lyceum Club. They are first mentioned in the *The King's Business* in the very first issue, so we know they were in existence before January 1910. A report from November 1910 begins, "There are as many inquiries concerning the plan, scope and real purpose of this work among women, which has been so wonderfully owned of God, we will endeavor, as concisely as possible, to answer the leading questions at this time." Eight women make up the group, who do their work "under the immediate direction of Mrs. T. C. Horton, who plans all work, but urges each worker to individual responsibility to and liberty in the Lord regarding all details."

Over and over in the early years, reports of their work begin with “The entire work has so many branches it is most difficult to state fully its many ramifications.” But their basic approach seemed to be personal visitation in heavily populated areas. Around 1912, the favored way of reporting on the work of the Bible Women shifted from statistics to anecdotes. Though most such reports in the early issues of *The King’s Business* were unsigned, these stories had consistent narrative patterns and a literary style which developed over the years until finally they become attached to the signature of: Mrs. Anna L. Horton. Mother Horton didn’t write any books or sermons to let us hear her tone of voice, but buried in *The King’s Business* is a series of her stories about the work of the Bible Women. Here, probably in Anna Horton’s own words, is a summary of their strategy:

A district is assigned each woman, its probabilities and possibilities discussed and made a subject of prayer, followed by faithful visitation with the Book in hand. Homes are opened for parlor classes and the members are interested in canvassing their own neighborhoods for the classes.

A series of lessons covering the fundamental truths of Scripture is given in each place and the class then moved on to another interested center, so covering the district. From this work springs numberless personal cases for special dealing until assurance of salvation and joy in the Lord results in lives of many. These classes average 75 or 100 per month, with as many more addresses in churches and before various societies. Hospital work is fruitful service and salvation has been brought by God’s grace to many afflicted and dying.

There are several classes in school and colleges and as it has been impossible to refuse requests from Sunday schools, every Bible Woman is at work each Sunday morning. Endless petitions for help in every variety and from every quarter are responded to as the women find it possible. Through their agency a number of homes have been reconstructed on the true basis and alienations have been changed to harmony and peace; waywardness and rebellion

have given place to submission to God, and sin has been recognized as sin and fought and overcome by the help of the Mighty One.

Conferences and prayer circles are held as seems wise in many localities and the blessing of God follows each effort. There are a number of classes in surrounding small towns where the call for help has been strong and insistent and the field seems to grow larger each year.

From this general work much of a personal nature necessarily follows, which is impossible to report.

The entire corps of Bible Women meeting each Tuesday in the Bible Institute at 4p.m. for report and conference and prayer are bound together in bonds of closest harmony and fullest fellowship, going on to each new week with heart and body strengthened for renewed effort in the blessed work of the salvation of souls and upbuilding of the saints." (*The King's Business* Vol. 1.11, November 1910, pg 187)

Note the range of ministerial activities in which these women were competent and empowered: canvassing, teaching, counseling, and doing "much of a personal nature." A favorite feature of these Bible Women reports is the rehearsing of statistical records of the work done. "A few extracts from the report give some intimation of its scope," notes the first report, and then gives these numbers:

- Homes visited.....6040
- Special interviews.....493
- Accepted Christ.....90
- Reclaimed.....60
- Bible classes.....568
- Other meetings conducted.....358
- Visits were made to many of the "shut ins" and to the hospitals. Hundreds of Gospels and tracts were distributed. (*The King's Business* Vol. 1.1, January 1910, pg 4.)

Given these numbers, the Bible Women obviously kept up an aggressive campaign of evangelism and instruction.

Another month's summary gives some qualifications of the Bible Women:

The Bible women did a great work last year. We have found this house-to-house visitation, with the heart-to-heart talks, one of the most fruitful missions of the Institute. The workers are all competent, strong teachers, and all capable of meeting the difficulties resultant upon the changed conditions of our city life. The many fads and fancies connected with the latter-day religions, necessitate intelligent and wise dealing upon the part of those who seek to rescue the misguided women who fall so easily a prey to the snares of the enemy. Many homes have been made bright and beautiful, and telling testimonies come from many sources concerning the work of these consecrated women. (*The King's Business* Vol. 1.1, January 1910, pg 4)

“House to house” and “heart to heart” may sum up their methods well, but the sheer vigor and scope of Bible Women work is something with few parallels in modern evangelicalism.

What kind of theology of ministry lay behind this program? A glimpse of the key underlying commitments is in a *The King's Business* article from 1910, by A. T. Pierson. Pierson spelled out the “Essential Elements in the Layman's Message.” “First of all,” Pierson says, “the distinction between ‘clergy and laity’ is an invention of the devil. There is no foundation for it in the New Testament, and the erection of an artificial and arbitrary barrier between disciples in the matter of testimony to the gospel and personal work for souls, was one of the most magnificent triumphs of Satanic subtlety and strategy known in history.” (*The King's Business* Vol 1.9, September 1910, pg 134.)

Pierson is not primarily thinking about the ministry of women here. He has a more comprehensive goal in mind: to restore the ministry of the laity to its central place, and “to lead the church back to the place where every disciple went forth to witness for Christ because he was a disciple.” But as his article develops, he keeps finding female examples: “I feel, as Hudson Taylor used to say, that I would rather be in the succession of the Samaritan woman who, while the disciples went to the city to buy food, in her

zeal for souls forgot her waterpot.” “And,” says Pierson, “I do not read that she was ever ordained by a Presbytery or association conference. She reminds me of Miss Field in Burmah, who went out and told the Gospel story to those who had never heard it. They asked her, ‘Have you ever been ordained to preach the gospel?’ ‘No,’ she answered, ‘but I was foreordained to preach the gospel.’”

Under a picture that names each of them (Miss Higgins, Mrs. Petty, Mrs. Covey, Mrs. Neth, Mrs. Lowe, Mrs. Horton, Miss Wood), *The King’s Business* describes their character:

They are Bible Women because no other title would be indicative of their mission or work. The Bible is in their opinion the only text and proof Book with which they could meet the errors of the times or the enemy of souls. The work is necessarily one of constant self-negation, close study, ceaseless prayer and endless tact as well as a work of joy “in the Lord.” The borders of the work cannot be found or the reach of it determined for in its ramifications and never ending groups of agencies it is ever changing like a kaleidoscope and the newly formed conditions and calls for quick change of plan or method can only be met by the power of the faithful God and leading of the Holy Spirit. Every variety of spiritual need, every form of false doctrine, every degree of Bible ignorance, every phase of heart hunger and soul need, continually face these devoted Bible Women for solution, counsel, loving consideration, and sympathy. ...Every woman of the band is a trained, tried, and proven Christian Bible worker, none other could at all be used, and great care by the Superintendent of this work is necessary to conserve both time and means. ...

When R. A. Torrey came off his massive world tour, he began investing his work in Bible Institutes precisely so he could train laypeople to do Christian work themselves. He knew that the future did not lie with the big crowds of city-wide revivals flocking to hear his famous voice. Instead, the future was with well-trained, competent people who knew how to teach the Bible, lead neighbors to faith in Christ, refute heresies right where they hatch, and apply Biblical wisdom to everyday life. Torrey traded in his high-profile ministry so he could equip the saints, building up the Bible Women to do the work of ministry. Under Mrs. Anna

Horton, and later under Mrs. Lula Stewart and other leaders, the Bible Women did that work.

The First Female Bible Teacher at Biola, Anna Dennis

Anna L. Dennis (d. 1962) taught Bible at BIOLA on and off for the twenty years between 1917 and 1937. When she left Biola in 1937, she was part of the start-up faculty at what would become Westmont College, where she taught until 1945. Though Dennis' Westmont career is fairly well documented, information about her time at Biola is more scarce. She was a graduate of UCLA and a teacher in the Los Angeles school system. After becoming a Christian through an evangelistic Bible study, Mrs. Dennis took classes at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. She apparently began to serve at the Institute in several capacities. She was enlisted as one of the Bible Women. A December 1931 (p. 553) notice in *The King's Business* written by Cutler Whitwell says that she "was closely connected with the work of the Institute as a Bible woman and as a member of the Institute faculty for six years in the palmy days of Dr. Torrey." In 1920 she was scheduled for doing the hospital visitation work characteristic of the Bible. She must have been absent from the faculty for at least a half dozen years before returning "to the teaching staff" in 1931.

The Westmont alum magazine's biography describes Dennis as a local talent discovered by Biola's internationally famous dean, R. A. Torrey:

When she began teaching in local Sunday schools, she displayed such skill as a storyteller she was asked to speak at Sunday school conventions. R.A. Torrey, dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, heard Dennis at one of these events and recruited her to teach at the institute as the only woman on the faculty. She spent 20 years there.

A 1944 Westmont Horizon story quotes Torrey as writing to Dennis with these words of commendation: "I cannot but feel that I have not fully appreciated the work you are doing. I knew that it was good, but I did not realize that it was so superlatively excellent." What was this "superlatively excellent" Bible teaching that Mrs. Anna Dennis brought to her employment at B.I.O.L.A.?

There are testimonials about her teaching from two men who went on to spend their lives in Christian ministry. The first is Jim Halbert, a Biola alum who was a career missionary to Africa. He and his wife Viola recently self-published the story of their life and ministry together as *Ivory In Our Hearts: The Special Work of God in Our Lives* (Lulu.com, 2006). Jim started classes at BIOLA in 1940, after Mrs. Dennis had moved on to Westmont. But during his time at BIOLA, he also studied the Bible with Mrs. Dennis on weekends:

In September 1940 I enrolled at BIOLA.... Mrs. Anna Dennis taught the “Mother’s Class” at the Church of the Open Door, and my mother attended this class. In previous years Mrs. Dennis had taught at BIOLA, including one year at BIOLA’s Hunan Bible Institute in China. Her teaching had a profound impact on Mother’s spiritual life. Due to the crippling effects of an automobile accident, Mrs. Dennis could no longer keep up with the housework, so she hired Mother to come on Saturday mornings to clean her house.

I had come to know Mrs. Dennis during my high school years. Upon learning that I had become a student at BIOLA, she invited me to study the Bible with her while Mother cleaned her house. This I did for several years. Her whole life revolved around the study of the Word of God. Her countenance literally radiated the glory of our Lord. I learned more from her about the Bible and walking with God than from all the other teachers I ever had. She found the greatest delight in teaching the Word of God to young men who looked forward to the ministry. I feel greatly privileged to have had the opportunity of studying under such a woman of God. Our second child, Denise, was named after her (p. 11).

Jim Halbert places Anna Dennis as teaching the Mother’s Class at the Church of the Open Door in 1940. Indeed, according to the church’s historical memoir, *70 Years on Hope Street* (p. 25), she taught that class from 1926 to 1960! Reliability, longevity, or stubbornness might have run in her family: Her sister, Jessie Tritt, taught the Auditorium Bible Class from 1917 to 1962.

But for a testimonial about Anna Dennis’ teaching that reaches all the way back to the early years at BIOLA, we turn to the student

days of Charles Fuller, who would go on to be founder of the Old Fashioned Revival Hour, chairman of BIOLA's board for a time in the late twenties, and founder of Fuller Seminary. Charles Fuller's son wrote his father's biography, *Give the Winds a Mighty Voice*, and in chapter 3 he tells us that "From the vantage point of later years, Charles Fuller felt that the teachers who influenced him the most at Biola were Reuben Torrey, William Evans, and Mrs. Anna Dennis." Dennis finds herself in stellar company here –people would travel great distances to study with famous teachers like Torrey and Evans. Fuller provides more detail about what Dennis taught: "Mrs. Anna Dennis showed him how to give concrete illustrations of the truths of God's Word from the Bible itself. She taught him to understand how incidents in the history of Israel and details regarding the construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness were types of Christ and His work of redemption." And this worked its way out in Fuller's later ministry:

The earliest sermon of Charles Fuller that still exists is the one he gave as speaker for the graduating class of 1921. His topic was the pillar of cloud which guided the children of Israel in the wilderness. He pointed out how insubstantial a cloud appeared to be, and yet it was through this cloud that Israel enjoyed the presence of God, the power of God, and the protection of God. That such an apparently insubstantial thing as a cloud could give Israel such marvelous blessings was emblematic of Christ, who though he appeared so pitifully weak as to suffer and die on the cross, is nevertheless the One who enables us to enjoy God's presence, power, and protection. Many were the times that Charles Fuller preached on the wilderness wanderings of Israel during the next half century, using concrete details from the Old Testament to set forth Christ's person and work, and it was from the teaching of Mrs. Anna Dennis that he learned to do this.

Dennis seemed to specialize in this typological presentation of Old Testament themes, especially things like the tabernacle, the temple, and the feasts. This was a popular topic for evangelicals back then (see how many authors had bestsellers with the stock

title “Christ in the Tabernacle”), and it would be interesting to know how Anna Dennis developed the theme.

One sample of her teaching that we have is her work with children. In 1918, *The King's Business* began publishing its Sunday School support literature in a new way adapted for all ages, and announced that Anna L. Dennis had agreed to provide the lessons for “beginners and primary” ages. If you’ve taught young children, you can tell the difference between stuff that will work and stuff that won’t. Dennis’ little Bible lessons for the young are good.

Toward the end of her BIOLA career, Mrs. Dennis went to teach in China. The April 1936 issue of *The King's Business* (not yet available online) described the beginning of her work there in this way:

After a journey of nearly a month by freighter, and delivered from a terrific storm en route, Mrs. Anna L. Dennis and Alma Bertschin reached, on February 13, the Bible Seminary for Women, 500 Recreation Road, Kiangwan, Shanghai, China. Mrs. Dennis is having a leave of absence from her work on the faculty of Biola in order to give a year’s volunteer service at the seminary, and Miss Bertschin has gone to assist with secretarial work. ... “As thou goest, step by step, I will open up the way...” was the translation of Proverbs 4:12 that the Lord made very precious to Mrs. Dennis as she sought guidance concerning the call to China. Arriving at the seminary, she found that her new friends had chosen a Chinese name for her, Teng (pronounced “Dunn”), as being the character sounding most like her name. The written character for this name has two parts, “to ascend step by step,” and, “a city.”

As Mrs. Dennis and Miss Bertschin entered the school compound, they were welcomed by two long lines of young women who were singing “He Leadeth Me.” At the meeting in the chapel, Mary Chen, ‘25, who was one of Mrs. Dennis’ students at Biola, gave a loving speech of welcome on behalf of the faculty. Joyful letters from members of the staff speak of the blessing that God has granted already through Mrs. Dennis’ deep interest in the school and in the individuals there. She is teaching a course in Romans to the members of the Junior class, and the subject for the Seniors is “Selected

Pauline Epistles.” The classes have been put at hours when all the Chinese teachers can attend one or two sessions in the morning, and all can attend the general class two afternoons each week.

The portrait that emerges of Mrs. Anna L. Dennis and her BIOLA ministry is of an insightful teacher with quite a bit of charisma. She was apparently capable of teaching the very young, holding an audience with storytelling, and teaching at the congregational level, but also relished the opportunity to help in the preparation of pastors. As the testimonials from her BIOLA students show, she was able to capture the imagination of serious Bible students and open up the meaning of the Old Testament for them. She graduated from college back when few women did so, and poured her considerable energies and talent into a teaching ministry. Why is she not more well known? I can think of several reasons: her work was apparently focused on personal interaction in a classroom setting, rather than on writing. She multiplied her ministry by teaching others how to interpret the Bible and tell stories the way she did, but she didn’t extend her reach further by publishing. In later life, especially after returning from China, health concerns (auto accident, etc.) kept her confined to a local ministry. She may have been overshadowed by celebrity teachers like R.A. Torrey during her time at BIOLA.

A note on writing Biola history: This report on Anna Dennis is an example of recovering a lost biography. Much of Biola’s history has been poorly preserved, and a comprehensive institutional history would include quite a few of these recovered biographies; most of the leading faculty in most departments have faded into a mere list of names, and few departments can recite even the list of who went before them. I am less sure that recovered biographies belong in the sort of short, supplementary history I am planning here.

III. Partners and Affiliated Ministries

One efficient way to locate Biola in evangelical history is to expose the network of institutions that have been connected with Biola in various ways. These range from wholly-owned subsidiaries like the Hunan Bible Institute, to the “sister school” called the

Arizona Bible Institute, to independent institutions which have had considerable cross-pollination with Biola.

Hunan Bible Institute was a part of Biola's missionary work in China. Frank A. Keller had been serving with the China Inland Mission as a medical missionary since 1897. He pioneered in riverboat evangelism. Lyman Stewart and Milton Stewart supported his work financially and Keller became the first superintendent of Hunan Bible Institute in Changsha. Charles Roberts was the second superintendent, and William Ebeling was the third. During the communist revolution, the property of the Hunan Bible Institute was seized by the Chinese government, which later made reparation payments to Biola.

The Union Rescue Mission is a homeless shelter in downtown Los Angeles with many Biola connections. The first organizational meeting was on December 4, 1891 (the name at that time was Pacific Gospel Union). In 1891, the population of Los Angeles was only about 55,000, but was growing rapidly. The first director of Union Rescue Mission was Major George A. Hilton (1836-1908), a civil war veteran and a popular Presbyterian evangelist. The first board of directors included Samuel Ingham Merrill (1856-1932), a prominent Baptist businessman who was also one of Biola's first directors and a signer of Biola's original 1908 articles of incorporation. Another member of Union Rescue Mission's first board of directors was Lyman Stewart.

The downtown mission had its own Bible institute beginning in January 1892 and employed a Bible woman, Clara Carver, who did home visitation. The 1906 board of directors includes several names that overlap with Biola's history: Giles Kellogg, H. A. Getz (Vice President), Frank F. Pratt (Secretary), W. E. McVay (Treasurer), J. M. Irvine, and Leon V. Shaw (State President of Christian Endeavor). In January 1906, Lyman Stewart paid a salary for T. C. Horton to be assistant pastor in charge of Bible teaching at the rescue mission. After Horton moved his ministry to the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, his Fisherman Club continued to meet one evening per week in the mission. In 1931, Union and Biola considered merging, but decided that their goals and needs were too different. By 1937 the mission had launched its own Bible training school featuring free board, lodging, clothes, and books. Thirty-four students enrolled under Biola graduate Rev. Joseph W. Johnstone. The work was short-lived. Over the years, Union

Rescue Mission has continued to be distinctively evangelical, but its Bible teaching has been more integrated into its overall discipleship program. Meanwhile, Biola has moved from downtown Los Angeles and has increasingly shifted its focus to higher education. But the two organizations have a century of teamwork with each other.

A helpful history of Biola would also need to describe how the school is related to other Christian schools in southern California: Westmont, Fuller, and Masters can all trace their origins in various ways back to Biola stock. Finally, a crucial part of the story that should at least be indicated is how Biola has kept close ties with hundreds of churches in the region, and how the school has negotiated various denominational issues throughout the turbulent twentieth century.

These notes toward a history of Biola are exploratory surveys of possible ways of telling the story, ways that I hope will be helpful toward the task of equipping Biola's faculty to undertake integration in their own fields. These experiments need to be combined with a more straightforward institutional history that lists the presidents and traces the major transitions from Bible Institute to College to University.

Sources for Biola History

No definitive scholarly history of Biola has been written. Here are the most important sources for constructing Biola's history.

Primary Sources

The King's Business: Biola's magazine published from 1910 to 1970. Available on microfilm in the library, in printed form in the library archives, and (1910-1920) online at <http://www2.biola.edu/kingsbusiness/>

Biola Alumni Annual: The school's annual yearbook for alumni, published from about 1916 to 1926. It was replaced by *The Biolan*. Library Archives.

The Biolan: The school's yearbook, published from 1927 on. The 1927 issue features an especially robust alumni report, to make up for 19 years without a real yearbook. Library Archives; some copies in library stacks.

The Chimes: The school's newspaper. I do not know what year it began being published. Library Archives.

Minutes from Board of Directors Meetings: Maintained since 1908. These are stored in the office of the President.

Lyman Stewart Papers: Probably the most important primary text held exclusively by the Library Archives. Mainly consists of letters, the correspondence of Lyman Stewart.

Biola Magazine, formerly *Connections*. An award-winning alumni publication. I do not know when it began publication. Library Archives.

Inside Story, Biola University Employee Newsletter. I do not know when it began to be published or if it is archived.

Historical Accounts

The Henry Manuscript. An unpublished typescript history of Biola written by history professor James O. Henry in the 1980s and deposited in the Biola library archives. Never published. It exists in two or three different recensions, from a sometimes rambling longer one (about 400 pages) to a shorter version (typed by English professor Inez McGahey).

"Black Oil and Souls to Win," by James O. Henry. A 16-page article by Henry published in *The King's Business* in February 1958.

Chartered for His Glory: Biola University 1908-1983, Robert Williams and Marilyn Miller. Published by the Associated Students of Biola in 1983. Includes a list of sources at p. 110.

90 Years of Following In His Steps: Biola University 1908-1998. Published by Biola's Marketing Communications Department, edited by Christy Gustaitis-Ritner. Includes bibliography and index.

Rooted for One Hundred Years, published 2008 for the Centennial celebration. Featuring many photographs, this book is kind of a yearbook for the whole century. About 35,000 words of text?

"Development and Transformation within Protestant Fundamentalism: Bible Institutes and Colleges in the U.S., 1925-1991," by Richard Flory. Unpublished dissertation, University of Chicago, June 2003. This dissertation includes case studies of Wheaton College, Moody Bible Institute, Biola University, and Bob Jones University. The Biola section is pages 191-277.