Partners in Scandal:  
Wesleyan and Pentecostal Scholarship  
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I have in my possession a treasured family picture taken around 1910 of my great-grandparents, John and Sarah McNeely, their children and grandchildren. The eleven sons and daughters and their spouses and children have on their Sunday best, high collar shirts, starched dresses, shined shoes, large hair bows for the girls and knickers for the boys. The picture would be “perfect” except for the presence of one person, my great uncle Harvey. As the story goes, he arrived from hunting just as the picture was being snapped and “had to be included.” On the left side of the picture stands “Harv,” leaning on his gun, wearing over-alls, with dead rabbits hanging from a leather belt strapped around his waist. His wife, great aunt Agnes, stands just behind him, her lips pressed into a resolute grimace. The story of this picture always included an explanation that uncle Harv was somewhat different. Somehow the shame associated with this day has survived generations. The photo has been copied by numerous cousins of my generation. Even today we feel obligated to explain Harv’s unusual attire.

Every family system has its embarrassments, those relatives to whom you “forget” to send wedding and graduation invitations. Yet, these relatives have the uncanny knack of showing up just when you are trying hard to impress others with your refined identity. They have ways of reminding you of your roots when you would rather have them remain hidden. Those of us from the Holiness and Pentecostal traditions have the dubious distinction of being the “embarrassing relatives” in the “Evangelical clan.” For better or worse, we share a marginal or fringe identity with those who position themselves as centrist. In the 1990s two books have been published which are good examples of this perspective. They are Richard Kyle’s *The Religious Fringe: A History of Alternative Religions in America* and Mark Noll’s *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.1

Kyle places the Holiness Movement and Pentecostalism in the category of “Christian related bodies.” He sees the two traditions as examples of “fringe religions” which arose during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Kyle, the Holiness

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Movement spawned a “bewildering profusion of sectarian organizations” and other offshoots such as Pentecostalism. While the Holiness Movement itself could not be labeled cultic, it proved to be the fertile soil for many cultic groups. Regarding Pentecostalism, Kyle follows the standard social deprivation-dislocation thesis, noting that the movement made its strongest appeal to those who had difficulty coping with the massive changes brought on by modernity. The shift into the modern urban-industrial capitalistic society was especially difficult for individuals in the lower echelons of society. Kyle asserts: “These people were disappointed; their worldly hopes had repeatedly been frustrated. Pentecostal meetings which were charged with emotion provided a real sense of relief from oppressive, frustrating and even bewildering circumstances.” The bizarre practices found in Pentecostalism, such as speaking in tongues, the holy laugh, the holy dance, and on occasions snake handling, marked the movement as fringe to the mainstream of Christianity.

Most of us are more familiar with Mark Noll’s book, which laments the state of Evangelical scholarship. It is Noll’s belief that the sorry condition of the Evangelical “mind” is largely the fault of those in the Holiness, Pentecostal, and Fundamentalist traditions. For Noll, the “scandal of the evangelical mind seems to be that no mind arises from evangelicalism.” The anti-intellectualism of revivalism coupled with Scottish common sense philosophy has undermined any earlier attempt made by Evangelicals to think Christianly about science, art, culture and history.

The dominant narrative which guides Noll’s criticism is that of post-Enlightenment scientific reasoning as mediated in and through the universities. Quoting a section from orthodox scholar Charles Malik’s address at the dedication of the Billy Graham center, the ringing challenge of the book is the following:

Who among the evangelicals can stand up to the great secular or naturalistic or atheistic scholars on their own terms of scholarship and research? Who among the evangelical scholars is quoted as a normative source by the greatest secular authorities on history or philosophy or psychology or sociology or politics? Does your mode of thinking have the slightest chance of becoming the dominant mode of thinking in the great universities of Europe or America which stamp your entire civilization with their own spirit and ideas? . . . Even if you start now on a crash program in this and other domains, it will be a century at least before you catch up with the Harvards and Tubingens and the Sorbonnes.

Noll confesses that Evangelicals were taken to the wood shed by Malik. So, standing out in the wood-shed is a wounded and shamed Noll. Having already internalized the narrative described by Malik, his humiliation is deep. Looking around for someone to blame for the