Title: Korean ancestor worship in the light of Biblical teachings

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Date completed: March 1992

Granting Institution: Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS)

Description: Unpublished Thesis (PhD): 277 pages

Abstract:

There is a confrontation between filial piety to ancestors and honoring God in Korean society. This study is directed toward finding answers to the question. “How shall a pastor advise a Korean convert on participation in ancestor worship? The study follows the four steps in pastoral theological reflection: (1) description, (2) analysis, (3) biblical-theological interpretation, and (4) pastoral action.

PART I: PRESENTATION

This study begins with the description and observation of the following case. Kwon Soochol was brought up and trained under strict Confucian tradition. Confucianism places heavy emphasis upon the correct practices of ancestral rituals. Su-mi was brought up and trained under the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Seventh-day Adventist do not worship any thing or any person other than God. After Kwon married Su-mi, he asked, “How can I explain to my parents and relatives that I have become a Christian and cannot participate in family ancestral rituals?”

PART II: ANALYSIS

In the analysis section, the investigation of the case used a horizontal perspective. A horizontal analysis probes the socio-cultural dynamics and religious dynamics of ancestor worship in Korean society that shaped the dynamics of the case.
Koreans, dominated for five hundred years by the Confucian rule of the Yi dynasty, regard ancestor worship as the most important national ritual. When Christianity was introduced into Korea about two hundred years ago, the initial problem was the conflict between the Christian God-centered way of life, and the Confucian men-centered way of socio-political-ethical life.

The center or the basic foundation of family is the filial piety of the descendants toward their ancestors, expressed in their ancestral rituals. The reason why the first born son is given prestige by the patrilineal family and preference in the inheritance of property is because he is to uphold the religious ceremonies related to ancestor worship and perpetuate the family line.

PART III: INTERPRETATION

In part III, the case is brightened from the perspective of vertical, biblical-theological, analysis. The three chapters in this section deal with separate specific issues: biblical teachings on the state of the dead, biblical teachings on worship and prayer to the dead, and biblical teachings on filial piety to the dead.

The findings may be summarized as follows: (1) a examination of the Hebrew and Greek words for “death” (maweth and thanatos, respectively) and “soul” (nephesh and psuche, respectively) denote basically an individual rather than a constituent part of the individual; (2) worshiping or in any way communicating with the dead is contrary to the first commandment of the Decalogue; (3) ancestors were not to be worshiped, but neither were they to be forgotten.

PART IV: ACTION

The pastoral action part presents the synthesis of the study and recommends pastoral strategies of actions to resolve the issues posed by the case. The very essence of this part is to
implement the findings from the perspective of the horizontal (socio-cultural and religious) and vertical (biblical-theological) dimensions presented in the second and third part respectively.

The recommendations from the study are that churches should encourage their members to take part in their families’ commemorative rites along the lines set forth by a new alternative way to show veneration. This investigation concludes by suggesting the order of chudo yebae (memorial service) be used instead of chudo shik (memorial ceremony).