**ANCESTOR WORSHIP.** Reverence for both recent and ancient ancestors, expressed in some specific ritual, is widespread. Such practices are based on belief in the survival of the soul and in the soul's need for ritual attention from its descendants. The specific types of ancestor worship are as diverse as the groups who practice them, from New Guinea to West Africa, from China to the Caribbean. Ancestor worship may involve the relationship between a man and one specific ancestor—for example, his own deceased father or grandfather—or the relation between a large kin group and a series of ancestors. Usually, the choice of ancestors is related to the line, or lines, in which descent is traced. When descent is traced through the male line, fathers, grandfathers, and so on, are given reverence; when descent is traced through the female line, ancestors in the female line may be revered. In the 19th century such students of anthropology and religion as Herbert Spencer believed that ancestor worship was the earliest form of religion and that belief in gods grew out of it. While this theory is probably much too broad a generalization, it remains true that elevation of ancestors to the status of gods has been observed in a number of widely diverse societies.

On the other hand, ancestors can be worshipped without being considered gods. Such is the case with the Chinese, whose filial piety is famous. Confucius taught the Chinese to pay special reverence to their ancestors, and, though it is a declining practice, numerous ceremonies of ancestor worship are still observed in China. At festival time, celebrations are held in the home or in the temple of the descendants, where the ancestral spirits are believed to join them. Models of houses and vehicles, in addition to imitation money, are burned as offerings.

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This document is from Erika Bourguignon's personal records. See [http://www.paulbourguignon.com/Erika.html](http://www.paulbourguignon.com/Erika.html) for more information.