

**Kinship and Pilgrimage:  
Rituals of Reunion In American Protestant Culture**

Gwen Kennedy Neville  
**Southwestern University**  
Georgetown, Texas

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The title of this essay comes from that of a book in which I explore a complicated set of summertime assemblies in the Southern United States, assemblies of kinfolk and Protestant co-believers I have come to label “kin-religious gatherings.” The gatherings include family reunions, church homecomings, cemetery association days or “decoration days,” camp meetings, and denominational summer communities. All these gatherings have in common certain key elements. They are held outdoors, in summer, at country churches and cemeteries, camp meeting grounds, or home places in the country. The participants are members of extended kin groups that count descent from early pioneer ancestors, who are often Scots or Ulster Scot in origin. The gatherings also share a set pattern and order—kin groups assemble, share stories, perhaps hear devotionals or preaching, say prayers, and invariably, they join together in a common meal of traditional foods prepared by the mothers. I have focused on these gatherings over the years as a way of exploring and seeking to understand some of the processes and performances of ritual, the way ritual dramatizes meanings of the past and creates new meanings for new situations.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the same years of attending and interpreting reunions in the American South, I have also been visiting and writing about gatherings in Scotland, in an attempt to place these American kin-religious gatherings on a larger stage of history. In Scotland I discovered some of the gatherings that are related structurally and historically to the Southern reunions—the open-air meetings of the Covenanters, the Communion Season of the following centuries, and the Conventicles of today in the Scottish Borders and Scottish Southwest. In Scotland I also found clan gatherings in the Highlands, which are related only tangentially to the Southern reunions, and town festivals in the Borders, one of which I explored extensively in the book *The Mother Town*.<sup>2</sup> In this paper I will focus on the American South and its round of ritual reunions, with the Scottish material as background. First, I would like to look at some of the questions and underlying assumptions in my efforts at interpretation. Then I will explore three key features in the symbolic configuration of the Southern gatherings — the family as a cognatic descent group, the ritual form as folk liturgy, and the process itself as a form of Protestant pilgrimage. Finally, I will attempt to summarize some of the overall meanings and suggested meanings that continue to have holding power for anthropological understanding

## I.

The twin themes of kinship and of pilgrimage are deeply woven into the fabric of American and European Protestant culture, presenting seemingly contradictory cultural imperatives. The imperative coded in “kinship” is that of living life in a family, a community, a network of related interconnected persons as found in a local setting or in a local Protestant congregation. The second, that of “pilgrimage,” is the imperative to leave this cozy home place to “seek one’s fortune” in the world. The image of the lonely pilgrim is the person on an outward journey of life going “across the fields,” a solitary individual in search of self-fulfillment and self-actualization. Both images are Protestant notions key to the life of what Presbyterians and Baptists refer to as “the Elect” and what Methodists know as “growing in grace.” Beyond the religious doctrinal prescriptions, these contrastive ideals and images are found throughout modern European and

American literature, philosophy, and social thought. The human being is seen as caught in a dilemma between loyalty to one's family of origin and community of traditions and loyalty to one's self, the impulse to individuality.

In the complex set of returns for reunion and homecoming, these conflicting requirements can be temporarily resolved. The lonely wandering pilgrim on life's journey is able to go home again for a brief while, a time in which the loyalty and belongingness can be recreated and invented for one day or one week each year or, in the case of the summer community, can be recreated over and over again in each recurring summer. This pilgrimage in the Protestant world is a reversal of the traditional Roman Catholic one associated with the Medieval Church, in which individuals break out of tight-knit families and villages to travel outward on a journey to saint's shrines or to the site of miracles as a means of insuring their salvation. The Protestant pilgrimage presents a reversal of Catholic liturgy and theology in the same vein as other symbolic reversals within the gatherings, resulting in a kind of counter-Catholic world of ritual and everyday life, a Protestant commentary on Protestant experience that is an inversion and a recanting of the Catholic liturgies and life, an expression of one cultural world that is symbolically an inversion of another.

These assertions are multifaceted, as are the processes and performances to which they refer. Social theorists in the Western world through the generations have puzzled over the problem of the relationship of the individual to the group, family, or locality; the construction of individuality itself; the seeming loneliness and dis-affection of isolated individuals; and the disappearance of, the forming of, or the rediscovery of an idea called "the community." Durkheim puzzled over the migration of villagers to the cities of France in the wake of industrialism and commercialism and over the resulting psychosocial condition he called "anomie." Weber spoke of the inherent difficulty in following the dictates of the Protestant ethic of achievement and virtue in expression of one's calling, a set of difficulties he called the paradox of the Protestant life.<sup>3</sup>

(Weber, by the way, visited North Carolina in 1904, as a guest of his cousin, during which time he witnessed a baptism by immersion in the river one cold day. Jim Peacock says it is a pity Weber did not stay longer in North Carolina and do more ethnographic work so that more of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, written in 1905, would be based on ethnographic observations and less on the written texts of Puritan New England. I have wished that Durkheim, too, had visited the American South.)<sup>4</sup>

Victor Turner suggested that ritual be viewed as a kind of symbolic anti-structural world, where meanings within the structures of society might be clarified and continued. And, Geertz saw ritual as a text, an expression of cultural motifs that often express contradictions in culture that cannot ever be resolved through daily life.<sup>5</sup>

My own first encounter with these contradictions and their ritual expression came in the early 1970s when I studied the Presbyterian summer community of Montreat, North Carolina. Here was an intentional creation of a "city of God" in the mountains, started at the turn of the 20th century as an ideal Christian community-- a summer enclave for Presbyterian families from Charlotte, Raleigh, and other industrializing cities of the Carolina Piedmont. Through the years cottages were constructed by individual families and a conference center was begun that elaborated on the camp meeting tradition of the

South and the Chatauqua tradition of the Mid-Atlantic States. By 1970 there were 400 hundred houses and a conference center in a mountain cove with one road in, and a gatekeeper who checked to be sure the entrants belonged inside. Here was an assembly of families who lived throughout the year in nuclear households scattered over the American South, who came together in summer to form large extended kin groups, to celebrate their heritage, their descent from a common ancestor, their historical ties to Scotland, and their shared Presbyterian cultural world.

One thing I noticed immediately about the family and community of Montreat was that it expressed tangibly one aspect of an intangible, imagined vast family in a vast imagined community of the family of God. To understand “the Southern family,” I reasoned, one must take stock of the family activities through the whole year, construct an entire annual cycle of gatherings and dispersals, of ritual time and ordinary time, of structure and anti-structure. And, to understand “religion” in the South, one must take stock of the complex set of reunions that tap kin and religious themes.

I started from the basic premises I had learned from my mentors Solon Kimball and Conrad Arensberg, whose work pioneered the study of European and American communities from an ethnological perspective. They had worked with Lloyd Warner at Harvard on the “Yankee City” series and its daughter studies “The Living and the Dead” and “The Family of God.” Kimball taught me the importance of ritual in encoding culture. At Columbia in the early 1960s he had been a sponsor of the translation from French of Van Gennep's *Les Rites des Passage*, and at Florida in 1969 he was one of the earliest to recognize and praise Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process*.<sup>6</sup> Arensberg, meanwhile, taught me to look for the way that rituals of gathering and dispersal frame the interlocking life cycles of human biograms into the culturally patterned social forms of transgenerational communities. For Arensberg, “the community” was never simply a geographical location or a collection of residents or an idea of similarity or belonging. The “community” for him was a biosocial unit of three generations and two sexes over time in a structured social field, with an annual rhythm of gatherings and dispersals. Through the structured sequences of time, space, persons, groups, and necessary functions, human communities encode cultural realities, create new realities, and pass them on to their children. They have a history. Ritual is a key process in this expressing and transmitting of culture. In studying a scattered and gathered community, I found ritual to be the central feature in cultural construction and transmission. In ritual, the assembled members of an otherwise dispersed group could enact their meanings, could incorporate imaginatively even those who attended infrequently or never, could in fact continue the selected core features of an earlier, perhaps idealized, culture in face of fragmentation or destruction by the modern world.

As time went on, and my study expanded outward from Montreat to include a wide range of gatherings, I began to see that the gathering types fit together as a set of nested bowls fits together—family reunion honoring one descent group and its ancestor, church homecoming honoring a set of founding ancestors, cemetery decoration day honoring a network of related ancestors and their descendants, and camp meeting including a connected set of descent groups for a week-long religious revival-type meeting. Montreat is the most complex gathering type—a summer-long residential community where large numbers of families from across the Southern region are represented.

And, as time went on, I expanded my explanatory models. From Victor and Edith Turner I gained an understanding of the pilgrimage process and came up with the insight that the complex of reunions comprised, in fact, a pilgrimage process within Protestant experience that is the reversal of the Catholic one they had documented for Europe and Mexico. I came to understand ritual as a literary event, as a commentary on society, as a performance or drama, as protest, as a structure of action, and as an embodiment of symbolic messages. I found comparisons to theater, to opera, and to performance. I found ritual to be an art form that is more than art—it is, in fact, a kind of memory chip of culture.<sup>7</sup>

In reviewing my long-term study of kinship and pilgrimage, I find that the foundations of my ritual analysis lie in the assumptions that human beings are interconnected in cultural systems expressed in social form. (Arensberg called these units “communities,” but this term has been so often used for other references it has become troublesome to use.) These units are real sets of interconnected lives over many generations-- people being born and dying and in the meantime moving about on the real landscape in culturally prescribed ways. In my analysis I ask repeatedly, “What are people doing—in what order, sequence, setting, with what ritual paraphernalia?” I also ask the question of “Who are the participants, in terms of age, gender, race, social class, and how are they arranged for this event in relation to their lives in the “outside world?” A third question is “What is the structure of the ritual itself and what are its symbolic components in terms of time, sequence, narrative, symbolic objects, and other creators of meanings?” And, finally, I ask, “How does this ritual expression relate to larger, longer cultural patterns and processes of history, polity, and economy?” All of these threads are woven into the three aspects of kin-religious gatherings I have chosen for a closer focus today: the kin group, the folk liturgy, and the pilgrimage.

## II.

The aforementioned terms have been useful as tools in my attempts to excavate the meanings of the observed events, to understand how the cultural memory is in fact constructed and how it communicates its message. Two of these terms are of my own invention—“kin-religious gatherings,” and “folk liturgies.” The third term, pilgrimage, seizes a label from a well-known and often studied practice of “a journey to a sacred place.” I turn now to these three crucial concepts in the study of Southern gatherings: first, family seen as a descent group; second, the liturgy of the outdoors and its symbols; and third, the idea of pilgrimage in Protestant and Catholic worlds.

### **Kin-religious Gatherings**

All of the gatherings I have described serve in various ways to construct an image of the family that is lineal and extended. Narratives connect this family with the foundation of churches, the taming of the wilderness, the bringing of religion to the frontier in camp meetings and revivals, and then later the playing of roles in the emerging industrial New South as prominent citizens. The family as an ideal is extended and historical. It is a sacred entity merged with the church and the cemetery through the reverence for founders and ancestors.

The family reunion is held on one day a year as an assembly of all the descendants of one common ancestor. Most often this is the ancestor who first entered the locality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and started a farm. The recitation of the apical ancestor's life will include his point of origin, his marriage, his children's names and what happened to each child. The largest reunions assemble four or more generations. Smaller ones represent segments of a larger lineal group. In Texas the reunion will honor an ancestor who came to Texas from Tennessee; in Tennessee the reunion will honor an ancestor who came from North Carolina; and in North Carolina, the reunion will honor the ancestor who came from Pennsylvania, Virginia, or from Scotland. This set of interlocking narratives reflects the actual migrations of the Scots and Ulster Scots into the colonies through Philadelphia into the Susquehanna Valley, down the Shenandoah and onto the Carolina Piedmont, then across the mountains into Tennessee and finally, in the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, into Texas. The journey took about two hundred years. Some Scots came directly into North Carolina as groups from the Highlands, entering through the Cape Fear River. Others, from all regions, trickled in individually to work in the farms and towns of the emerging new America. But the original Lowland Scots and Scots-Irish streamed down the Piedmont in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as clusters of families, populating the farms and towns of the upcountry and becoming apical ancestors for churches and families. By the 1790s they were moving into Tennessee, and in 1820, Stephen F. Austin brought the first colony into Texas.

The family that is constructed by the descendants of these ancestors is actually a descent group, based on the principles that anthropologists call "cognatic descent." It includes all the descendants from one apical ancestor through both male and female lines. The "greater family," then, as seen in the reunion includes both men and women who are "blood kin." In-laws are not members. Children are members by descent from one parent who is the blood descendant. The reunion family is a bounded group, bounded by blood kinship. While both mother and father may each one belong to one of these large descent groups, and families may attend both reunions, they are most likely to attend the reunion of the mother's side. My data from Montreat and subsequent interviewing leads me to suggest that in the Scottish and Scots-Irish Southern groups there is, in fact, a tendency toward matrilineality in classic Southern descent.

(The family reunion, by the way, removes the vexing annual arrangements attendant to which side of the family will the couple visit at Christmas or Thanksgiving. The reunion family only meets on one day of the year, in summer, and it is unlikely that both sides would meet on the same set, recurring day. Christmas and Thanksgiving remain annual times of reassembly for nuclear and three-generation families, often alternating between the origin family of the wife and that of the husband. This conflict and confusion results from the structure of the bilateral kindred, which intersects with the cognatic descent group. The only time, however, that one will find his or her bilateral kindred even partially assembled is at one's wedding or at one's funeral. The structure of Southern kinship is a complicated subject—its full exploration provides material for yet another paper but is beyond the scope of this one.)

The mother holds a central role in family ritual occasions. The reunion family relies heavily on the role of the mothers of each of the component families to be the

organizers and providers of the reunion and its food. Mothers also are expected to keep up with family news, birthdays, and anniversaries, to be able to tell the family stories, to know genealogy, and to be able to explain people's family relatedness. Each family may have an unofficial family historian, who is almost always a mother or aunt, who keeps track of births and deaths and keeps a chart of families and sub-families to assist children and uninitiated relatives in figuring out the family lines. Family genealogists may produce written texts, sometimes published histories of the family.

In addition to their duties as family genealogists and keepers of the oral tradition, the mothers are the keepers of the sacred space where the reunion is held. In the case of Montreat, the mothers open up the Montreat house at the beginning of the summer and close it at the end, often staying at Montreat for the summer to welcome a parade of visiting children and grandchildren and to host the reunion. At the camp meeting grounds, the mothers are in charge of the cabin or "tent," where at least a part of the family stays during the week, where family meals are taken on the weekdays leading up to the communal meal on Sunday, and where the family reunion may take place on a Sunday early in the summer before the week in August when camp meeting is held. For the large reunion meal, each mother prepares her specialty dish or several dishes for serving on the long tables under the trees. The mother is a symbolic figure in the construction of "the family." She is responsible, at least ideally, for the transmission of the culture through the reunion—she is the liturgist.

"The family" is constructed and continued not only in the family reunion itself, held on one recurring day every summer at a sacred space, but also it is honored and continued through the homecomings at country churches and cemeteries. The church homecoming is held once a year on a Sunday in summer to celebrate the church's founding, its history, and to gather together all "the sons and daughters of the congregation" who have moved away. The cemetery association day is also a homecoming for scattered families, descendants of those buried in the graveyard. At this event attendees may clean the graves and place flowers on them. Some cemeteries and older churches have an arbor similar to a camp meeting arbor, where families sit to hear devotionals, prayers, or recited histories. The camp meeting is held at a camp meeting ground, where families gather for an entire week to hear preaching and to visit with kin.

In these homecomings and camp meetings the family is enshrined and sacralized in part through its association with sacred spaces and with their history. In the churchyard and in the scattered country cemeteries, ancestors form a community of the dead to merge with the community of the living in a long line of kin and co-believers. In the case of the Presbyterians this is especially strong, as they refer to the Covenant People and the Covenant Community. They point to their origins in the Protestant Reformation period in Scotland and to devout "Covenanting" preachers in Scotland, Ulster, and in North Carolina. These descendants of Scots and Ulster Scots see themselves as a people apart, a chosen people, heirs to the covenant made with Abraham in the Old Testament and the new covenant in Christ as well as the covenants signed by their dissenting forbears in the Scottish Reformation.

Methodists and Baptists also hold family reunions, of course, and attend homecomings at churches and at cemeteries; and Methodists and Baptists have been the primary denominations to maintain camp meeting grounds and to hold camp meetings. While the gatherings of Methodists and Baptists also have foundation narratives and

often feature an entering ancestor, my data indicates that the emphasis is less on genealogies and more on the living relatives and the parents and grandparents of living memory. Both these denominations flourished on the American frontier and found compatible venues in the camp meeting and revival traditions, which emphasized the experience of the individual believer and the conversion decision, over the received tradition of the Scottish Presbyterians. The Methodists and Baptists also allowed preaching and ministerial duties to be carried out by unordained pastors who were personally called by God without benefit of a seminary education. The Presbyterians, meanwhile, held staunchly to doctrinal purity as passed down from the Westminster Confession of 1647 and to the requirement of seminary education for ordination of ministers. These features created and continue to reflect a subtle division among white Protestants mirrored in issues of theology, the practice of worship, social and political situating, and socioeconomic stratification by denomination—worlds of meaning within the Protestant meaning world, worlds that find ritual elaboration in the summertime sacramental season of the kin-religious gatherings.

### **Folk liturgy**

The summertime gatherings at country churches and cemeteries have roots both in the American frontier revivals and in the older tradition in Scotland known as the “sacramental season,” or “communion season.” The communion season, or the sacramental season, consisted and consists of set weeks for outdoor preachings or “protracted meetings.” In this tradition the celebration of the Holy Communion, or The Lord’s Supper, was served outdoors and held only once a year in summer. This contrasts sharply with the weekly Mass or more frequent Communion of the established, formal church. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these were viewed by the established Church of Scotland and the middle class formalized churches of the American mainstream — especially the Presbyterian — as being a statement of populist religion over and against the formal, official religion of the organized and indoor church.<sup>8</sup>

The key symbolic event — one of the “fixed elements” of the outdoor summertime gatherings — is a commensal meal prepared by the mothers and shared by all in a highly ritualized way. This is especially true of the family reunion, which in the classic version is centered entirely on the meal shared by the family. Through celebration of this meal the summer gatherings take on a quality that I describe as sacramental. They are a folk liturgy.

The food at this meal is laid out on long tables that are sometimes permanent fixtures in the churchyard of the camp meeting ground or cemetery. The food is traditional food—fried chicken, baked ham (or, in Texas, perhaps barbecue) followed by “side dishes” that are specialties of various mothers in the assembled families. There is potato salad, three-bean salad, green bean casserole, squash casserole, jello salad, and then there are the pies and cakes—lemon chess pie, blackberry cobbler, chocolate cake and coconut cake—each one brought by the same mother year after year. Families eat together to visit with their own children and grandchildren, and then they mix and talk with cousins, aunts and uncles. At camp meetings, the commensal meal is usually held on the “Sunday dinner.” At Montreat the entire community assembles once every summer for the “cottage owners’ picnic.” This outdoor meal is the central focus of

commensality. It is the focal point of the sacramental gathering of family and co-believers. It represents the “communion of the saints.”

The communion of the saints is a concept deeply held by the Reformers along with that of the “priesthood of believers.” At the Protestant Reformation the saints of the Catholic Church were dethroned from their privileged positions and sainthood was redefined as all the faithful followers of Christ, in other words all Christians or all of the Elect. Communion became dis-associated with magic and mystery as found in the Eucharist and in the Mass. The elements were no longer seen as the body and blood of Christ but as symbolic elements, a sign of Christ’s presence. The large outdoor communions in Scotland that became arenas of anti-ecclesiastical rebellion and their daughter gatherings on the American frontier were in part anti-Communion in the sense of the indoor, Eucharistic celebration. The Mass represented to these outdoor once-a-year celebrants not only mystery and magic but also hierarchy and authority.

The phenomenon of outdoor services I have described here could be seen as an elaborate set of folk liturgies that form a kind of structural parallel, even a reversal or inversion, to the tightly ordered and formal structures of the established Church. The outdoor service was first an arena of protest, then a frontier interpretation of populist Protestantism; and now, a contemporary expression of kin-religious themes. In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries these very old forms have been seized to express new meanings of family and community in contrast to secular, modern meanings of the solitary individual in an isolated nuclear family.

Within the alternate world of folk liturgy — a ritual world of “anti-structure”— the liturgies are formed from symbolic elements that are clearly non-Catholic. There are no saint’s or saints’ days, but instead there are ordinary people living faithful lives, celebrating their family as a collection of saints on one feast day a year in the reunion. There are no elaborate buildings in this outdoor anti-Church, but instead simple cabins called “tents” around an open-air arbor. Cemeteries are not adorned with crosses or statuary, but present simple gravestones, and they are maintained by the descendants of the deceased kin group in a veneration of known lineal ancestors. In place of hallowed bread and wine transformed into the body of Christ and dispensed by a priest, there are simple foods made by mothers and partaken as a symbol of the priesthood of believers. The forms of the outdoor gatherings use symbolic forms that are decidedly Protestant to communicate a Protestant worldview and to enact a folk liturgy in opposition to a formal, ecclesiastical one.<sup>9</sup>

## **Pilgrimage**

When the Reformers threw out the Mass, the doctrine of transubstantiation, and the images of saints, they also threw out the pilgrimage. In the Roman Catholic Church, the pilgrimage was, and to a great extent remains, a journey taken by a person who goes out from home to a sacred place for the purpose of adding to the insurance of one’s salvation. Pilgrim shrines are the sites of miracles, visions, locations of a saint’s relics or relics referring to the life of Christ. In a Protestant world, the person is saved by grace alone. Nothing one can do will insure salvation—it has already been accomplished by God’s activity. The person, then, lives a life that is a journey. One is, in fact, continually a pilgrim.

In this Protestant world, the return home is itself a pilgrimage. Instead of going out, one goes back home, in a Protestant pilgrimage that is a reversal of the Catholic one. Its destinations are sacralized not by miracles or saints relics but by repeated return of the families and descendants of the founders. Home becomes a place in the annual, activated memory. Homecoming becomes an act of devotion.

It is in the celebration of this ritual that the figure of the lonely Protestant is merged with the picture of the extended family of the real or imagined past, the family associated with rural America and with a time before industrialization and commercialism. The person is now validated both for leaving and for return. The conflict of cultural imperatives can be temporarily resolved, or at least can be brought into focus and its unresolvable aspects dramatized over and over again in the community of family and of faith

### III.

In summary, I will state briefly a few of the ideas I have tried to elaborate.

- 1) The requirements of family and community over and against those of personhood and independent identity are a part of the conflicting demands on the Protestant individual. In order to fulfill the goal of attaining one's "vocation" or calling, it is essential to view oneself as a detachable individual who hears God's call and leaves home to respond. This imperative within the Protestant worldview is a part of the cultural milieu of Northern Europe in which a modernized, secular, scientific, industrial, and commercial economy was born. Within this cultural world, the Protestant pilgrimage enables one to fulfill—or to experience the ambivalence of not being able to fulfill—conflicting cultural demands. It is a cultural performance that is a commentary on Protestant experience as the Catholic pilgrimage is a commentary on Catholic experience, and one is a reversal of the other.
- 2) The family that is symbolized and created is a lineal one, one that emphasizes extended kin relations and descent from ancestors. The reunion family extends outward into the day-to-day life of individual family members as they communicate by phone or email, attend funerals and weddings together, and offer assistance to one another in everyday situations. The participation at the reunions enables an imagined family to be sustained in the face of the economic and cultural imperatives to remain scattered in nuclear households.
- 3) The liturgies involved in the reunions are folk liturgies—rituals with patterns and rules for observation, but rules that are unspoken and uncodified. They involve symbols that are familial and non-hierarchical, symbols of simplicity in contrast to symbols of formality and order, symbols of rationality in contrast to symbols of magic and mystery. These create a separate, contrastive liturgical world to the formal world of the indoor church—a Protestant world that presents an inversion of the Catholic one. It is a world that is repeated in other aspects of Protestant life and experience.

- 4) The reunions create a world where the past can be told and affirmed, where memory can be made and passed on. It is a world that also affirms religious truths shared by the ancestors, beliefs that may not be compatible with everyday life in the city or town. The priesthood of believers is a reality and the communion of the saints takes place in a joyous shared meal in the sacred grove. For one day or one week, the kin group and the religious faith have shape and form.
- 5) The participating individual is placed in an environment of heightened awareness of the contradictions within the modern world, a bittersweet experience of contradictions not quite resolved. It is an awareness that one can't go home again; or, perhaps, that one can do so, but only periodically and only in that semi-magical time and space that is set apart for rituals of reunion.

In my approach today and in my work on which this talk is based, I have attempted a cultural reading along with a functional and a psychosocial one.<sup>10</sup> I have seen the reunions not only as a response to a changing society and as a historical continuation of an old tradition, but also as a ritual language in the same way that culture itself is a language. As a pilgrimage system the reunions form a structural complement to a pilgrimage system that is a part of the shared world of Western Christianity. They provide a window into a larger, deeper set of cultural questions that are at the heart of how culture is expressed in ritual and how symbols state critical features of human experience. Other rituals of family and church will provide other windows — weddings, funerals, baptisms, Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, and all the numerous rituals of church congregations, including family night suppers, women's and men's associations, retreats, and youth camps. Anthropologists can only begin to look through these windows as a way of hoping to see a cultural world, partially, through the eyes of those to whom it properly belongs.

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> See Neville (1987, 1994). See also, Neville (1979).

<sup>3</sup> For Durkheim's study of *anomie*, see Durkheim (1951 (1897)). See also Durkheim (1974 (1915)). On the paradoxes of Protestantism, see Weber (1958 (1905)).

<sup>4</sup> See Peacock and Tyson (1989).

<sup>5</sup> See Turner (1979, 1978) and Geertz (1973).

<sup>6</sup> See Arensberg and Kimball (1965); Van Gennep (1960 (1909)). See also Warner (1961).

<sup>7</sup> My models and methods have benefited from many sources in addition to those already mentioned. These include the following: Turner and Turner (1978), Boon (1982), Bauman (1977), Hobsbawm (1983), Babcock (1978), and Myerhoff (1978, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> For a history of the Scottish communion season and its relation to American revivals see Schmidt (1989). On Scottish social history, see Smout (1969, 1986). For more on worship forms and conflicts about these, see Melton (1967). And for general history of Southern Presbyterians, see Thompson (1963).

<sup>9</sup> Catholics in the South also hold their own version of reunions and other gatherings, primarily those centering on the church and on Saints Days. For more on this, see Neville (1995).

<sup>10</sup> My recent readings and re-readings of various studies of myth, ritual, and the making of memory have enriched my thinking on the topics I have treated in this paper. These include the work of Shore (1996), Gillis (1996), Connerton (1989), Schwerder (1991), and Yates (1966).

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