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whole, as the holy messenger of God says clearly:'I fulfil that which is still lacking to the sufferings of Christ; the Church suffers as his body'.[f] [26]Paul could not suffer for the churches except as a member awaiting his duty. [g]We must all follow in the footsteps of Christ, armed with such thoughts.[g] [h]Here no gloss helps men who think to overcome the works righteous in a material way,[h] [i]and in fact poison the world still worse with imaginary faith than did the others with loutish works.[i] [j]Hence, because they are incapable of making proper distinctions, they are still *neophiti* (untested persons)[j] [k]who should not be pastors of souls but still for a good long while remain *chatecumini* (diligent pupils of the work of God) and not teach until they themselves are taught by God.[k]

This writing of mine is still unsuitable for showing to the mad world. [l]I must still think to explain this writing in all its chapters with my [citation of] Scripture chapters, for the ruination of the fleshly scribes. For among them the imaginary flesh has permitted all sorts of knavery.[l] Therefore it cannot now be printed, because this would amount to sending it out unprotected against those who are, in their own opinion, well armed. You should know, too, that they attribute this teaching to Abbot Joachim and with great mockery call it an 'Eternal Gospel'. I hold Abbot Joachim in great respect. I have read him only on Jeremiah. But my teaching is much superior. I accept it not from him but from the utterance of God, as I want to prove at an appropriate time on the basis of the whole Bible. Let the matter rest for the moment and let us at all times faithfully preserve copies of our writings. Given, the Wednesday after St. Andrew's[27] in 1523.

<div style="text-align: right">Thomas Müntzer, your brother in the Lord.</div>

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Is There Ancestor Worship in the Old Testament?

Andrew Chiu

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[f] Col. 1.

[26] See Col. 1:24.
[g] 1 Pet. 2, 4.
[g] 1 Pet. 2, 4.
[h] Rom. 4.
[h] Rom. 4.
[i] Mt. 5; 1 Tim. 1; 2 Tim. 1.
[i] Mt. 5; 1 Tim. 1; 2 Tim. 1.
[j] Is. 5.
[j] Is. 5.
[k] Jn. 6; Is. 54; Jer. 31.
[k] Jn. 6; Is. 54; Jer. 31.
[l] 1 Cor. 2; Mt. 7.
[l] 1 Cor. 2; Mt. 7.

[27] December 2.

Ancestor worship is worship directed to deceased parents or forefathers. The cult is based on the universal belief in the existence of an immaterial part of man. The deceased is believed to have the same kindly interest in the affairs of the living as when alive and to interfere in the course of events for the welfare of the family or clan. The deceased is able to protect his or her relatives, help them in war, give them success in their undertakings, and therefore, demand their continued service, reverence, and sacrifice. Otherwise, the deceased may bring sickness, storms, calamities or other misfortunes upon them, if the worship of him or her is neglected.

Thus it is evident that the motives of ancestor worship are not only filial piety, but also fear of the deceased spirits. For ancient Romans, ancestor worship was a sort of family religion. Masks or images which embodied the *manes* (the spirits of the deceased) who had become gods of the lower world were set up in the homes. Altars were erected, sacrifices were made, and prayers were offered to them in the same way as to the *penates* (the protecting spirits of the household). Even today the Chinese practise ancestor worship wherever they have settled. Tablets of wood, some with only a piece of red paper on them, bearing the name and genealogy of the deceased are found in many homes; incense and spirit money and objects are burned before them, prayers for protection and/or assistance are also offered. Often, an entire room or hall, or even a separate building, is set aside for this purpose.

Was ancestor worship practised in the Old Testament? If the Old Testament refers only to the time span from creation to the New Testament the answer to this question is in the affirmative. If it refers to the people and the land of Israel, or to the canonical books which are accepted by both the Jews and the Christians, the picture might be different. p. 218

FAMILY LIFE IN ISRAEL

It is not the purpose of this paper to give a full treatment of the family life in Israel. We intend to discuss here only those practices which may relate to ancestors. The characteristics of the Israelite family have been dealt with thoroughly by Roland de Vaux.[1] Although there are some indications in the Old Testament of fratriarchate,[2] and matriarchate[3] practices, yet, Israel was basically a patriarchal society.

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[1] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Social Institution* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company 1965), pp.19–21.

[2] Fratriarchate means the eldest brother is the head of the family. See for example, Laban plays a role in arrangement of the marriage of his sister Rebecca (Gen. 24), Dinah's brothers enter into deliberations with Shechem (Gen. 34) and Joseph's brethren sold him to the Ishmaelites (Gen. 37). Cf. also Ignatius Hunt, *The World of the Patriarchs* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), pp.64–65.

[3] Matriarchate means a state or stage of social evolution in which descent is reckoned only in the female line, with all children belonging to the mother's clan. For instance, some authors argued that in the case of the marriage of Samson to Timna the wife does not leave her clan but brings her husband into it (Judg. 14). Also the two sons of Joseph, who were born of Egyptian wives, were not acknowledged as children of Israel until they had been adopted by Jacob (Gen. 48). And Amnon and Tamar could have married each other,

For the Israelites, as with many other peoples, the family consists of those who are united by common blood and by a common dwelling place. The father is the head of the family. He has the right to arrange the children's marriage just as stated in the Code of Hammurabi (Sections 155 and 159) and an essential condition of marriage is a contract based on the agreement of the fathers of the two contracting parties or on the groom-to-be and the father of the bride-to-be.[4] So Abraham sent his servant to choose a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24), Judah arranged the marriage of his first-born (Gen. 38:6), Caleb decided on his daughter's marriage (Jos. 15:16) and Saul did the same (1 Sam. 18:17, 19, 21, 27; 25:44). Lot even suggested that the men of Sodom might abuse his virgin daughters rather than abuse his guests (Gen. 19:1–11). Furthermore, a vow made by a girl or married woman needs the consent of the father or husband to be valid. If the consent is withheld, the vow is null and void (Num. 30:4–17).

Although the mother gave her children the first rudiments of education (Prov. 1:8; 6:20), the primary task of educating the children was entrusted to the father. One of his most sacred duties was to teach his p. 219 son religious truth and national traditions (Ex. 10:2; 12:26–27; 13:8; Deut. 4:9, 6:9, 20–25; 32:7, 46). Of course, the father was responsible for his son's professional education as well.

In Israel, only sons had a right to the inheritance. Daughters did not inherit except when the father had no male heirs. If a man died without children, the property passed to his male kinsmen on his father's side in the following order: his brothers, his father's brothers, his nearest relative in the clan (Num. 27:1–11; cf. Num. 36:6–9). The eldest son was to receive a double share of his father's wealth (Deut. 21:17). This was why the Israelites wanted mainly sons in order to perpetuate the family line and fortune and to preserve the ancestral inheritance.

This may also explain why Israelites practised the levirate system.[5] It was regarded as a tragedy for an Israelite man to die without any children, so the levirate system required his brother to take his widow in marriage and have children by her (Deut. 25:5–10; see also Gen. 38 and Ruth 1 and 4). A special term, onanism, was used in Israel. The term originated from Onan who refused to carry out his duty for his dead brother by marrying his brother's wife (see Gen. 38:7–10). However, from Ruth 2:20 and 3:12 we can see that the levirate law was a clan regulation rather than for the family in the narrow sense. Nevertheless, the purpose of the levirate system was 'to perpetuate the name of the dead' (Ruth 4:5, 10) and the child born of the marriage was considered the son of the deceased (see Ruth 4:13–17).

The name of a person is very important in Israelite society for it reveals the character or destiny of the person who bears it. Ample examples, for instance the names of Abraham, Jacob and Israel, etc., illustrate this truth. But this is not in the realm of our present discussion. But the patronymic name (the child was named after his father, grandfather, great grandfather, or uncle) may have something to do with ancestor worship, or at the least, with ancestor practices.

TREATMENT OF THE DEAD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

because, though both were David's children they were born of different mothers (2 Sam. 13), etc. (See de Vaux, ibid., pp.19–20).

[4] See James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp.172–173. Cf. also Hunt, ibid., p.52.

[5] The term Levirate comes from Latin, *levir*, which translating the Hebrew *Yabam* (brother-in-law or husband's brother). It means that at the death of a man without children, his brother must marry the widow so that her children will bear the name of the deceased and continue his line of descendants.

Another important matter related to family life is the treatment of the dead in the Old Testament. This subject has been covered very well by both de Vaux and Pfeiffer.[6] First, we must realize that the Hebrew **P. 220** word *nephesh* can be used for both a living 'soul' ([Gen. 2:7](#)) and a dead 'body' ([Num. 6:6](#); [19:13](#); [Lev. 21:11](#)). Hebrew thinking did not distinguish between the soul and body. Although Pfeiffer mentions that 'some scholars, adopting the theory of Herbert Spencer that the grave was the first shrine and the tombstone the first altar, believe that the ancient Semites worshipped the ghosts of their ancestor'.[7] However, he maintains that 'our available information indicates clearly that the early Semites, like the Israelites later, believed in human survival after death and feared the ghosts of the deceased, but it does not prove that such ghosts were worshipped like divine beings.[8] For the Israelites, death was not annihilation. The dead were believed to survive weakly and miserably in the bleak darkness of the family grave or like a shade in the subterranean abode of Sheol ([Ez. 32:17–32](#); [Job 26:5–6](#); [Is. 14:9–10](#)). Sheol is often translated both as 'grave' and 'hell' in the Bible. But it was considered by the Israelites to be a land of darkness and gloom ([Job 10:21](#)), a place of silence ([Ps. 31:17](#)), and a land of forgetfulness ([Ps. 88:12](#)). Hence, in Sheol there is no activity, no planning, no knowledge, no wisdom ([Eccl. 9:10](#)) and the departed spirits cannot praise God in Sheol ([Ps. 6:5](#); [30:9](#); [88:10](#); [Is. 38:18](#)).

Since the deceased were considered still living, it was very important to have a proper treatment of the corpse and to have an honourable burial. To leave the dead body unburied or to let the corpse be a prey for birds and the wild beasts was thought of as the worst of all fates ([1 Kings 14:11](#); [Jer. 16:4](#); [22:19](#); [Ez. 29:5](#)). However, both the corpse and the grave were considered unclean and those who touched them were also considered unclean ([Lev. 21:1–4](#); [22:4](#); [Num. 10:11–16](#)).

The burning of a body was an outrage which was inflicted only on notorious criminals ([Gen. 38:24](#), [Lev. 20:14](#); [21:9](#)) or on enemies a man wanted to annihilate forever ([Amos 2:1](#)). Therefore, cremation was not practised in Israel. As a rule, burial took place on the day of death or as soon as possible.

The usual Israelite tomb was a burial chamber dug out of soft rock or a natural cave. A 'tomb of the sons of the people' in Kedron valley was for those who could not afford to own and maintain a tomb for the family ([2 Kings 23:6](#); [Jer. 26:23](#)). This was also where condemned criminals were thrown. A rich person could have a tomb for his own family. To be buried 'in the tomb of his father' was normal ([Jud. 8:32](#); [16:31](#); [2 Sam. 21:12–14](#)), but to be excluded from the family tomb was considered a punishment from God ([1 Kings 13:21–22](#)). p. 221

Sometimes some personal belongings and pottery were placed beside the corpse. Occasionally food was presented to the dead and incense was burned ([Deut. 26:14](#); [2 Chron. 16:14](#)). These acts, as explained by de Vaux, were based on a belief in survival after death and a feeling of affection towards the dead. 'They are not acts of worship directed towards the dead, for that attitude never existed in Israel'.[9] He also mentions that prayer

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[6] See Roland de Vaux, ibid., pp.56–61 and Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Religion in the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) pp.17–21.

[7] Pfeiffer, ibid., p.17–18.

[8] Ibid., 18.

[9] Roland de Vaux, ibid., p.60.

and sacrifice of expiation for the dead (both incompatible with a cult of the dead) appear in the Apocrypha in 2 Maccabees 12:38–46.[10]

NO ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN ISRAEL

From the foregoing discussion we can deduce that there are indications of ancestor worship in the Old Testament times but there was no ancestor worship in Israel. Living in Palestine, surrounded by pagan nations, the Israelites might be influenced by these nations and at times in certain places might have followed their practices in this regard. However, as exegeted by Gerhard von Rod, the First Commandment 'was also directed against the less important private cults, in particular against any manner of worship of the dead'.[11] The person who turns to mediums and to spiritists (Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:11) and the mourners who shave their hair and beard partly and make cuts on their bodies (Lev. 19:27–28; 21:5; Deut. 14:1) were all condemned because these practices were done by the heathen.

Questions might also be raised concerning funeral rites, stele over the tomb and the leaders of the tribes being treated like gods in Israel. Was this ancestor worship? For all the rites related to the treating of the dead, de Vaux maintains:

> These ceremonies were regarded as a duty which had to be paid to the dead, as an act of piety which was their due (1 Sam. 31:12; 2 Sam. 21:13–14; Tb. 1:17–19; Si. 7:33; 22:11–12). For children, these rites formed part of that duty to their parents enjoined by the Decalogue. We conclude that the dead were honoured in a religious spirit, but that no cult was paid to them.[12]

In regard to the stele, it is true that Jacob set up a pillar over his beloved wife Rachel's tomb (Gen. 35:20) and Absalom set up a monument for p. 222 himself in the King's Valley because he had no son to preserve his name (2 Sam. 18:18). However, Jacob's deed was a love memorial and Absalom's monument may be compared with the returning eunuch to the land of Israel after the Exile who sighed: 'Behold, I am a dry tree! (Is. 56:3) Then the Lord said:

> To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, And choose to please Me, And hold fast My covenant, To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, And a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off (Is. 56:4–5).

In Mowinckel's book, *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, the truth concerning tribal leaders in Israel is stated. The basic reality in human life for the Israelites is not the individual, nor the leader, but the community. Each tribe has a common ancestor who represents the tribe. This person is often looked upon as the deity of the tribe or in other cases he may bear the name of the tribe. However, Mowinckel's main concern in writing this is to prove that the 'I' and 'We' in the Royal Psalms are actually the same. The leader of Israel 'is the "representative" because the "soul", the history, the honour, the vigour and the blessing of the whole are concentrated on him. And, the other way round, all the others participate

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol.1 (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962), p.208. See also p.276 where he mentions the Jahwism turned with a special intolerance against all forms of the cult of the dead.

[12] Roland de Vaux, ibid., p.61.

dynamically in what he represents'.[13] Mowinckel is not asserting that the leaders of Israel were worshipped as gods.

If we understand what 'worship' meant in Israel then our conclusion that Israel did not practise ancestor worship is much more conclusive. G. E. Wright states that in the worship of the Israelites, 'the focus of attention is on the will and acts of God, especially as revealed in historical events'.[14] Hence, the religious festivals were very important in the faith and life of Israel. Concerning the forms and the spirit of worship, H. H. Rowley maintains, 'The more discerning religious leaders of Israel were aways aware that it was the spirit that gave meaning to the act and that the spirit was more important than the act'.[15] He also deduces that early in Israel it was perceived that the spirit without the ritual act could suffice. However, 'where the ritual act was prescribed, sincerity of penitence could not dispense with it'.[16] So he asserts that p. 223 no forms of worship constrain the spirit to worship and that without the spirit the forms are not real worship.[17]

In regard to the object of the worship in Israel, after surveying the nations around, Peter Ellis concludes:

> Thus the God of the patriarchs, as he is revealed through the patriarchal traditions in Genesis, is personal, unrestricted, unassociated with other gods, all powerful, provident, and benevolent. The question, however, may be raised as to whether the patriarchs themselves realized the God they worshipped was indeed the 'only' God.[18]

Then he goes on to say that what the patriarchs thought about the gods worshipped throughout the ancient Near East is not clear. In the world of Abraham, polytheism was the common and universal belief. Monotheists were unknown. However, Ellis acknowledges that even if the patriarchs were not monotheists they were at least monolatrists.

These monolatrists, worshipped one God, focused their attention on the will and acts of God in historical events, emphasized the spirit rather than forms, and said that sincerity of penitence could not dispense with the ritual act. They also observed the strict and firm First Commandment that you shall have no other gods before me. Consequently, there is no place for the assertion that ancestor worship was practised in Israel.

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[13] Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, vol.I (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p.43.

[14] G. E. Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment* (London: SCM Press, Let., 1968), p.101.

[15] H. H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel: Its Forms and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p.246.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., p.249.

[18] Peter Ellis, *The Yahwist: The Bible's First Theologian* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Fides Publisher Inc., 1968), p.101.

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Christianity Encounters Ancestor Worship in Taiwan

Lim Guek Eng

This article is based on a term paper presented at the China Evangelical Seminary, Taipei. The author shows that ancestor worship among the Minnan Chinese of Taiwan has its roots in primitive animism (rather than in Confucianism). Using a theological analytical approach she suggests some functional substitutes for Christian Taiwanese.
(Editors)

The aim of this article is to develop a more adequate approach to Taiwanese ancestor worship. It rests upon the assumption that ancestor worship in Taiwan has never been effectively encountered by Christianity and hence continues in its current virile form as a major roadblock to the growth of the Church especially in rural villages.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN CURRENT TAIWANESE SOCIETY