MISSIONARY WORK IN KENYA AND AFRICAN RESPONSE: IMPLICATIONS FOR PASTORAL CARE WITH YOUNG ADULTS

by Phyllis Muraya

Introduction
In the light of the Christianization of Africa by European and American missionaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, debates have raged about the response of the indigenous people to the Gospel and to Western-style education that was a tool of evangelization. My thesis is that Africans responded, and indeed have continued to respond variously, redrawing the psycho-spiritual contours in an ongoing process whose residual effects shape experiences generations later. This process has been ongoing for more than a century and although the African church is largely locally led, the ramifications of the missionary enterprise remain an inescapable reality for all indigenous people, Christian or not. The dynamism of human cultures as they oscillate between resilience and transformation forms a backdrop against which Africans have been active players, not blank slates on which others have been writing at will.

I join the conversation as a practising Christian in the Roman Catholic Church with deep Presbyterian roots. My interest emanates from my current involvement in pastoral work (as a counsellor and spiritual director) in Tangaza College, a Roman Catholic university college in Kenya that forms women and men, lay and religious, for different ministries in Africa and beyond. It is our hope that through the pastoral care programme the students are supported in their formation to become more integrated persons who will eventually make effective heralds of the good news of Jesus Christ, irrespective of ministry. I came to Tangaza with a negative outlook on most aspects of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and have been challenged to review this stance as a result of my clinical experience and interaction with people who hold different perspectives. Theological reflection on the current Roman Catholic Church’s attitude towards traditional cultures and religions has been a further incentive. This paper articulates that process.

1 Initially Presbyterians, my family became Roman Catholics when I was 12 years old.
2 With about 30 percent from Kenya the students come from 31 countries, 18 of which are African.
I will begin with a brief overview of the missionary enterprise and a description of how the African peoples have received the Gospel message. This will enable me to outline some of the main tenets of ATR and show how they were viewed in light of the Christian message. At the heart of the paper are several vignettes from clinical experience through which I intend to illustrate how the ATR-missionary encounter has continued to play out in the psycho-spiritual health of young indigenous Christians. A study of these encounters leads to an examination of some of the ways in which re-rooting has been sought, especially through the Instituted African Churches (or IAC’s). In the final section, the paper argues that some of the people who embrace Christianity are able to break from the past religious system and find a new identity in Christianity, while others are not, hence the frequently observed syncretism (Idemudia, 2003; Gichinga, 2007). The voices heard in the dialogue will largely be those of missionaries and of theologians, African and otherwise.

My purpose in entering this dialogue is to tease out residual cultural elements that underpin some of the psycho-spiritual issues presented for counselling and spiritual direction by young Christians. Experience working with them for several years points to nagging conflicts that neither readily surface nor are easily resolved, mainly due to prejudice towards ATR. An understanding of these factors and how they operate will lead to greater empathy, better contextualization and hence more effective practice helping young African Christians to synthesise their faith with their cultural grounding. Finally, I want to encourage others involved in pastoral care to engage in critical review of the fundamental dialectic between ATR and Christianity that may underpin some of the issues with which they are dealing.

Methodology

I have chosen to locate the methodological approach to this paper in case studies for several reasons. First, as Bill Gillman says, case studies seek to answer questions whose answers lie “in the case(s) setting”; questions and answers which need to be extracted and reassembled (2000, pp.1-2). Second, case studies deal with people in the context of their own human experience, and therefore present us with excellent material for the study of human phenomena. A third advantage of case studies lies in the fact that the researcher can use intuition or tacit knowledge (Robson, 1993). Case studies, however, can be viewed as “soft

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3 Invariably termed Independent, Indigenous or Instituted, these churches are remarkable by their ability to choose whatever suits them both in the Bible and African Traditional Religion and blend it to form a type of hybrid Christianity that is uniquely African and original. They seem to have found perfect synthesis between the two milieus.
options” prone to biased, perfunctory, dishonest, and incompetent treatment unless the researcher is determined to be rigorous, honest, and thorough.

The use of clinical material, human texts, or according to Charkes Gerkin (1984), “living human documents,” makes it feasible for a researcher to analyse human behaviours as they unfold in a historical context. The three cases presented in this paper have been selected out of many others on the ground that they are typical of the kind of study being undertaken. According to Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman (1993), the selection is a kind of purposive sampling, which is a key feature of case studies. This theory-driven sampling favours cases that are information-rich and that clearly display the phenomenon under scrutiny.

Finally, I have found it necessary to indulge in a brief historical perspective to bring to light the major forces colouring the arena in which the discourse unfolds.

Christian evangelization in Kenya
While the missionary imperative was always an integral part of Christianity (Julian, 2006 p.7), some periods have been more “missionary” than others. Following Christ’s commission to his disciples to go to the whole world and evangelize all peoples (Mt 28:19), groups of his followers have always done so, hence the spread of Christianity through the Mediterranean world, Western Europe, and North America before its return to Africa which saw the coming of missionaries to East Africa (indeed all over sub-Saharan Africa) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The missionary imperative was rekindled by the 18th century evangelical Revival (Bediako, 1999) and jolted to action by Dr. David Livingstone’s passionate appeal to the British government to open up the interior of the “dark continent” through colonization, commerce, Christianity, and civilization. Parallel to the political “scramble for Africa,” the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) were offshoots of the new awakening among the Protestant churches. Roman Catholics also experienced a similar reawakening in this period following the founding of two missionary societies: The Congregation of the Holy Ghost Fathers (HGFs) and the Missionaries for Africa (MAfr.) popularly known as the White

4 North Africa, Egypt and Ethiopia were Christianized in the early period. In a second wave in the 15th and 16th centuries the Portuguese made some attempts to evangelize parts of the western and eastern coasts and the Congo, but this thrust did not yield lasting results.
5 Legitimate trade as opposed to the slave trade, whose abolition Britain was spearheading.
Fathers. While Protestant missionaries were bent on what was called the “civilizing mission,” their Roman Catholic counterparts emphasized ethnographic studies.\textsuperscript{6}

Missionary activity in Kenya preceded colonization but the pioneers remained at the coast, where they were making little headway until the construction of the then Kenya-Uganda railway in the late 1890s made it possible to move inland. Their arrival in the interior thus coincided with that of the colonial administrators. If they had failed in making converts among the Muslims at the coast, the missionaries had tremendous success in the study of African languages, which they committed into writing,\textsuperscript{7} and in providing refuge and rehabilitation to freed slaves. The initial converts were thus ex-slaves, some of whom became very devoted catechists and teachers.

Jostling for territory and souls began with the earliest arrivals inland, the CSM in 1898 followed by the CMS in 1899, the Roman Catholic Holy Ghost Fathers in 1899, the Consolata missionaries in 1902, the American Africa Inland Mission (AIM) in 1901, and the independent Gospel Missionary Society (GMS). Their modus operandi was very similar: wherever they went, the missionaries sought out the local chief, with whom they aligned themselves for land and good will. The next move was to recruit children, initially boys only,\textsuperscript{8} for kusoma, the Kiswahili word for reading, which came to mean Christianity as well because the two were inseparable.\textsuperscript{9} It was not enough to instruct in faith alone: literacy and numeracy were essential as the missionaries realized the crucial role lay readers and lay catechists were to play in evangelization. Western-style schools became major avenues for both evangelization and dissemination of Western culture. The initial converts in the hinterland were also the socially marginalized who had lost social identity and easily found a new one in Christ (Njoroge, 1999, p. 95). Soon, however, the terrain changed when the benefits of Western-style education began to bear discernible fruits and so the demand for it increased.

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\textsuperscript{6} Read spreading Western civilisation.

\textsuperscript{7} They not only translated the Bible into several African languages but also compiled dictionaries. A few began to study African cultures and produced ethnographies in European languages, e. g. Fr. Constanzo Cagnolo’s \textit{The Akikuyu}, in 1933 (Njoroge, 1999).

\textsuperscript{8} Girls’ education, though lagging behind that of the boys, was not entirely neglected. The missionaries were quick to realize the need to prepare future wives for the new converts.

\textsuperscript{9} For a long time Christianity was equated with literacy, reading, a word that came to imply both the literacy competence and practice of the new faith. Christians were referred to as “those who read”, even if they were illiterate.
It did not take long before Christianity and schools began to be seen as a vehicle for advancement. The distinction between the *kusoma* Africans and the rest of the community was noticed as early as 1927, when one of the district commissioners remarked on “…an unnatural gulf …, between Mission adherents and their pagan brothers and sisters” (Njoroge, 1999, p. 77). Thomas Bewes poignantly observed: “And so the church became associated with progress, with education and with prestige” (1953, p. 46): it produced a *kusoma* Christianity (Anderson, 1977, p. 111). Hence the *kusoma* syndrome was spearheading a silent revolution: all the students became Christians and as expected, gave up (at least outwardly) traditional beliefs and rituals, acquired a biblical or European/Western name, and wore Western clothes. However, resistance to conversion was displayed by a few who only wanted Western education. On leaving school, the “mission boys” were recruited as teachers, catechists, and readers by the missionaries; as clerks and messengers by the colonial government; as foremen, drivers, and artisans by the settlers and traders thus entering the monetary economy and acquiring an enhanced socio-economic status. An additional missionary service was the provision of modern health facilities which became integral features of the mission station and the potency of Western medicine, another of the missionaries’ mesmerising attractions.

Remarkably, however, while schools were a vital vehicle for evangelization, it was the men and women who attracted new converts to Christ through their personal witness. Adrian Hastings observes:

…the spiritual power and manifest generosity of missionaries and local pastors as men of God, wise advisers, defenders in distress together with the friendliness and sense of belonging engendered in the communities they founded were probably more decisive factors for the growth of the church than the establishment of schools and hospitals (1976, p. 6).

It is undoubtedly true that many of the missionaries loved Africa and willingly made tremendous personal sacrifices for her (Bediako, 1992, p. 239). They were driven by love of God and His people, whom they felt called to serve. Cardinal Lavigerie, founder of the Missionaries for Africa, is reported as having written:
It is to you that I now come, O my beloved Africa. Seventeen years ago I sacrificed all to you, when driven by a palpable force from God, renounced everything to devote myself to your service…I have loved everything about Africa, her past, her future, her mountains, her clear sky, her sunshine, the great sweep of her deserts, the azure of waves that that bathe her coasts (Lavigerie, 1950 pp. 210, 270 cited in Shorter, 2006, p. 157).

He urged all his missionaries to do the same. Since they lived close to them, the missionaries gradually came to know a great deal about the Africans. Some mastered local languages which they made literate by translating parts of the Bible, hymns, and prayers. However, it was, on the whole, difficult for them to enter the African mind completely. The fact that they assumed to have done so only compounded the problem (Isichei, 1995, p. 7).

Despite their tremendous contribution to the welfare of the Africans and their undoubted devotion, often in the early years, at great personal cost including high death rates, some missionaries were disdainful of the indigenous people and their institutions. Traditional dances were condemned as sexually immoral; many rites and rituals were labelled retrogressive and contrary to the Christian faith and had thus to be given up (Nasimiyu-Wasike and Waruta, 1993; Njoroge, 1999; Nasimiyu-Wasike, 2010). The missionaries were guided by what Bevans (1992) terms “counter cultural” or Niebuhr’s (1951) “Christ against culture/Christ and culture in paradox” models of Christian-culture interaction. This thinking is based on the assumption that Christianity and ATR were diametrically opposed and the latter would have to give way. A veteran Roman Catholic missionary priest, Aylward Shorter observed:

Traditional religion has been despised. Its adherents have been labelled ‘pagan,’ ‘heathen,’ ‘idolatrous,’ ‘polytheists,’ ‘primitive,’ ‘primal.’ Its beliefs and practices have been represented as an amorphous collection of ‘customs’ and ‘rituals’… (1999, p. 45).
Such attitudes made it difficult for the Africans to reconcile the Gospel message of love with missionary practices that amounted to racism, and also to their interdenominational strife.\textsuperscript{10} Thus, despite the total devotion of many missionaries, the supremacist attitudes had a highly negative impact on how the Christian message was received, a theme that is explored in some detail below.

**African response to missionary evangelization**

One of the foundational missionary assumptions was that they were called by God to bring “Him” to a heathen people. Adrian Hastings, a missionary in Kenya for many years, says of the early pioneers:

> What struck them, undoubtedly, was the darkness of the continent; its lack of religion and sound morals, its ignorance, its general pitiful condition made worse by the barbarity of the slave trade. Evangelisation was seen as liberation from a state of absolute awfulness and the picture of unredeemed Africa was often painted in colours as gruesome as possible, the better to encourage missionary zeal at home (1967, p. 6 cited in Bediako, 1992, p. 225).

It is against this stark backdrop that I examine the interaction that has been going on between ATR\textsuperscript{11} and mission Christianity, and see how this did and has continued to affect the people several generations later as indicated in my pastoral care experience.

ATR did (and still does among its adherents) encompass all life dimensions and cater to the socio-psycho-spiritual needs of its adherents. Their interpretation of and responses to evangelization must be seen as largely deliberate choices in an attempt to make sense of and accommodate the changing horizon occasioned by colonization, the entry of a monetary economy and above all, Christianity and Western-style education and culture that arrived on the scene concurrently. Later generations, descendants of the early players, have continued being largely affected by the responses, choices, attitudes, and values of their predecessors, even if not walking entirely in the earlier generation’s footsteps.

\textsuperscript{10} The HGFs bowed to settler pressure and opened a boys’ school for their sons in 1939 and the Loreto Sisters soon followed suit with two girls’ schools. All the missionaries presided over segregated congregations.

\textsuperscript{11} ATR is currently followed by about 10\% of the total population according to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, May 2009. Other faiths are listed as follows: Christianity 78\% (45\% Protestants, 33\% Roman Catholics); Muslims 10\%; Hindus 2\%).
Two pertinent questions arise at this juncture: First, what attracted so many to the new faith after the initial impasse? Second, what did the reality of conversion mean for the African Christians? In addition to the material benefits I have alluded to above, there had to have been other factors to attract so many and capture their loyalty. Roland Oliver has suggested that perhaps the concept of an all-powerful God devoid of the many spirits and ancestors was attractive to some. Others may have been disappointed with the traditional God for failing to protect them against the ravages of the slave trade and of colonialism, and viewed ATR as incapable of meeting the new external pressures (1952, p. 216).

From a theological perspective, however, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that conversion is an initiative from God who wants to reveal himself through Jesus, the visible image of the unseen God, and he thus prepares people for that revelation (Acts 17: 27). According to Gerald McCool, the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner says that when people initially hear the message of the Gospel, they are not encountering something strange from outside of themselves it is only the explication of what they already have experienced. “The expressly Christian revelation becomes the explicit statement of the revelation of grace which man always experiences implicitly in the depths of his being” (1975, p. 213). Kwame Bediako puts it more succinctly:

In missiological jargon, these Traditional Religions will have been a real *preparatio evangelica* (preparation for the Gospel); and it is now up to African theologians to interpret the meaning of that preparation for the Gospel, in the African context of not only the past but today and tomorrow (Mbiti, 1970 p. 36, cited in Bediako, 1992 pp.315-316).

Hence, what marks out conversion to Christianity is the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

His own person is greater than can be contained in a religion or ideology…. I consider traditional religion, Islam and the other religious systems to be preparatory and even essential ground in search for the Ultimate. But only Christianity has the terrible responsibility of pointing the way to that Ultimate Identity, Foundation and Source of security (Mbiti, 1969, p. 277 cited in Bediako, pp. 319-320).
However conversion is understood theologically, it has had major social and psychological ramifications. Jabulani Nxumalo (1980) identifies three types of responses that embody these effects—the uprooted, the transitional, and followers of IACs. Each one of the types is explored through case materials from my clinical experience.

Case 1: the uprooted

Atieno\textsuperscript{12} was a member of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa and a professional woman in her early forties. When she sought counselling with an American therapist in Nairobi for her troubled marriage, she was disconcerted with his insistence that she and her husband consult with clan elders. The elders, she insisted, did not have a bearing in her Christian, Western-style marriage, which she and her equally Christian, professional, urbane husband had entered into without reference to the elders. While admitting they owed the elders respect she could not see what role they would play in their marriage. Atieno and her husband and their parents lived their lives without much reference to traditional mores, but rather guided by Christian principles as they understood them. Despite her protestations, the American counsellor was persistent: he had learnt that because marriage in Africa is a community affair, the extended family should handle such issues. Atieno decided to terminate and seek assistance elsewhere. Professional marriage and family therapy worked very well for her and her husband as they felt respected and allowed space to be who they were.

First, some of the people like Atieno, her husband and their predecessors have fully embraced Christianity with the cultural “swaddling clothes” (Archbishop Tutu, 1977 cited in Anderson, 1977, p. 1) it was wrapped in, and in so doing abandoned many aspects of ATR. The initial converts were uprooted Africans: ex-slaves, outcasts, and others who had lost traditional grounding and were thus happy to find re-rooting in the new faith. However, by the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century the landscape had begun to shift as the benefits of the “new way” started becoming obvious. Parents were now keen to send their sons (and daughters later on) to the mission to become “readers”, i.e. Christians and literate. Some of the converts found in Christianity the grounding ATR had provided and as they became new wine they developed new wineskins.\textsuperscript{13} They fully identified with the person, values, and outlook of Jesus Christ as presented to

\textsuperscript{12} All names used in the case materials are assumed.
\textsuperscript{13} “No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins” (Luke 5: 38).
them, becoming the new creations in Christ that Paul writes about.\textsuperscript{14} So strong was their faith that they were willing to die for it. Thomas Bewes, a vastly experienced missionary in Kenya, reports of a woman who under threat from Mau Mau\textsuperscript{15} wrote to him in 1953:

I came to know Jesus as my personal Saviour in 1947 and I will never go back on Him now. Rather would I die for Him (1953, p. 35).

She typifies many.

Underscoring the very meaning of life for the indigenous people was and is a monotheistic religion acknowledging a Creator God who is the source of everything animate and inanimate. The Creator God is supreme and distant, not concerned with the daily lives of the people, yet is a benevolent provider of all needs. To this concept of the divine the missionaries proclaimed the unconditional love of a Trinitarian God revealed in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as recorded in the scriptures. On accepting the saving power of Jesus, the converts are transformed through the Holy Spirit to enter a new relationship with God.

Debate has been raging as to what actually happens when ATR followers become Christians. Do they undergo a radical change and sever ties completely with the ATR God or do they carry the old image into Christianity? On one hand are voices like John Mbiti (1969; 2010); Kwame Bediako (1992); Anne Wasike-Nasimiyu (2010) who claim that African converts retain the old image and are unable to reconcile the two, becoming superficial Christians. Mbiti accuses the church for failing to convert fully “…partly at least, because it has largely been unable to present to Africa more than a Western image of the faith…” (1969, p. 237). Nevertheless, there are undoubtedly, converts who choose to give up the former image of a distant deity and embrace the one presented by Jesus Christ—that of a loving Father who wants to relate as “Abba” (Rom. 8:15).\textsuperscript{16} Atieno and her progenitors fall into this group. From

\textsuperscript{14}“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).
\textsuperscript{15}Mau Mau is the name given to the rag-tag nationalist army that waged guerrilla warfare with the combined colonial and the British troops from 1952-1956 when the former were defeated. Due to the deeply traditional nature of its oaths Mau Mau was considered anti-Christian, hence, deplorable by many of the uprooted/re-socialised Christians.
\textsuperscript{16}Romans 8:15 “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”
the very beginning of missionary evangelization the two brands have been a reality of African Christianity. This situation that has prevailed though is not always recognised, the tendency being to treat all conversion as a uniform experience (Spear and Kimambo, 1999).

Atieno exemplifies what I call re-socialised Africans who do not know much about their traditions and frown on many of them: whatever knowledge they have is superficial. They are to be found both in the rural areas and in the towns and cities, membership cutting across all ages and walks of life. Some of them have been truly heroic in confessing their new faith, for example, the catechists and lay leaders who have travelled long distances to win souls for Christ; some of the men and women who choose to eschew marriage, family, and children to follow a celibate religious life that is totally counter-cultural; the many who preferred martyrdom to taking the Mau Mau oath(s) which they considered a betrayal of Christ, as well as thousands of ordinary men and women who have faithfully stuck to the gospel of Jesus Christ and their new identity in him despite the cultural and sometimes social alienation (Njoroge, 1999). Many of the early converts were severely persecuted by their families and communities – they were disowned, disinherited, cursed, beaten, girls married off: “…the Gospel was something more than comforting and a beautiful story; it was a great revolutionary force, bound to cut right across some of the cherished customs of the tribe” (Bewes 1953, p. 30). Yet they have stood firm for the sake of Jesus Christ and their numbers have markedly increased. These people must have found a new sense of personhood and a new community in the new faith and way of life which they have passed on. Many of their descendants continue to follow in their footsteps.

Several observations can be drawn from Atieno’s case. Being third generation Christians their ties with the traditional order are practically non-existent and should not be construed, following a stereotypical model of African identity as the American therapist was doing. Many descendants of the first generation Christians who turned away completely from ATR

17 My own background is very similar to Atieno’s and I identify very much with her outlook. However, the professional exposure I have had has opened my eyes to appreciate different outlooks.
18 While such occurrences have decreased dramatically, some heroism is sometimes still called for, for example, by young women and men who choose to join celibate religious life for which they may face strong opposition. A good case in point is the emeritus Archbishop of Nairobi, Ndingi Mwana’a Nziki, who says his father condemned him as worse than a still birth when he decided to become a celibate Roman Catholic priest in the 1960s.
19 My progenitors fit well into this category. Radically detached from ATR our parents shielded us completely from most of its elements. This stance was strengthened by the education system we went through in the 1960s that reinforced the denigration of traditional practices. It is only in the past few years that I have begun to critically review the situation with a view to understanding those who hold divergent perspectives.
and related practices, even those who have given up on Christianity, continue to admire and espouse the values associated with Western-style education and culture and find personhood partly through this identity. The expansion of a radical type of Christian conversion that continues to demand renunciation of all ties to ATR, Western-style education, professionalism and globalisation are all factors that have served to increase the numbers who, like Atieno and her husband, are re-socialised. It is critical, therefore, for counsellors to be in touch with their own standpoint, prejudices, and convictions, and communicate complete openness to and acceptance of the counselees’ perspectives, unlike the American counsellor above, if therapy is not to be hampered.

**Case 2: the transitional**

Nxumalo (1980) calls the second group transitional, having one leg in each camp. Their version of Christianity is often shallow, consisting of rules to be obeyed and meaningless Sunday rituals, a type of Christianity associated with buildings and is otherwise locked up, creating a lacuna. Such people usually resort to elements of ATR in times of crisis in search of security and to fill the void. Greatly ranging in diversity and to be found among all shades of population, some consult mediums and diviners secretly for fear of being labelled “backward” and often out of a sense of obligation to kin. Others will, for instance, after a church funeral service, feel the need to offer a peace libation to their ancestors before lowering the coffin into the grave. Their source of personal identity oscillates—at times it is in ATR, at other times in Christianity. Nxumalo (1980) asserts that they find many vestiges of Western culture irresistible. Ciru falls in this category.

*Ciru, a young woman, had been seeing me for spiritual direction for some time when I brought to her attention the fact that she had frequently mentioned in passing her mother’s recurrent but seemingly unexplainable bouts of illness. From what I was hearing, Ciru’s concern was not so much the state of her mother’s health but its cause. This had not been raised as a main issue but was frequently mentioned as a passing thought. After some time, however, it occurred to me that there was some underlying concern that needed exploring, so I invited her to do so. Clearly relieved by this recognition, Ciru talked about her fear that her family may have been bewitched by some jealous neighbours and her mother would have been the victim of the witchcraft.*
She explained that her family was an island of “progress” in a rather remote part of the country. Both her parents, qualified primary school teachers, had unlike many of the neighbours, benefitted from a Western education and her father was the head of the local primary school. The family thus enjoyed many of the trappings of a monetary economy that included a stone house. In many ways, however, they were well integrated into the community and did not deliberately isolate themselves. To compound matters, however, she had completed high school before joining religious life, when most of her peers had dropped out years before. As a part of a hate campaign, there had been wild talk that she too would not complete school and indeed she had been linked to some young men. She said the hostility was so deep it was palpable. In her mind there was no doubt witchcraft was responsible for her mother’s poor state of health. Ciru experienced intense fear for the welfare of her family, not knowing what else their enemies might try. She had talked about this with those responsible for her missionary formation and her superiors on several occasions and every time the response seemed to have been rehearsed: pray about it, which she did, but the problem and attendant fear persisted. She had begun to doubt the power of prayer and had thus decided to seek the intervention of a diviner but wondered whether this would not amount to betrayal of her faith. Would consulting with a diviner by a religious person not be counter-witnessing? She was more confused as a few of her close friends, all of them Christians as well, supported the idea of divination and were willing to assist her.

Ciru’s case exemplifies an attempt to graft the new onto the old or syncretic Christianity (Mbiti, 1969).20 Her toying with witchcraft touches on one of the elements of ATR that is very frequently associated with syncretism mainly because witchcraft is a resilient tenet that has resisted the passing of time in some (many) people’s milieu. Anti-life and the ultimate enemy, it is manifested in symbolism like bareness, impotence, sterility, bad reputation, illness, hardships, all manner of suffering—unless these can be attributed to religious or natural causes. In Ciru’s case it was her mother’s unexplained bouts of illness. Witchcraft is dreaded and fear of it shared by some (many) people, Christians and the Western-educated alike (Mbiti, 1969; Magesa, 1998; Kirwen, 2005; Gichinga, 2007). Solution for such people is divination and religious observation of whatever is prescribed. The inability of mission-Christianity to accept its existence and deal satisfactorily with witchcraft is one of the causes of rupture that has led to the establishment of many Indigenous African Churches (IACs) and

20 Eclectic or syncretic.
continues to draw substantial numbers, like Kajo’ka (Case No. 3) from mainstream/mission-founded churches (Magesa, 1998; Oduro, 2010). Most IACs carry out exorcisms on a regular basis while mainstream churches tread that ground very hesitantly. Thus, witchcraft is at the root of much syncretism.

Often associated with witchcraft is the recognition and veneration of ancestral spirits, the founders of the group, the pristine men and women who originated the tribe, the lineage, and the clan, and who provide the people with their names. The ancestors, by virtue of their age and closeness to God, have a life force that dominates the living, “…it is the superhuman quality of their power, not its omnipotence that makes it so voluble, sometimes so dreadful to their descendants” (Magesa, 1998, p. 48). Mission Christianity largely continues to misunderstand the essence of ancestors and outlaw them as evil and belief in them as idolatry, yet (some or many?) Christians believe in their potency.21 However, there seems to be a way of dealing with witchcraft and ancestral spirits as proposed by the former Roman Catholic Archbishop of Lusaka, Emmanuel Milingo. Seeing the possibility, perhaps the duty of handling ancestral spirits and witchcraft by the church,22 he used to draw huge crowds to his faith-healing and exorcism services. He claims:

The living-dead ancestors are cultured and well-mannered people. They give way when Jesus comes in, provided that Jesus guarantees protection and guardianship to the living members of the clans and tribes….We are marrying Jesus with our ancestors…carrying over the trust our people have in their ancestors into Jesus (1984, pp. 87-88).

Experiences like these raise practical questions of process of pastoral care. My approach basically has been person-centered, unconditional, and non-judgemental acceptance of the counselee. If the ATR practice in question is deeply embedded in the individual (as with Ciru), my role is to help her integrate the practice with her Christianity so as to resolve for herself the cause of tension. From a theological viewpoint, I help her examine whether by complying she would violate any Gospel tenets. If on the other hand the client’s disquiet is

21 There is a great need to carry out some empirical study to find out the extent to which Africans, Christians and otherwise, cling on to these beliefs.
22 Prohibition does not remove the great fear and distress which witchcraft and ancestral spirits cause to some Christians. That may explain why Milingo used to draw large crowds not only in Zambia but in Kenya as well whenever he visited in the 1980s before he was recalled to Rome and lost his see.
due to external pressure to comply with practices or rituals she/he does not identify with, my approach is to help her/him explore the various possible options and their consequences, so that she/he is in a position to make an informed choice. I remain supportive of the counselee, irrespective of the decision she/he makes. Clearly the approach any counsellor or spiritual guide would take on such questions depends very much on the model of Gospel inculturation they think appropriate (Bevans, 1992). The model may be held more or less explicitly, but will nonetheless influence the approach taken.

Case 3: followers of IACs
A third group, comprising adherents to IACs, is typified by Kajo‘ka whose case below brings to the fore the experience of many IAC adherents, especially their belief in direct divine intervention in their lives and elements of syncretism (Spear and Kimambo, 1999). Prayers and expectations of miracles are a central element in these churches. IACs are also a haven from the frustrating missionary (and current African elitist) paternalism evidenced by the lack of local leadership in the mainstream churches until forced to act by the political-military shake-up of the 1950s. By then the missionaries were being denounced as not better than the settlers and the colonial administrators. A statement that became popular in the 1950s, *Gutiri mubia na muthungu*, sums up the frustration. Bewes, an Anglican missionary in Kenya for many years, after commenting on the friendly relationship as the two groups learned from one another, quips: “The early pioneers were often kindly despots, ruling their little kingdoms with great firmness” (1953, p. 30). Current African leadership in most mainstream churches is accused of elitism that tends to exclude many of the ordinary people from leadership positions (Magesa, 2004).

Kajo‘ka was in his late twenties when he sought assistance. A refugee who had fled from hostilities in his country, he was initially a Roman Catholic who had drifted to one of the many evangelical churches. He seemed to harbour a lot of bitterness towards his father who had abandoned the family in a foreign country and gone back home where he had remarried. Kajo‘ka displayed many layers of emotions—while often exuberant about his faith and how it helped ground him, at other times his anger and frustration dominated. His academic work was being hampered by a language deficiency but he could not take advantage of remedial classes due to financial constraints. He was also angry with God because a childhood bout of

23 The statement literally translates as: “There is no (difference between a) priest and a European.”
polio had left him slightly disabled, ruling him out of priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church. That was part of the attraction to the evangelical church where he was hoping to become a preacher. At times he was very cheerful, confident, and hopeful that the prayers by his pastor and the community would work miracles in his life and eventually all would be well. In the bad times he was kept going by the many promises of liberation and bounty in the bible which he took literally and applied liberally to his situation.

The factors underlying the mushrooming of IACs form an important subject in their own right but which cannot be pursued here. What is pertinent for this study is that their establishment is a creative response—a deliberate choice by the leaders to take what they find meaningful from the bible and from the missionaries and reject what they consider mere cultural baggage. Generally led and patronised by the less-well educated, the churches include many small evangelical congregations. Their major attractions are their simple creeds and ingenuity of the leaders in fusing the biblical, often Old Testament message and many traditional practices and rituals. They lay great emphasis on revelation, dreams, visions, healing, and literal interpretation of the Bible. The pastors and other leaders conduct regular healing, deliverance and miracle services and exorcisms, thus meeting some of the psycho-spiritual needs often ignored by the mainline churches (Mbiti, 1969; Nxumalo, 1980; Milingo, 1984; Njoroge 1999; Magesa 2004; Oduro, 2010). Their services are characterized by an attempt to combine traditional notions of healing like laying on of hands on the sick and communicating with the ancestors. The place and work of the Holy Spirit is paramount and during worship many seek to be possessed by him and speak in “tongues”.

The explosive growth of IACs, which seem to be trail-blazing inculturation, is a clear testimony of their resonance with the psycho-spiritual needs of many, especially among the poorer and less Western-educated (Magesa, 2004; Oduro, 2010).

Having explored Nxumalo’s three types I wish to identify two more categories usually not mentioned by commentators: those who choose to remain aloof from the missionary, indeed from all foreign influence, and those who have given up on Christianity after initial conversion but espouse many elements of Western culture. No member of these two groups has consulted with me to date but it is important to be aware of their existence in the country.
The first group comprises the older people, not many still alive, and many pastoral communities who choose to remain faithful to their traditions and religion. Some missionaries have established warm relations with some of these communities but have not been successful in evangelising them. A good case in point is that of Vincent Donovan, a Roman Catholic missionary who, after unsuccessfully trying conversion lamented “…there are no adult Maasai practising Christians from Loliondo mission…no Catholic child, on leaving school, has continued to practice his religion…” (1982, p. 15, cited in Isichei, 1995, p. 260). He tried inculcating the bible into the Maasai milieu and made a few converts but there has been no follow-up of his work since his departure. At home entirely in their world, these people will seek out their own to meet all their psycho-spiritual needs.

However Christ was not, and still has not been fully incarnated into this spirituality and cosmology despite repeated calls by church leaders for such communication. Once considered an obstacle to evangelization, ATR is now recognized as a means through which God has been and continues to reveal himself (Rom. 1:20; Bediako, 1992). The new stance calls for critical dialogue between Christianity and ATR with the aim of drawing the best out of both in order to make Christianity fully at home in Africa.

…Christ…is not alien to any culture…Our culture is the medium of receiving, diffusing, tuning in and relaying the Gospel. Without culture we would not hear the Gospel, we would not believe the Gospel, and we would not inherit the promises of the Gospel (Mbiti, 1976, pp. 273-275)

As was the case in the early Christian Church, ATR is a communal affair with no room for routine individual practice, unlike Christianity (Arbuckle, 1990). Ordinarily there are/were no organised prayers or religious ceremonies. As long as things are well it is assumed that God is satisfied and there is no need for prayers. The people live daily and hourly in the most intimate contact with nature and with the spirit world. The innovation of individual salvation and devotion, exacerbated by Western-style education, is often a cause of tension between ATR and Christianity, particularly because of the premium attached to kinship ties for psycho-spiritual well-being. It is critical for pastoral carers to take this reality in their stride as they work in an African context.

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24 Western-style education emphasises competition and rewards individual achievement unlike the traditional one which emphasises age-groups and other kinship ties. Such tension is epitomised in case study 3.
In the final group are those who choose secularism which is a new phenomenon since all people in the traditional set-up are religious. The depth of African religiosity, notorious according to Mbiti, is one attribute the missionaries recognised and affirmed. Religion is so fundamental to life that “…there is no formal distinction between the spiritual and the secular, between religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and material areas of life” (1969 p. 2). An African performs or lives out her/his religion wherever he/she is, whatever she/he is doing. “…African people do not know how to exist without religion” (Mbiti, 1969 p. 2). Thus religion is foundational for personhood. That notwithstanding, secularism is a reality in Kenya today.25

In addition to Western-style education and the competitiveness and individualism that go with it, current secularism has a plethora of other causes that have been gradually eroding traditional values, especially religiosity. These factors include shallow initial evangelisation, urbanisation and the break-up of family bonds, explosion in communication technology and globalization, Western-style education and its cultural packaging, as well as failure of Christian witness (Isichei, 1995).

The need for cross-cultural communication
An overview of my own clinical work suggests that many young African Christians today represent Nxumalo’s first three categories rather than the other two. It is my contention therefore, that successful pastoral work with them must recognise that reality. Those working in pastoral care with young Africans need to rise to the occasion by becoming increasingly aware of the interactions and adaptations that have been taking place between Christianity and ATR and acknowledge them. As dialogue continues about the appropriate models of inculturation at official church levels, pastoral carers could benefit from doing some critical work to re-orient their own thoughts and attitudes towards ATR and its impact on the experiences of their clients. On the basis of the work I have done so far, I shall name a few examples of the issues to which pastoral carers need to become alert.

First, one vital element of ATR which pastoral carers need to recognize is its role in ensuring psycho-spiritual health. To appreciate how this is achieved one needs to take into account

25 No statistics for this group could be established.
what the African cosmology is and how “dis-ease” is viewed. In African cosmology the world is one unbroken moral universe which has three components: the spiritual, comprising God, the ancestors, other spirits, and the concrete. Life is given to lineages to safeguard, nurture and propagate. There is a very close connectedness between the three worlds and the vital elements: the moral, the social, and the spiritual. In this world view, illness of whatever kind does not just happen but “is caused” by any one of the three forces acting as the enemy of life. It is argued that disease and health are not merely the consequences of bacteria or a prudent life-style but they reflect the delicate relationship between man (woman) and the ancestral spirits (Kenyatta, 1938; Gichinga, 2007; Mbiti, 2010). The moral, physical, spiritual, and psychological parts must function together and, if any part is out of balance, the person becomes physically, spiritually, or mentally ill. Disease, as such, is a sign of moral disorder in relationships or the work of witchcraft: the cause, whether human or supra-human, is evil and has to be identified and counteracted. A diviner is consulted and whatever she/he prescribes is followed religiously. Such prescription may involve appeasing an ancestor, exorcising some malevolent spirit, consuming some herbal medicine(s), wearing some charm, making retribution to some person, dead or alive, or a combination of therapies (Magesa, 1997; Lartey, 2003; Gichinga, 2007). By outlawing belief in and many of the ceremonies and rituals associated with the ancestral spirits and divination the missionaries struck a major blow to a central ATR nerve and the psycho-spiritual wholeness associated with it, resulting in frequent disorder for those who have not found a new source of wholeness. Ciru’s dilemma above (Case 2) exemplifies such a struggle.

Second, pastoral carers need to be cognisant of the fact that the ATR-Christianity interaction continues as new generations appropriate the heritage that has been handed down and try to negotiate their personal identities in light of a fast-shifting landscape. It is to meet this need that Bevans talks of the possibility of inculcating the Christian message to produce “…a theology that makes sense at a certain place in a certain time” (1992, p. 5), i.e. contextual and hence, more acceptable theology. The clarion call for inculcation of the gospel has been repeatedly made by the various churches but it needs to be appropriated at the individual level as well. Pastoral carers are perhaps uniquely placed both to document the models of inculcation in people’s lives and to propose creative ways forward in helping Africans incarnate the Gospel in ways that make sense for their place and time which theologians might usefully draw upon. The church, in order to offer them the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, must implant herself into these groups for the same motive which led
Christ to bind himself, in virtue of His incarnation, to certain social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom He was born. For as in Evangelii Nuntiandi:

> Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed,….if it does not use their symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life (1975, para 20, 63).

John Wright suggests that through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus changes everything and leaves everything the same. Of his teaching he contends: “…it opposes no positive human insight, contradicts no adventure into the future that respects the personal worth of other human beings” (2010, p. 111). Another interesting insight comes from Paul Kollman (2010) who argues that self-conscious inculturation is not crucial because spontaneous contextualization takes place whenever people become Christian. That is an ideal situation but my pastoral experience shows it does not always happen, hence the incongruences sometimes brought to counselling and spiritual direction.

Conclusion
I have attempted to show the need for pastoral counsellors in Kenya/Africa to engage in critical dialogue between the operational and professed theologies of their counselees which can be at variance and hence cause un-ease/dis-ease. The benefits of so doing would be twofold. First, by becoming alert to their own, perhaps erroneous and stereotypical assumptions, pastoral carers might better help their clients deconstruct damaging God images and reconstruct helpful ones (Lartey, 2006) that are in keeping with the good news of Jesus Christ and also compatible with who the clients truly are. Second, in becoming alert to these issues and communicating the creative ways in which they are being addressed on the ground, pastoral carers might contribute to the process of finding appropriate ways of incarnating the gospel message into the African milieu. Such an on-going exercise will be a major help for young African Christians like Ciru and Kajo’ka in reconfiguring their identities without feeling torn between diametrically opposed paradigms and may also speak to other cultures (both within Africa and beyond) who also need to find contextually appropriate ways of being and becoming Christian. The words of Patrick Lynch underscore this need:
…the starting point for pastoral care is that the church is called to be ‘a sacrament of unity’ in our multi-cultural world today. In other words, whenever we are both ‘a sign’ of unity and a source of unity we are a sign of God’s presence (2010, p. 35).

Attempts to inculcate the Gospel into the African milieu would be a major step in securing that quest.

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