



RESEARCH ARTICLE

PERCEPTION AND NEGOTIATION OF CHRISTIAN AND TRADITIONAL SPIRITUAL PRACTICES  
AMONG CHRISTIAN WOMEN IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have been conducted on the dichotomy between Christian and African religion (s), to understand why African Christians turn to traditional practices when they encounter everyday life crises like prolonged sickness, pre-mature death, and quarrels amongst couples and also lack of child to point a few. One cannot understand the reason for consulting traditional healers without focusing on how this is negotiated and perceived by the actors themselves. The empirical materials from the study done in 2010 are applied to bring about the idea of understanding spiritualities among the women in the Pentecostal church and Methodist Church in Kenya (MCK). Some priests and traditional healers were interviewed too and their views are employed to unearth the situation. Due to confidentiality and anonymity purposes, names given to informants are not their actual names. It is understood that lack of missionary understanding of the role of African traditional religion to the natives resulted in a split between African traditional spiritual practices and African Christian spiritual practices. This has also brought about the question of syncretism and how Africans theologians can try to contextualize their practices, though African theologians have tried to reinstate the conflicting issues of syncretism by seeking better integration between African traditional practices and African Christian practices. Good elements in African traditional religion need to be accommodated into African Christian practices to promote proper contextualization

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INTRODUCTION

This article is derived from my doctoral work on how Ameru Christian spiritual practices and Ameru traditional spiritual practices are negotiated and perceived among the Pentecostal women and MCK. According to some women, sometimes Christian women practice both spiritualities since they are in need and Christianity does not address the issues that concern them. The reason for this lack of concern could be the failure of missionaries' understanding of how life is interpreted in Africa. This culminated in a context where some Christians regard others as syncretic because they adhere to both practices. According to women Christianity brought with it a package of culture that did not exist before its advent. There is a need to deal with the issue of mixing Ameru traditional spiritual practices and Ameru Christian spiritual practices because of the question of syncretism when both are practiced by Christian adherents. I discuss perceptions and practices of women's spirituality, building from points of view of Mageša's theological arguments, in his book *What is not Sacred? African Spirituality*, in relation to spirituality of the African people south of the Sahara.

His argument shows that Africans need to maintain their religious worldviews and spirituality even after accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ. His argument together with other literature relevant to the empirical material is useful for critical discussion of the subject matter. In order to convey the types of negotiations and perceptions of lived-out spiritual practices amongst MCK and Pentecostal Church women, I first discuss the spiritual trends that emerged from informants understanding of these practices. I then set out to discuss how these spiritual practices are perceived and how syncretism as a mixture of both is perceived.

Trends of How Spiritual Practices Are Mixed

It is apparent that some MCK and Pentecostal Church Christian women live out a mixed spirituality. Numerous circumstances lead Christian women to adhere to both spiritual practices. Such circumstances are as follows: barrenness, miscarriage, irregularity in menstruation, marital strife, and wife beating to point a few. Some Christian women consult priests for spiritual matters before they consult prophets and traditional healers (see Figure 1, described as the common path, and Figures 3 and 4). Based on my findings, I have identified four distinct spiritual paths followed by MCK and Pentecostal Church Christian women when they experience the need to consult. These are illustrated in Figures 1 to 4 below.

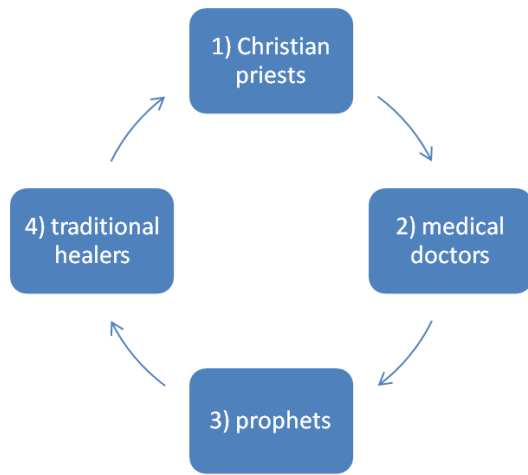


Figure 1. Trend 1 of the paths

The most common path followed by some Christian women can be traced from Christian priests, through practitioners of western medicine (termed “medical doctors” in the figure), to prophets, who reveal the root causes of the problems encountered by the client. If the client is not satisfied or has been informed that he/she has been bewitched, the path continues to traditional healers, who identify the problem and heal through performing rituals. After the client has consulted a traditional healer and recovers, or indeed fails to recover, he/she returns to the starting point: the Christian priest. Gehman’s understanding of syncretism perspectives is paramount at this juncture. These are; conscious or deliberate where syncretism arises from church leadership. This means that the leaders of the church find ways of accommodating the gospel to other religious faiths and cultures. To be explicit, integration of cultural practices is done without compromise and Christian faith made relevant through fusing compatible practices with the gospel (Gehman, 1989). The spontaneous syncretism is where Christians do not mingle compatible practices with the truth of the gospel. In this case, Christians first seek spiritual help from the Christian priest and if it fails they consult traditional healers. For him, Christians here are blending practices that cannot be blended that results to split-level Christianity (Gehman, 1989).

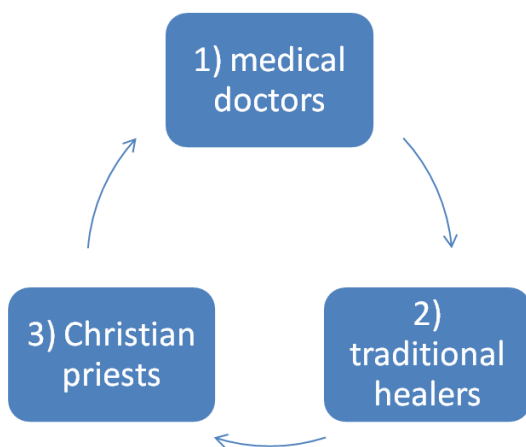


Figure 2. Trend 2 of the paths

The second path reflects that, in the event of illness, some MCK and Pentecostal Church Christian women first consult western medical practitioners. If western medicine fails, they

consult traditional healers, and if traditional healers fail, they consult Christian priests, without the need to consult a prophet. If Christian prayer seems to have failed, they return to the medical doctors.

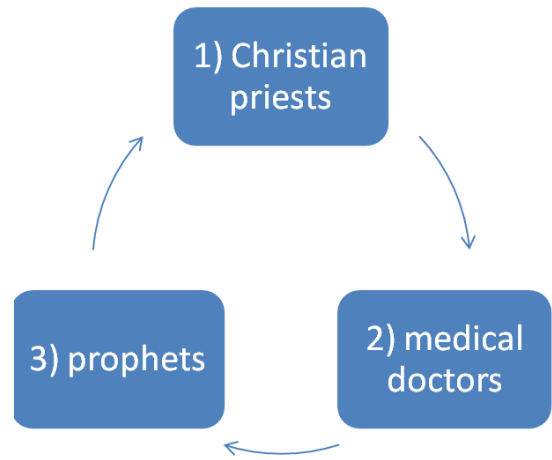


Figure 3. Trend 3 of the paths

The third path proceeds from Christian priests to medical doctors and then to prophets, without the intervention of healers. It shows that when Christian prayer offered by priests fails, the women consult medical doctors. If they also fail, they consult prophets. If the prophets fail, they end up with Christian priests in the church.

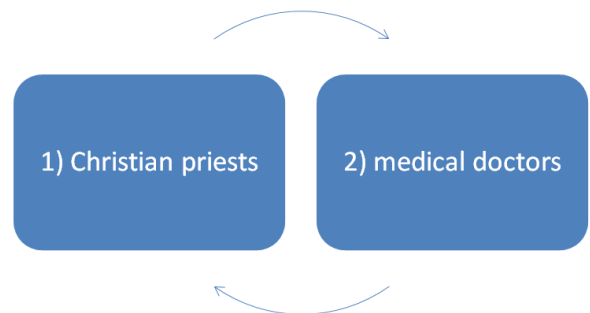


Figure 4. Trend 4 of the paths

The fourth path alternates between Christian priests and medical doctors and involves neither healers nor prophets. The four spiritual paths are practised by four categories of MCK and Pentecostal Church Christian women-the category that takes the four paths shown in figure 1, 2 and 3 and 4, the full Christian woman that is, those who disapprove of traditional healers and refuse to consult them, even in private. These simple illustrations indicate four different categories of MCK and Pentecostal Church Christian women and the spiritual paths they take to address the existential crises in their daily lives. I can argue that they all depend upon the circumstances in each case of illness/misfortune. A woman might start out only intending to consult western medicine and/or a Christian priest, but if they fail, she may become desperate and then reluctantly consult a prophet and/or healer. Conversely, a woman may be lucky if Christian prayers resolve her problem, she never needs to consult a prophet or healer. In line with the arguments provided by the informants, Magesa shows the positivity of accepting African traditions. He holds that Africans themselves need to discard and scorn their own practices only when there are incidences of cultural ugliness that also need to be modified.

Otherwise, there are many things that need to be appreciated (Magesa, 2014). Magesa also argues that for the people to have a future, they need to hold on their past. For him, the past influences the present in such a way that both provide direction for the future. Additionally, Magesa argues that negotiation of cultural understanding is needed among the people in question in order to bring African indigenous spirituality into a contextual state. Perception of the mixture according to Magesa, contextualisation (or inculturation, as he uses it) is a risky process when cultures encounter one another to make the contextualisation of Christian spirituality genuine. He argues that in order to move from comfort zones to unknown territories, one has to engage in the process of contextualisation, which I regard as negotiation. It is also a process where people may reject or accept one another.

For genuine negotiation to take place, I want to point to Magesa's assertion that contextualisation must become a culture and that there is a need to realise that culture is lived. His claim is that in order to have genuine inculturation, African churches need to go beyond self-governance, self-propagation and self-reliance and adapt to the work of the 'Divine Spirit' in Africa (Magesa, 2014: 186ff). According to Magesa, there are essential things to preserve and reclaim from African traditional spirituality for contemporary African Christian living. I want to explore his assertions for better understanding of negotiation of spiritualities. I discuss issues of syncretism linking it to contextualization and trends pursued by Christian women from MCK and Pentecostal Church. This is what I call practical syncretism. It is practical because it involves people in context and their spiritual practices. Magesa states that "Spirituality in Africa is perhaps the one thing that is really real, not merely a conceptual idea. On the contrary, it is the most experiential reality in the totality of being" (Magesa, 2014).

When it comes to the issue of mixing of both traditional spiritual practices and Christian spiritual practices, a healer asserted that some women within MCK and Pentecostal Church should balance both practices since both meet their existential needs under response. When one practice fails, the other works out. The provision of healing matters more than people's identity in regard to Christianity. There is no separation between the profane and the sacred. Life in totality is religious. On the contrary, one of the informants who happened to be a Christian expected Christian priests to abstain from consulting traditional healers or living out both spiritual practices. For him, the pastors should not mix both practices. Limbitu states:

It is not good for a Christian to consult healers if they truly believe in God's healing. It is wrong to blend the two. It is right to stand on one side and not both and that church people are hypocritical, even those who preach publicly that consultation of the healers by Christian adherents is wrong. I fail to understand why these priests consult me. I think the world is coming to an end. I see it this way because pastors who come to preach in our church ask me to go in front of the church with my medicine so that they can pray for me and throw away my medicine, hence, transformation and salvation (Limbitu, 18<sup>th</sup> August 2010).

The informants were categorical when illustrating how one should live in both worlds if it does not directly affect the second party. Mithika thought that since he is a Christian and a

healer who does not cause death to individuals in society, but struggles for the well-being of people, there is nothing wrong in exercising both practices. His idea is parallel to what Magesa argues above that there some ugly things that need to be eradicated and discarded in culture, but much to be appreciated. Additionally, O'Donovan's understanding is that there is no perfect or best culture but bad elements that should be discarded in a given culture (O'Donovan, 2000).

Recalling Gehman's argument, conscious and deliberate syncretism occurs where church leaders find ways of accommodating the gospel to other religious cultures and faiths. In this kind of system, traditional practices are integrated without compromising, whereby Christian faith is made relevant. An example is African Independent Churches (AICs) who mix traditional practices in order to deal with contextual issues within their churches. This creates an understanding of positive syncretism. Some of the good elements, especially in traditional cultures, can be reclaimed for the betterment and stability of women's Christian spirituality. This is where contextualisation is relevant, as it is inevitably thought to be a missiological and theological perspective (Bevans, 2002). As a way of mixing, women whose problem is lack of a child a result of marrying a man from a prohibited clan, may be advised by the *kiroria* (prophet) to consult *muiciaro* (a person with traditional link). A *muiciaro* could settle the issue with in-laws and the husband.

The study reveals informants' different perspectives in regard to Christians' mixing of two spiritualities. Some after being fully converted to Christianity, they stopped mixing the two spiritualities. This assertion is different from a priest who experiences difficulties in understanding this amalgamation. Jackson's idea was that the advent of Christianity did not prevent Christians from consulting and living out both spiritualities.

The advent of Christianity in Meru did not prevent Christians from consulting traditional healers. This has been practised and will not stop. Traditional healing is part of them. Some realize the conflicting facet between both practices while others do not realize the difference (Jackson).

Even after conversion, living out both spiritualities continues and will continue since traditional healing is part of the way of life among Ameru Christians in the region. Some Christian adherents are aware of the friction caused by the blending of both, while others are not. Due to this assertion that integration of both spiritualities causes friction, L. Jones argues that "Religious entities that were originally separated can come together in such a way that a syncretism results. The first possible results are that what is superimposed predominates, while what is older survives" (Jones, 2005). This is true because Christian practices dominate traditional religious practices, even though traditional religious practices continue to exist. Magesa, using an analogous example, argues that incorporating the new into the old is spiritually disparaging and need to be rejected. He states:

The question in this process is not one of 'putting new wine into old wine skin' or 'sewing a new patch onto an old cloth.' It is not a question of adding layers of beliefs one on top of another or any procedure of that variety, because doing so would be spiritually destructive and should be categorically rejected (Magesa, 2014).

In relation to the above argument, Schreiter shows four ways of understanding different negotiations when dealing with syncretism. These include the following: similarities, filling the gaps, indiscriminate mixing and domination (Schreiter, 1997). For him there should be similar elements between traditional and Christian practices. He understands the filling of the gap as Christian elements that come into traditional religion to deal with problems that have previously not been dealt with well. Christianity sometimes creates gaps in the process of solving the problem in traditional religion, and thus tries to fill the gaps it has created. It is also critical that such filling of these gaps by Christianity would result in hasty contextualisation. What Schreiter argues is that in the third mixing indiscriminate mixing, although traditional religion experiences pressure from Christianity is a syncretism that is clearer than similarities and filling the gaps. Hence, it is able, for instance, to relate Jesus with African ancestors or, relate Jesus with *mugaa* (traditional healer). In what Schreiter calls domination, Christianity replaces the traditional religious practices. This is how Christian practices dominate African traditional practices. What Schreiter argues is that in syncretism, the mixing of two religious systems results in loss of basic structure and identity of one or both systems. In conscious or deliberate syncretism, integration is done without fusing compatible practices with the gospel this kind of integration does not allow for compromise. This is what is expected to see in the context where spiritualities are negotiated. I argue that Christians spontaneously seek help from priests, and when that fails, they consult traditional healers. This is seen as mixing of elements from traditional practices, leading to split-level Christianity.

This may not be the case with some of the women because, as some priests argue, Christians who mix both spiritualities may not be aware of the differences. This was explicit with some healers who argue that mixing of both should not be a problem since this is how people are being cultured. The study shows that some Christian women fall within this category of being split Christians because they consult priests and then turn to traditional healers when that fails. But this can be argued differently because of the question of the elements practised by traditional healers. Not all traditional practices are wrong, as argued by the informants in the interviews. For instance, use of herbal medicine does not mean the practice is incompatible. Exorcising evil spirits and regarding Jesus as *mugaa* are other examples of compatible practices and contextualisation. The argument shows how Christian and traditional ways of life represent two different entities that can either harmonize or conflict. O'Donovan furthers this argument when he contends that a number of Africans in the contemporary world are being enticed towards both worlds, and that both play a big role in influencing people's ways of thinking and decision-making. What should be noted is that he strikes a balance on both practices—both are important to African people. He indicates that disagreement arises from the collision between two worlds with totally different values and worldviews, and that people involved in such an environment suffer frustrations and end up blending both practices. Mbiti draws parallels between Christian culture and African traditional religious culture. This shows that the divergence and convergence of both cultures can be understood and drawn from different perspectives. Mbiti further sees conflicting aspects between Christian life and adherents of African traditional religion. He understands the differences as conflict between two cultures European culture and African culture rather than a religious clash (Mbiti,

1991: 190). This understanding shows a practice of cultural syncretism. In contrast to Mbiti's sentiment, I see it as religious conflict rather than cultural. It is the conflict between Christianity as religion and its practices and African traditional religion as another. Following Mbiti's arguments, Kirwen expresses how Christians in Africa south of the Sahara have implicitly behaved as if introduction into the Christian faith is a way of discarding African traditional practices. He shows that both practices move parallel to each other among the Christians:

A few, however, mainly those who have had long-term personal contacts with new Christians, realise that the traditional and Christian religions continue to exist side by side in the minds and the hearts of the new Christians (Kirwen, 1987: xvii).

My understanding of Kirwen's argument is that if they exist parallel to each other, it means they do not mix. Each spirituality is practised exclusively. It is claimed that women practise traditional practices as a result of Christian spiritual practices not meeting local people's needs. Traditional practices present a problem to wrestle with, since the issue is not problematic to some but remains a problem to others. From my point of view, Christian women who practise both do so not because the contemporary Christian Church is superficial but because they have internalised both practices. Thus, both have to exist, though not parallel per se, because to some, either Christian or traditional are adhered to more than the other. It is shown that traditional practices are adhered to after Christian and medical help seem to have failed. Christian help may not be failing, but it is to some because God does not allow it at that particular time. Traditional spiritual practices should be taken into account if suitable balancing is envisioned. Integration of traditional healing, western healing and Christian healing is experienced by women. Western healing and Christian healing are welcome in the Christian Church, but traditional healing is in question because of lack of hygiene and suspicion of using magic, giving a traditional healer a title of witch rather than *mugaa*.

### Response

The Christian Church and theologians are duty-bound to focus on such negotiations between faith and cultures in order to provide an integrated Christian spirituality able to embrace the wider scope of Christian women's spiritual quest. Both should provide literature that can fully address proper negotiation of African traditional spiritual practices and African Christian spiritual practices. As shown in the theoretical framework, both theological and ecclesiological literatures provide negative connotation on the synthesis of both practices, but for me, both need to reinterpret and modify previous literature in a dialectic way. Since the gospel is able to be communicated in a contextual way, there is a need for spirituality that embraces without selling out to contemporary western thoughts and judgements. Syncretism is inevitable to the issues of spiritualities operating side by side. Sometimes spiritualities function differently and therefore may borrow from each other. In this process of give and take, modifications of spiritual elements need to be observed to enable negotiation proper. The empirical study shows that some Christian women live out both spiritual practices. How they live out both varies with conversion and receiving of Jesus Christ as their personal saviour.

When people are brought in a setting of traditional healing practises they discard them after growing up and became a Christian. Both traditional and Christian spiritual practices play an important role in people's lives. In a situation of friction of spiritualities, Christians blend both spiritual practices. What needs to be understood is that although Christians and Christian leaders still hold these beliefs, the Church in Africa, though independent for many years, is yet unable to come to terms with this problem. Some women deal with the problem by living out both spiritual practices and being able to contextualise.

### Perception of the Genesis of Mixture

In different instances, people show that the natives themselves do not have a problem when two spiritual practices are mixed. Some informants have shown that the problem of mixing began with early missionaries. Although the informants disclosed that this blending resulted from a need for a broader spirituality than was offered by missionaries, they also lacked a properly articulated understanding of native cultural practices, thus leading to condemnation of their traditional practices. Christian churches reject this blending because traditional practices were regarded as primal and barbaric.

Missionaries ventured into Africa in the nineteenth century. At the end of the nineteenth century, Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries from Britain, Germany, Spain, Portugal and Italy arrived to preach the gospel in Kenya. While the missionaries preached the gospel, they judged and suspected the cultural traditions of the natives. They condemned the cultural beliefs and practices of the indigenous people and attempted to plant this condemnation wholesale into people's way of life. Africans found connections with Christianity due to modernity or, in other words, improvement of life, while missionaries did not find any connection with African religion. Missionaries were not able to understand what African traditional religion meant to the natives. This led to failure in dialogue or no dialogue at all. On the other side, the missionaries' hegemony meant that dialogue could not take place, causing Africans either to accept or reject the missionaries' way of life entirely. Since Christianity did not meet the needs of the Africans, they continued with their African traditional religion as Christian converts. This resulted in a dichotomy in which Christianity is confessed yet African traditional religion is practised. For Verstaelen, this dual system was more problematic to missionaries than to the African converts since the missionaries did not accept anything to do with African traditional religion into Christian religiosity. Hence, Africans viewed blending Christianity as a religion for modern life with a religion that answered their daily life problems as normal and as a way of ensuring fullness of life. This is an example of how syncretism emerged within the Christian Church (Verstaelen, 2003:124ff). This is why Mugambi, using a child-parent analogue, sees it as difficult for natives to adhere to what has been introduced to them because they are responsible. Mugambi states:

Without exception, missionaries introducing Christianity into a new culture found it quite normal for their converts to adopt ecclesiastic structures identical to their home church. Thus, the new churches automatically adopted the ecclesial structure of the parent's church. It should be noted, however, that the children-parent analog is not entirely consistent with the reality, because children can be

reared according to the norms adopted by their parents but on maturity they are free to choose their own life-style (Mugambi, 1995:99).

It is difficult to control the direction Christian Church adherents take regarding issues pertaining to indigenous practices. Even if they have been brought up familiar with a single religious practice, they may end up in more than one religious practice, no matter what they were introduced to when they were young. This is brought up by intercultural contacts, which also lead to a kind of mixture. As some argue, the advent of Christianity did not prevent Christian converts from living out both practices. Mugambi expresses other aspects, such as the missionaries' attitude toward African culture and religion (Mugambi: 2002:142). He shows how missionaries had a negative perception towards African culture and religion and yet used the local language of the Africans as a medium of communication in the process of evangelism. At the same time, he throws all the blame unto the anthropologists of the nineteenth century, who had nothing to do with evangelism but were interested in social evolutionism that shows the primitivism of the African people (Mugambi, 2002: 142). Mugambi points out that missionary anthropologists, and anthropologists in general, overlooked African cultural values and religion: "Missionary anthropology was a means to an end. It was a means of identifying the weaknesses of the African cultural and religious heritage in order to justify the missionary enterprise" (Mugambi, 2002: 143).

Mugambi shows that in the process of change, continuity should also be expected in regard to African heritage. He states, "In almost every discussion concerning the African heritage, the question of continuity and change tends to predominate" (Mugambi, 1989: 165). This is quite relevant in the context where the society undergoes some change. In such a process, there are some elements that need to be retained and others that must be relocated. As he shows when he talks of continuity and change, this assertion shows the relevance of reconciling compatible elements for the continuity of the past. There must be continuity of traditional practices in the course of change taking place because of both encounters. In his book *What is not Sacred? African Spirituality*, Magesa argues that Africans need to regard what is profane as profane, but what is sacred should not be regarded as profane. He claims that although Christian missionaries refused to recommend the goodness of traditional African spiritual practices and religious culture, these spiritualities are still lived out and experienced by those living them. Magesa is against opposing the religiousness of the African culture and believes that one must acknowledge the truth that there is sacredness in African culture. Not everything is irrelevant and irreligious, but what is religious should be acknowledged and credited. As a result of both missionaries' pessimism about the natives' practices and natives' spiritual thirst being quenched, the natives started blending both practices. Gitonga states that while the converts did practise a European lifestyle at the mission station, these converts turned to indigenous culture and visited traditional healers when they encountered life crises (Gitonga, 2008:52). These healers were consulted even after people were converted to Christianity. Some informant shows that traditional healing is highly therapeutic. This contrasts with western healing because western healing does not offer healing on issues related to witchcraft, curses and spirit-caused sickness. Parratt asserts that the Christian message did not meet the needs of African Christians since it was introduced in foreign clothing.

He further articulates that, due to this presentation of the Christian message in western thought form, theology in Africa necessitates new ways that take an African worldview. To fulfill this task, then, African authenticity and African beliefs are vital factors to be considered for reflection (Parratt, 1997). This is where we see the relevance of the aspect of modification.

### **Reflecting missionary concept and how to deal with the quandary**

Missionaries could have taken a different approach to understand the importance of native culture. This would have been the preparatory point for them to avoid imposing on the Christians and leaving them in a dilemma. Some informants value both practices and feel that those practising both spiritual practices do justice both to their way of life and to the Christian way since almost all Christian women informants claim to be Christians. Christians continue to respond to cultural contact by practising both spiritualities, thus achieving a synthesis between African religion and Christianity. All the same, there are aspects of both dualism and negotiation features.

The point here is not to blame missionaries but to argue that outsiders' viewpoints on cultural and religious practices are very different from insiders' perceptions of their own culture. Unlike outsiders, insiders might see incompatible elements as compatible. This is what one should bear in mind when dealing with missionaries' and anthropologists' perceptions on native cultures, and vice versa. The problem arises when the outsider imposes foreign culture to the insider, rather than simply the gospel itself. When I mention the gospel itself, I mean contextualizing the gospel message in accordance with the Christian way of life. In the nineteenth century, European missionaries were convinced they were doing the "gospel itself"—that is, bringing light to Africans by saving them from their barbaric religion. Christianity is always supposed to bring transformation to traditional practices based on the religious matrix of the people in question. This would enable insiders to relate the gospel of Christ according to their cultural, religious and spiritual needs. There may be a developing interaction or an innovative dialectic between the Christian message and cultures (Bevans, 2002). There might be a way to reconcile the positive traditional spiritual practices and Christian spiritual practices without compromising either because a theology that seeks to be relevant to Christian women ought to recognize its spiritual roots. This theology should, on the other hand, be aware of the fact that no one can name elements that are fully reconciled. The reason behind this argument is that the incompatibility is usually realised on the side of Christianity and not on the side of traditional beliefs and practices. My findings show that MCK and Pentecostal Church Christian women are living out spiritualities new to Church leaders. The extent of dual spirituality among the Christian women is much greater than I believe Church leaders are aware of. There is a need to reconsider spiritual practices, theology of healing and theology of practice. It should be a theology emerging from what has been lived out by Christian adherents and what African theologians have found, like the theology of liberation. One cause of the problem is that Christianity is an occasional religion that requires only Sunday worship services, in comparison to traditional religion, which is an everyday life religion. Rejecting conversion to Christianity, it is not a solution; as Magesa states it, it is also a lack of inculturation

(Magesa, 2014). This can be dealt with by introducing the gospel of Jesus Christ in a given culture in order to unify and transform cultures into a new formation (Magesa, 2014). To deal with official Church discourses, one has to understand the theology of practice by accepting the similarities and differences in both spiritualities. Acceptance of these differences will help in retaining authenticity within those borders. The Christian Church needs to accept the differences in order to facilitate negotiation as a way of avoiding domination. Domination shows that no spiritual match or filling up gaps can be seen. There is a danger of resistance when Christian adherents withdraw from or refuse Christian principles that would oblige them to continue with Christian practices while at the same time secretly engaging in African traditional practices. This is like living a double standard spiritually. To deal with this problem, Church leadership needs to incorporate African traditional spiritual practices in order to recontextualise.

When the Church leadership modifies its practices, the recipient culture becomes a tool to communicate the gospel message to Christian women. When doing modification, care must be taken because this process of reformation can result in postponement or delay of inculturation or quick contextualisation, which can be deceiving to Christian Church leadership. To understand the contention above in relation to contextualisation, one of the informants told me that sometimes she puts a Bible in the pillow to protect her from evil spirits attacking her in the middle of the night. She also wakes up in the middle of the night to pray because this is when her prayer can reach straight to God. The Bible has become a protective measure—a symbol in this context. Christ is involved in prayer to neutralize the power of the enemy. Some believed that writing of letters/symbols in the air and saying "in the name of Jesus" would defeat the power of the enemy. Christian clergy need to be more active in using symbols and prayer in faith, in line with compatible African traditional practices like exorcism, in order to bring about proper understanding of both spiritualities.

### **Conclusion**

This research maps the discussion of spiritual practices among Ameru Christian women in the MCK and the Pentecostal Church. The responses from informants in the study show that some live out both spiritual practices during life crises. According to some, this is against Christian practices and principles, and thus sets up a system of syncretism within Christian Church in Kenya adherents. The spiritual trends practiced by the informants as they engage in physical and spiritual practices were illustrated as paths taken by Christian women in the study. This offers basis for how the mixture of spiritual practices is perceived at different levels of intervention. By discussing the integration of spiritual practices as a way of contextualisation, I have shown how and why Ameru Christian women in the study practise both types of spiritual practices. I have shown that syncretism occurs because Christianity is not able to deal with Christians' contemporary issues. Since missionaries conceived of African traditional religious practices as old-fashioned practices and introduced Christianity as a new religion with different practices, there exists at the foundation a failure by Christians to own their Christianity. But it was found that Christianity can be owned by Christians through integration of compatible elements from both spiritualities.

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