

# Innovative Christian Strategies for Confronting Syncretic Practices in Selected Methodist and Pentecostal Churches in Abogeta Division, Meru County, Kenya

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**Abstract:** A study was carried out to establish the Christian strategies that confront syncretic practices in the church a case of selected mainline Methodist and Pentecostal churches. The objectives of the study were; to identify the forms of syncretism practices practiced by Christian churches in Kenya, to find out the reasons why Christians still practice syncretic practices in Kenya and to evaluate Christian strategies that confront syncretic practices in the churches in Kenya. The target population for this study was all the pastors and sampled members in Pentecostal and Methodist churches in Abogeta division. The study established that; the majority of the respondents was satisfied with the beliefs and practices of the church, of the respondents indicated that some of the church members did visit diviners. The study further established that some of the church members did believe in astrology and fortune-telling, some of the preachers did preach modified versions of the gospel and that some of the Church members were involved in traditional religious practices. The study established that some of the participants were not satisfied spiritually, and could have resulted to syncretic practices, for satisfaction, the preachers had disoriented the gospel to suit their needs, as was revealed by the majority of the participants, the gospel preached in the churches did not meet the spiritual needs of the church members and that the members of the church did not feel protected by their gospel. The study established that; the preachers did teach against syncretism using familiar accounts from the Bible, the church leaders did teach the supremacy of Jesus Christ, and the church leaders should teach and apply salvation by grace through faith, to confront syncretic practices. The study further concluded that spiritual dissatisfaction, preachers not meeting the spiritual needs of the members of the congregation, the Christians did not feel protected by the gospel and the insecurity that led to Christians resulting to witchdoctors. The study recommended that; the preachers should adhere to the actual content of the bible, and lead the Christians to the way of true Christianity, through spiritual nurturing and growth by the preachers.

**Keywords:** syncretism, contextualization, denominational challenges.

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## I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Schreier (1994) has defined syncretism as the mixing of elements of two religious systems to the point where at least one, if not both, of the systems loses basic structure and identity. Pinto (1985) defines it is the fusion of incompatible elements or the mingling of authentic notions and realities of the revealed faith with realities of other spiritual worlds. By this, he is saying that elements of other religions are uncritically borrowed and fused into Christianity, watering down or spoiling Christianity in the process (Chidili, 1997).

Syncretism in Christianity occurs when basic elements of the gospel are replaced by religious elements from the host culture. It often results from a tendency or attempt to undermine the uniqueness of the gospel as found in the Scriptures or the incarnate Son of God. Syncretism designated “a system or rather a tendency of Hellenistic thought which tended to mix and to confuse most diversified cults. It is ‘a fusion of rituals and doctrines’”. The concept finds place in almost all

modern religions as syncretism is a 'blending,' a tampering, a mixing together, and a "bringing together of conflicting ideologies into a unity of thought and/or into a cooperating, harmonious social relationship" (Angeles, 1986).

A glance at some of the most common superstitious beliefs and practices from around the world revealed that while some people follow them meticulously and religiously, others dismiss them as sheer irrationality and hence deplorable (Abhijit, 2010). However, one thing remains certain: there is no culture without its impending superstitions and no amount of sermonizing or education has been able to relief those who are well entrenched in them from the contagious pangs of these eroded religious beliefs.

In the West, syncretism is widespread. In essence, it means "living like everyone else", adopting their world views and mixing them with faith, so that the new soup is palatable to everyone and no one is offended by "fundamentalist" beliefs. It involves downplaying key elements of the Gospel that are considered "old fashioned" or "not cool", so as to be more acceptable, less eccentric. Young people growing up in church have great fear which is almost a phobia about distinctiveness, especially of being rejected because they are different. They do not want to be associated with the image of the small, traditional, suburban church with a hall, a manse and an aging membership. The church of the future must employ culturally sensitive evangelism, without being seduced to conform. Otherwise, the natural process of syncretism will increasingly lead to the acceptance and validation of extra-Biblical offshoots such as Christian feminism, Christian gay groups, atheistic evolution in Christian schools, removing Christ from Christmas celebrations and a host of similar developments in respectable ecclesial circles. The Gospel must be assimilated into each culture and context without compromising the heart of the message, or by diluting the authority of Scripture and the core truths of Christianity. The term contextualization was introduced in 1972 as the Theological Education Fund attempted to formally implement aspects of cultural identity, social change, and popular religion into missions. The Fund proposed how to communicate their Gospel in a more effective format so that converts in the target culture would own and propagate the Gospel. Contextualization is differentiated from syncretism in that it bridges between the core Gospel message and the target culture. It never contradicts Scriptures and remains faithful to the spirit and context of the Message. When Scripture is neither taught, nor integrated, or Scripture is altered for the sake of gaining wider acceptance in a comfortable, viable religion, it results in compromise of basic Christian tenets and syncretism (Kaplan, 1995).

Syncretism has found a fertile ground with the current new religious movements and Pentecostals in African Initiated churches. With such movements syncretism is spreading like wild fire throughout the world. Having detached themselves from the mainline churches, these modern sects have been turned into private businesses by their founders and pastors. With the proliferation, the founders have to cope with challenges, competitions and struggle for customers in the religious world market. They are therefore obliged to advertise their goods befittingly, attempt to outwit other competitors by attracting and keeping as many clients as possible. They scramble for members by all means; that is by preaching only what they would want to hear. Concerning this last, the most often referred to is miracles in connection with wealth, health, power, material well-being, including success in marriage, long life, prosperity, breaking of age-long curses and family woes, destruction of one's enemies, especially witches. These days, no mention is ever made of heaven and hell. Heaven is either materially here or nowhere (Armellini, 2002).

Church history is filled with the struggle against syncretism from political, social, religious and economic sources. In New Testament times, Greek, Roman and so-called "mystery religions" sought to undermine the Christian community through syncretism. In subsequent centuries (particularly after Christianity became the official religion of the state following the conversion of Constantine in 312 AD) it was easier to undermine Christian faith by mandating "toleration" rather than persecuting Christians, which only led to martyrs.

## II. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR SYNCRETISM

Syncretism demands that worship of God be shared with competing deities. This occurred constantly in the Old Testament, as the values of the Canaanites, Babylonians, Assyrians and others permeated ancient Israel. On one occasion, the Prophet Elijah challenged the nation to stop dithering between two opinions and decide whether Jehovah or Baal was the deity worth following (1 Kings 18:21). The Baal and other gods of the Canaanites had great influence on the people of God. One of the earliest expressions of the rejection of the amalgamation of incompatible beliefs is in the Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians. St. Paul makes it clear that the Christian belief is based on the risen Lord, and not from the synthesis of religious beliefs or practices from one religion or the other. The Christians were warned not to be captivated

by “an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

Regardless of culture or personal background, believers do not have to live by the standards and patterns of everyone else, because they are ‘born of God’ and their Biblical praxis is predicated on the person and presence of His Son. Let us allow Him to bring this about in a transforming way.

**Key questions which guided the study were:**

- i. What are the forms of syncretism practiced by Christian churches in Abogeta Division?
- ii. Why do Christians still practice syncretism in Abogeta Division?
- iii. What innovative strategies does the study provide for confronting syncretism practices

### **III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was based on Functionalism theory by Émile Durkheim (1858–1917). Durkheim saw the concept of the sacred as the defining characteristic of religion, not faith in the supernatural. He saw religion as a reflection of the concern for society. He based his view on recent research regarding totemism among the Australian aboriginals. With totemism he meant that each of the many clans had a different object, plant, or animal that they held sacred and that symbolizes the clan. Durkheim saw totemism as the original and simplest form of religion. According to Durkheim, the analysis of this simple form of religion could provide the building blocks for more complex religions. He asserted that moralism cannot be separated from religion. The sacred, that is, religion reinforces group interest that clash very often with individual interests. Durkheim held the view that the function of religion is group cohesion often performed by collectively attended rituals. He asserted that these group meeting provided a special kind of energy, which he called effervescence, that made group members lose their individuality and to feel united with the gods and thus with the group. Durkheim saw magic not as religious, but as an individual instrument to achieve something. The empirical basis for Durkheim's view has been severely criticized when more detailed studies of the Australian aboriginals surfaced. More specifically, the definition of religion as dealing with the sacred only, regardless of the supernatural, is not supported by studies of these aboriginals. The view that religion has a social aspect, at the very least, introduced in a generalized very strong form by Durkheim has become influential and uncontested. With the current situation in the society, the evil, the hardship of life, the challenges, have led to Christians looking for alternative sources of solace. Some of the Christians have resulted to syncretism owing to the fact that they feel the Christianity does not adequately address their needs.

### **IV. CRITICAL REVIEW OF THEORIES**

#### **Freud's Theory of Religion**

Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) saw religion as an illusion. With illusion, Freud means a belief that people want very much to be true. Freud attempted to explain why religion persists in spite of the lack of evidence for its tenets. Freud asserted that religion is a largely unconscious neurotic response to repression. With repression, Freud meant that civilized society demands that we cannot fulfil all our desires immediately, but that they have to be repressed. Rational arguments to a person holding a religious conviction will not change the neurotic response of a person, in contrast to Tylor and Frazer who saw religion as rational conscious, but primitive and mistaken attempt to explain the natural world. In his 1939 book *Moses and Monotheism* Freud proposed that Moses' monotheism derived from Akhenaten.

This view is not supported by biblical accounts and differs from scholarly theories. Freud's view on religion was embedded in his larger theory of psychoanalysis. Apart from theorizing, Freud's theories were developed by studying patients who were left free. Psychoanalysis has been assessed as non-scientific. Though his attempt to the historical origins of religions have not been accepted, his generalized view that all religions originate from unfulfilled psychological needs are still seen as offering a credible explanation in some cases. In this case, the Christians in Kenya are perceived to be true believers of Christian religion, and that in their lifestyles, they are expected to live by their belief. Engaging in syncretism implies that the Christians have lessened their belief in Christianity, and started acknowledging supremacy of other powers.

### **Mircea Eliade Theory of Sacred-Profane**

Mircea Eliade's (1907 – 1986) approach grew out of the phenomenology of religion. Like Otto, he saw religion as something special and autonomous that cannot be reduced to the social, economic or psychological alone. He saw the sacred as central to religion, but differing from Durkheim, he views the sacred as often dealing with the supernatural, not with the clan or society. The daily life of an ordinary person is connected to the sacred by the appearance of the sacred, called hierophany. Theophany (an appearance of a god) is a special case of it. Eliade wrote that archaic men wish to participate in the sacred. Archaic men long to return to lost paradise, outside the historic time, as explained in Eliade's book *Eternal return* (Eliade) to escape meaninglessness.

The primitive man could not endure that his struggle to survive had no meaning. He wrote that man had a nostalgia (longing) for an otherworldly perfection. Archaic man wishes to escape the terror of time and saw time as cyclic. Historical religions, like Christianity, Judaism revolted against this older concept of cyclic time. They provided meaning and contact with the sacred in history through the God of Israel. Eliade's methodology was studying comparative religion of various cultures and societies more or less regardless of other aspects of these societies, often relying on second hand reports. He also used some personal knowledge of other societies and cultures for his theories, among others his knowledge of Hindu folk religion. He has been criticized for vagueness in defining his key concepts. Like Frazer and Tylor he has also been accused of out-of-context comparisons of religious beliefs of very different societies and cultures. He has also been accused of having a pro-religious bias (Christian and Hindu), though this bias does not seem essential for his theory.

### **Evans-Pritchard Theory of Primitive Religion**

Evans-Pritchard argued that the religion of the Azande (witchcraft and oracles) cannot be understood without the social context and its social function. Witchcraft and oracles played a great role in solving disputes among the Azande. In this respect he agreed with Durkheim, though he acknowledged that Frazer was right that their religion also had an intellectual explanatory aspect. The Azande's faith in witchcraft and oracles was quite logical and consistent once some fundamental tenets were accepted. Loss of faith in the fundamental tenets could not be endured because of its social importance and hence they had an elaborate system of explanations (or excuses) against disproving evidence. Besides an alternative system of terms or school of thought did not exist. He was heavily critical about earlier theorists of primitive religion asserting that they made statements about primitive people without having enough inside knowledge to make more than a guess.

### **Contextualization of Christianity**

Contextualization is the process of assigning meaning as a means of interpreting the environment within which a text or action is executed. Contextualization captures in method and perspective the challenge of relating the Gospel to culture. The term contextualization includes all that is implied in indigenization or enculturation, but also seeks also to include the realities of contemporary, secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice. Contextualization both extends and corrects the older terminology. While indigenization tends to focus on the purely cultural dimension of human experience, contextualization broadens the understanding of culture to include social, political, and economic questions. In this way, culture is understood in more dynamic and flexible ways, and is seen not as closed and self-contained, but as open and able to be enriched by an encounter with other cultures and movements. Contextualization is used in the study of Bible translations in relation to their relevant cultural settings. The word continues to be used theologically, mainly in the sense of contextualizing the biblical message as perceived in the missionary mandate originated by Jesus in the gospel accounts. However, since the early 1970s, the word's meaning has widened. It is now used by secular, religious and political groups to render their message into different settings by adjusting or accommodating words, phrases or meanings into understandable contexts in respondent cultures.

Contextualization was adopted by the Presbyterian Church in the United States by a gathering of scholars in the Theological Education Fund in its missionary mandate to communicate the Gospel and Christian teachings in other cultures. Prior to the use of the word contextualization many cross-cultural linguists, anthropologists and missionaries had been involved in such communication approaches such as in accommodating the message or meanings to another cultural setting.

## V. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

### Position of the Church on Syncretism

The history of the early Church is the history of how the Church opposed syncretism and articulated her identity. As early as 70 AD, the Church was aware that it had a distinct identity that governed its relationships with other spiritual traditions. It was on this basis that it dealt with Judaism from which it emerged, the mystery religions which abounded at the time, and emperor worship which anchored the Roman social and political order. There was the controversy of the Ebionites, who wished to keep Christianity tightly bound with Judaism. There were the Gnostics, the Marcionites, Valentinians, Docetists, Monarchianists etc. The church declared their outlook as being incompatible with the Christian faith (Green, 1994).

One of the negative contributions of the current new religious movements to syncretism and superstition is the purely materialistic gospel preached by their men and women of God. Turning their churches which are already personal property, assets or estates, into commercial entities, founders do their utmost best to advertise their enterprises and goods in the most attractive and flamboyant fashion that today's world would want to hear. It is in this way that the authentic Christian message is lost sight of, jeopardized, diluted, polluted and blended with things that have absolutely nothing to do with the Christian vocation. As we know, syncretism is a misappropriation, and therefore an adulteration and a dilution of the dogmas, doctrines, decrees, tenets and the creedal system of a particular religion on modifying them for one's personal motives. In this sense the materialistic salvation and prosperity gospel in vogue today constitute a sharp and remarkable departure from the authenticity of the original creed of the mainline churches.

### Syncretism Situation in Kenya

In 1994, the President of Kenya (Daniel T arap Moi) appointed His Grace Archbishop Nicodemus Kirima of the Catholic Arch-diocese of Nyeri to head the Presidential Commission of Devil worship. The commission undertook a thorough inquiry into devil worship. The data collected was so perplexing and scandalous such that the president demanded that they be concealed from the public (Wachege, 2000). The report was indicative that devil worship and occultism pervades all the secular and sacred realms of life, with some faith-healers, pastors, evangelists, priests, sister-nuns, students, pupils, top government officials and common (Citizens) implicated. Very pious Christians are drifting to occultism, thus doubling up as magicians and miracle or wonder workers. This is done either for fame, (money) or as poverty eradication strategy.

In Kenya, Christian crusades, which have become the order of the day, are reported to have brought about healing and conversions, that is, several people rising from wheel chairs, leaving crutches, blind eyes and deaf ears being opened and verified in public. Such occurrences have raised a lot of controversies. Where medical verifications have been sought to confirm the healing, the findings have been more scandalous than affirming the work of the Holy Spirit. Some people call this kind of 'holy spirit' Roho mtaka chafu or Roho mtaka kitu (a ridiculed fashion of the Holy Spirit). Cases have been cited where healthy people have been planted in the meetings with crutches or on wheel chairs, with instructions in advance, to step forward and abandon their crutches or wheel chairs at the crucial moment of 'healing' (Kigame, 2000). In the media, the televangelists have been seen or heard claiming that miracles and wonderful signs will occur to those who watch and listen to their television broadcasts. They claim that people will be canceling funeral service by bringing their dead person in a casket before a Television screen as the programme is being transmitted, so that the dead will be raised.

Religion in Kenya has played a catalytic role in strengthening people in their suffering. As problems strike majority of the people, millions are thronging in the churches, cinema theatres, stadiums, and halls for prayers and healing. In such situations some preachers are making their fortunes. While most of the congregation members are living below the poverty line, the leaders of these groups are leading posh lives. They are normally very expensively dressed, exhibit opulence, and live in exclusive luxury. For instance, a casual look private lives of Kenya's televangelists confirms this. They teach that poverty is anti-Christ, and so their members should be rich. It has been reported in our media that when some televangelists conduct a rally in Kenya, they collect colossal sums of money as offering from majority of those who are poor (Sunday Nation, 14/5/2000). While some of those seeking healing feel healed and elated by such faith healers, others feel confused. They doubt the miraculous healing because of the craving these healers have for money and wealth. Yet others opine that the exegetical and hermeneutical methods employed by the faith-healers have no Biblical foundation, and are at best an abuse and embarrassment to Christianity. It is mixing prosperity gospel with the true gospel for selfish gains.

### **Forms of Syncretism Practices Practiced by Christians**

Over a period of time, superstitions have rooted themselves firmly in our society, so much so that it is virtually impossible for the person to ignore them. For example, a politician resorting to the astrological predictions is not at all rare. Such superstitious practices are found all over the world. And some people just can't seem to survive without them. It has been observed however, that whenever and wherever there are superstitions, such are bound to intermarry with other orthodox creeds thereby resulting in syncretism. That is how both superstitions and syncretism become inextricably associated and are always found together, as we will see in a while.

Syncretism is well imbedded in Africa. Umoh (2012,) has affirmed that "Our religious inclination like any other African countries is very syncretistic. Some people call it syncretism, but it may be more like dual religious allegiance, where Christianity is practiced in the daytime and occult practice is done at night. Many of the pastors will preach from the pulpit that this type of thing is wrong, but secretly take part in it at night. There is the mentality, especially in African Initiated Churches, where the prosperity gospel is preached, that you do what you have to do to get ahead.

Another form of modern day syncretism in the church is usually nurtured and propagated during interreligious dialogues. Because the world is becoming one politically, technically and economically there is a felt need to be drawn together in a universal brotherhood. Religions are also called upon to unit with one another. Christians, Muslims, and African Traditional Religion (ATR) are told to find common beliefs to unite them, and in many cases, this places a political pressure upon Christian churches, and the end result is syncretism and the compromise of the gospel. Here, the quality and compatibility of religions are justified by subsuming their various categories under generic categories. For instance, we say that the writings of various religions are 'sacred'. We speak of the different deities of the different religions as 'transcendent'. We say we serve the same God (Udoete, 2002).

Syncretism is also found among African Independent Churches, which were founded as a consequence of resentment over missionary and colonial control. These churches try to reclaim some of their traditional beliefs and practices that had been rejected by missionaries. These beliefs and practices are inserted into Christianity without any criticism; this is expressed in their songs, dance and rituals especially. Sometimes, these elements are placed side by side to the gospel and sometimes exalted above the Christian tradition. When traditional beliefs and practices which are not compatible with the Christian belief are included in the Christian faith, the result is syncretism (Gehman, 2001).

Syncretism is predominant when it comes to religions and cultures. As far as religion is concerned, it is a well-known fact that most of the modern religions evolved from various ancient beliefs; hence the tendency to carry-over and blend with the former creedal milieu. From the religious perspective then, it is in this blending that is found the adulterating character of syncretism. This makes syncretism an inauthentic tenet gotten by combining bits of various creeds, ideologies and views – even contradictory ones – resulting in a formulation of a doctrine that is completely new and sometimes unidentifiable with any of its original stuffs. Such an espousing is far beyond the scope and in fact a deviation from the target of enculturation, which for African Christians involves embracing the Christian message in an African manner (Umoh 2012).

### **Reasons for Syncretism among Christians**

It is in attempting to make for this necessity that the mushroom churches, as they are sometimes called, go beyond the search for cultural identity or enculturation to adulterate the very essence of the Christian message by embellishing it with superstitious and syncretistic doctrines. This is done in a bit to attract clients. It must be borne in mind that most of the founders of these movements broke off from the mainstream Christian churches to establish their own. They deserted for several reasons. At times it was due to some disagreement in matters of doctrines, leadership or finance. This last, the economic reason, seems to constitute the main reason for the endless proliferation of nascent Christian churches in Africa. This is because most of the New Religious Movements have been established for purely economic reasons (Enzeweke & Madu 2006).

The early Western missionaries assumed to plant uniform Christian missions with the reflection of western culture with little or insignificant forms of adaptation. Lately, the goal of every missionary work is to plant Christian churches that are both true to the word of God and historical tradition and indigenous at the same time. In the attempt to create this balance, most times, churches fail to remove the aspect of the indigenous culture that are contrary to the gospel and living tradition of the Church. Because of this incompatible mixture, they fail to penetrate the depth of the Christian message and find themselves oscillating between the redeeming gospel of Christ and their constricting traditions without settling for any (Comaroff, 1992).

Another cause of syncretism is the policy of religious tolerance. In this case, syncretism becomes an effort to plug all the gaps in a given religion (Chidili, 1997). The innovations in Christianity is said not to provide for some of the functions the traditional values perform. The gospel displaces them without replacement. This is one of the reasons why the African Independent Church Movement is growing by geometrical proportion. These independent churches provide traditional needs for spontaneous prayer, exorcism and faith healing lacking in established churches (Luzbetak, 1992). While these satisfy the spiritual hunger of many Africans, they could have far reaching negative effects when exaggerated.

These new era preachers adopt many strategies and tactics to outwit their rivals. They excite, attract and draw their clientele mainly from among the youth and the middle-aged, both employed and unemployed; for the unemployed to help them secure employment in Jesus name and for the employed to enable them to find promotion in Jesus mighty name – all these in materialistic terms. This is syncretism tainting the message of the gospel with materialism. The founders/leaders are usually charismatic individuals, literate, and often loud and flamboyant in their life-style. They adopt very modern methods of preaching employing electronic gadgets and modern music. Their overall bearing in life is generally Western-oriented. Some of them employ all kinds of modern means of promotional advertisement to propagate their message. With all these, the corruption of the message of Christianity cannot but be obvious; giving way to newly formulated superstitious doctrines to compliment whatever is retained of the original teachings of the mother mainline churches from where they emerged (Corrilus, 1986).

## VI. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The descriptive survey is chosen for the study because it allows the researchers to study phenomena that do not allow for manipulation of variables (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). Since the study involved human subjects, and the information needed cannot be manipulated, the researcher collected information on the state of affairs in division, without manipulating any variables making the design appropriate for the study. According to Lockesh (1984) descriptive research studies are designed to obtain pertinent and precise information concerning the status of phenomena and whenever possible to draw valid general conclusions from the facts discovered.

### Target Population

Target population refers to the entire group of individuals or objects to which researchers are interested in generalizing the conclusions (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The target or accessible populations for this study was all the 28 pastors and 947 congregation members in Pentecostal and Methodist churches in Abogeta division.

### Research Instruments

The study utilized a questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire was used for data collection because as Kiess and Bloomquist (1985) observe that questionnaires offer considerable advantage in administration; presents an even stimulus potentiality to large numbers of people simultaneously and provides the investigation with an easy accumulation of data. Borg and Gall (1983) emphasize that whereas the open ended type of questions give informants freedom of response, the closed ended types facilitate consistency of certain data across informants. The questionnaires contained both open and closed ended items.

## VII. DATA ANALYSIS

Data from the field was collected, cleaned, coded and recorded. Data collected by use of the questionnaire, was coded, and analyzed, using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 17 for windows. Data tape recorded during the interview was transcribed verbatim. The researcher read the transcribed data thoroughly to segment it into coherent themes. This enabled the researcher to identify data segments that are critical in addressing the research questions. Analysis procedures employed involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically, whereby similar responses were tallied to come up with frequency counts and then percentages calculated based on the total number of responses. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequency counts, percentages, modes and means. Bell (1993) maintains that when making the results known to a variety of readers, percentages have a considerable advantage over more complex statistics. Data is presented in summary form using the frequency distribution tables, bar charts and pie charts.

### Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation

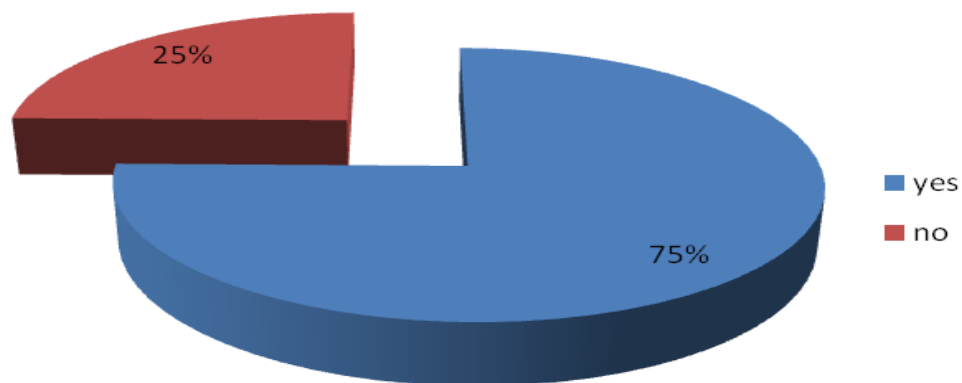
The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- i. What are the forms of syncretism is practiced by Christian churches in Kenya?
- ii. Why do Christians still practice syncretism practices in Kenya?
- iii. What strategies do Christians employ to confront syncretism in the churches in Kenya?

The findings were presented thematically with the themes developed from the research questions.

### Forms of Syncretism Practices Practiced by Christian Churches

The study sought to establish if the respondents were satisfied with the traditions of the church, and the responses obtained are presented on the Figure below.



**Figure 1: Respondents satisfied with the traditions of the church**

The study established that the majority (75%) of the respondents were satisfied with the beliefs and practices of the church, as opposed to (25%) who were not. The finding imply that the (25%) of the respondents who were not satisfied with the beliefs of the church, may be the ones practicing syncretism. With all these, the corruption of the message of Christianity cannot be obvious; giving way to newly formulated superstitious doctrines to compliment whatever is retained of the original teachings of the mother mainline churches from where they emerged (Corrilius, 1986).

The study further sought to establish the forms of syncretism that the church members were involved in. the findings were tabulated on a 5 point likert scale, with the responses as Never as (N), Seldom as (S), Occasionally as (O), frequently as (F) and Always as (A), and the findings obtained are revealed on the table below;

**Table 1: Forms of syncretism that the church members were involved in**

| Statement                                                                  | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
|                                                                            | N    | S    | O    | F    | A    |
| Church members do visit diviners                                           | 31.2 | 47.3 | 17.3 | 4.3  | 0    |
| Some members of my church do visit witchdoctors                            | 53.8 | 26.9 | 12.9 | 4.3  | 2.2  |
| Members do believe in astrology and fortune telling                        | 31.2 | 33.3 | 31.2 | 4.3  | 0    |
| Some of the preachers do preach modified versions of the gospel            | 30.1 | 24.7 | 26.9 | 18.3 | 0    |
| Some of the Church members are involved in traditional religious practices | 19.4 | 44.1 | 19.4 | 10.8 | 6.5  |
| Some of the members of the congregation take part in oaths                 | 22.6 | 31.2 | 33.3 | 8.6  | 4.3  |
| Members of the congregation do believe in superstitions                    | 25.8 | 23.7 | 34.4 | 8.6  | 7.5  |
| Some church members are involved in traditional rituals                    | 26.9 | 21.5 | 35.5 | 5.4  | 10.8 |

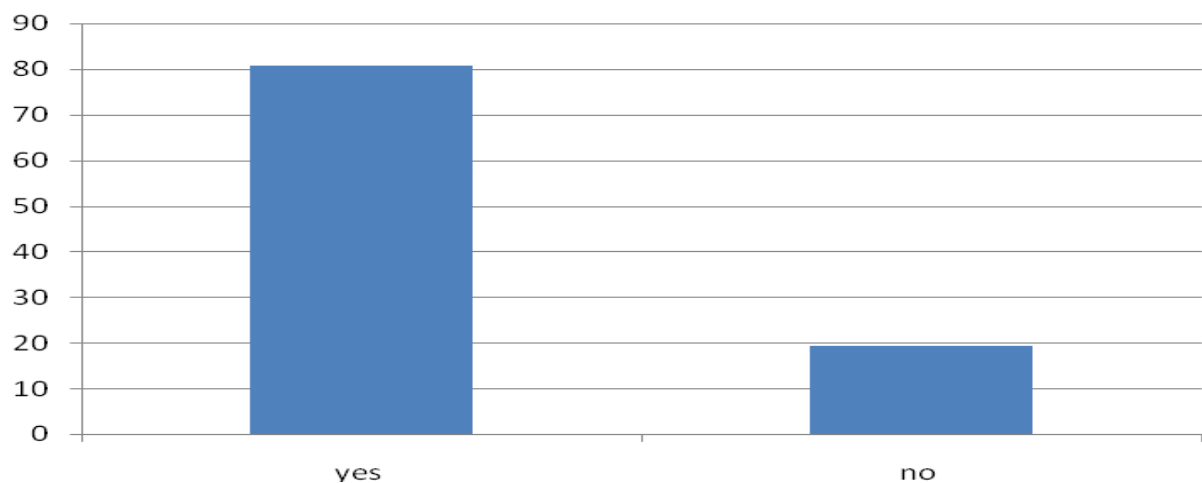
The information on above table revealed that the majority (47.3%) of the respondents indicated that some of the church members did visit diviners, seldom. This information revealed that the Christians did admit to visiting diviners. The study further established that some of the members of the church did visit diviners, as was revealed by some of the church members, who admitted they did so occasionally (12.9%), (4.4%) frequently and (2.2%) who indicated always.

The study revealed that some of the church members did believe in astrology and fortune telling, as was revealed by (31.2%) of the respondents who admitted to doing so, occasionally, and 4.3% frequently. The study also established that some of the preachers did preach modified versions of the gospel, as was revealed by some (26.9%) of the respondents who admitted to the statement, occasionally, and 18.3% frequently. The study showed that some of the Church members were involved in traditional religious practices occasionally, as was revealed by the majority (33.3%) of the respondents. The study further established that the members of the congregations did take part in oaths occasionally, as was revealed by the majority (33.3%) of the respondents. Gehman (2001) has confirmed that traditional beliefs and practices, which are not compatible with the Christian belief, are included in the Christian faith, they result to syncretism.

The study further established that members of the congregation occasionally did believe in superstitions, as was revealed by the majority (34.4%) of the respondents. The findings agree with Abhijit, (2010) who stated that some of the most common superstitious beliefs and practices from around the world revealed that while some people follow them meticulously and religiously, others dismiss them as sheer irrationality and hence deplorable. The study further established that some church members were involved in traditional rituals, as was revealed by the majority (35.5%) of the respondents.

#### Reasons why Christians Still Practice Syncretism Practices

The study sought to establish if the participants were spiritually satisfied in their churches, and the responses obtained are revealed on the table figure below



**Figure 2: if the respondents were spiritually satisfied in their churches**

The study established that the majority (80.6%) of the respondents were spiritually satisfied in the church, while (19.4%) were not. This information is an indication that some (19.4%) of the respondents were not satisfied spiritually, and could have resulted to syncretic practices, for satisfaction.

The study further sought to establish if the respondents ever had a thought of visiting diviners. The results obtained are presented on the table below.

**Table 2: Respondents ever had a thought of visiting diviners**

| Responses    | Frequency | Percentage   |
|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| Yes          | 8         | 8.6          |
| No           | 85        | 91.4         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>93</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

The study established that the majority (91.4%) of the respondents indicated that they never had a thought of visiting the diviners, while (8.6%) revealed that they ever had that thought. These findings reveal that some percentage of Christians directly admitted to having thoughts of practicing syncretism.

The study further sought to establish reasons why Christians still practice syncretism practices. The respondents were asked to give their opinion and the responses are revealed on the table below:

**Table 3: Reasons why Christians still practice syncretism practices**

| Statement                                                                                                            | 5<br>SA | 4<br>A | 3<br>U | 2<br>D | 1<br>SD |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| The preachers have disoriented the gospel to suit their needs                                                        | 20.4    | 54.8   | 0      | 18.3   | 6.5     |
| The gospel preached in the churches does not meet the spiritual needs of the church members.                         | 11.8    | 40.9   | 0      | 20.4   | 26.9    |
| The members do not feel protected by their gospel, and hence result to alternative sources of spiritual satisfaction | 3.2     | 67.7   | 11.8   | 4.3    | 12.9    |
| The people need to protect their property and the church preachers do not help them                                  | 16.1    | 21.5   | 11.8   | 22.6   | 28.0    |
| The increase in insecurity and theft cases leading to the Christians turning to witchdoctors                         | 14.0    | 34.4   | 11.8   | 20.4   | 19.4    |
| The Christian churches are tolerant of the syncretism practices practiced by members                                 | 19.4    | 45.2   | 4.3    | 22.6   | 8.6     |
| The preachers fail to meet the spiritual needs of the church members                                                 | 4.3     | 58.1   | 7.5    | 17.2   | 12.9    |

The study established that the respondents agreed that the preachers had disoriented the gospel to suit their needs, as was revealed by the majority (54.8%) of the respondents. In the attempt to create this balance, most times, churches fail to remove the aspect of the indigenous culture that are contrary to the gospel and living tradition of the Church. Because of this incompatible mixture, they fail to penetrate the depth of the Christian message and find themselves oscillating between the redeeming gospel of Christ and their constricting traditions without settling for any (Comaroff, 1992).

The study further established that the gospel preached in the churches did not meet the spiritual needs of the church members, as was revealed by the majority (40.9%) of the respondents who agreed. As Schreiter (1994) defines syncretism as the mixing of elements of two religious systems to the point where at least one, if not both, of the systems loses basic structure and identity.

The study further established that the members of the church did not feel protected by their gospel, and hence resulted to alternative sources of spiritual satisfaction, as was agreed by the majority (67.7%) of the respondents. Abogurin (1988) notes that in exorcism, some healers mistake their own wishes for the will of God to ascribe to the benevolent spirits an aspiration which really comes from malevolent forces or from natural dislikes. The study established that the respondents disagreed that people practiced syncretism in effort to protect their property and the church preachers do not help them, as was revealed by the majority (28.0%) of the respondents.

The increase in insecurity and theft cases leading to the Christians turning to witch-doctors, was another reason that Christians agreed that it led to syncretism as was indicated by the majority (34.4%) of the respondents. The study further established that Christian churches are tolerant of the syncretism practices practiced by members, as was revealed by the majority (45.2%) of the respondents. Kigame (2000) confirms that in Kenya, cases have been cited where healthy people have been planted in the meetings with crutches or on wheel chairs, with instructions in advance, to step forward and abandon their crutches or wheel chairs at the crucial moment of 'healing'. The majority (58.1%) of the respondents revealed that the preachers failed to meet the spiritual needs of the church members, leading to syncretism.

### Summary of the Main Findings of the Study

The study sought to establish the Christian strategies that confront syncretism practices in selected Methodist and Pentecostal churches in Abogeta Division, Meru County, Kenya. The first objective of the study sought to identify the forms of syncretism practices practiced by Christian churches in Kenya. The study established that; the majority (75%) of the respondents was satisfied with the beliefs and practices of the church, (47.3%) of the respondents indicated that some of the church members did visit diviners. The study further established that some of the church members did believe in

astrology and fortune telling, some of the preachers did preach modified versions of the gospel and that some of the Church members were involved in traditional religious practices. The study further established that the members of the congregations did take part in oaths and that some church members were involved in traditional rituals.

The study established that 19.4% of the respondents were not satisfied spiritually, and could have resulted to syncretic practices, for satisfaction, the preachers had disoriented the gospel to suit their needs, as was revealed by the majority (54.8%) of the respondents, the gospel preached in the churches did not meet the spiritual needs of the church members and that the members of the church did not feel protected by their gospel. The increase in insecurity and theft cases leading to the Christians turning to witch-doctors, was another reason that Christians agreed that it led to syncretism and that Christian churches are tolerant of the syncretism practices practiced by members.

The study established that the preachers did teach against syncretism using familiar stories from the bible, the church leaders did teach the supremacy of Jesus Christ, and the church leaders should teach and apply salvation by grace through faith, to confront syncretic practices. The religious leaders should explain and apply that there is one God and only one way to Him, in order to discourage syncretism, and the church leaders should contrast the ways of Christ and the lifestyle of adherents of syncretism, in order to discourage syncretism.

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher concluded that;

- i. Syncretism was being practiced by some of the Christians in Abogeta division, in the forms of visiting diviners, astrologers and witchdoctors, and preachers preaching the edited versions of gospel.
- ii. The study further concludes that spiritual dissatisfaction, preachers not meeting the spiritual needs of the members of the congregation, the Christians did not feel protected by the gospel and the insecurity, that led to Christians resulting to witchdoctors
- iii. The study further established that the Christian teachers did teach on the biblical standpoint on syncretism, and application of salvation by grace, to confront syncretism in the churches.

### Recommendations based on the Study

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that;

- i. The preachers refrain from modifying the content of the gospel, to suit their financial needs. Rather, they should adhere to the actual content of the bible, and lead the Christians to the way of true Christianity, through spiritual nurturing and growth.
- ii. The church leaders should not only focus on development issues, but strive to meet the spiritual needs of their members, through nurturing and teachings. They should actively take part in teaching the members of the congregation on ways to avoid syncretic practices. This would enable them to withstand the temptations of engaging in syncretism
- iii. The congregation members should be openly discouraged from engaging in syncretic practices, and should be enlightened on the effects of such engagements. They should be encouraged to be seeking refuge in the almighty God, as Christians.
- iv. The church leaders should nurture the members towards being true believers of Christianity, and believing in supremacy of their Lord. They should emphasize to them that the Christ is the only way to eternal life, and that God is Omnipotent. This will enable them to depend on their God for all their needs, security included.

### Suggestions for Further Research

Further research is suggested on;

- i. The effectiveness of the preachers, in nurturing spiritual growth of the members of the congregation in churches in Kenya
- ii. A study should be carried out on the approaches that the church leaders take to discourage syncretism in Kenya.
- iii. A further study should be carried out on the competence of the preachers in preaching contents of the bible in churches in Kenya.

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