Book Section:
van Klinken, A orcid.org/0000-0003-2011-5537 (2017) Western Christianity as Part of Postcolonial World Christianity: The 'Body of Christ with AIDS' as an Interstitial Space. In: Becking, B, Korte, AM and van Liere, L, (eds.) Contesting Religious Identities: Transformations, Disseminations and Mediations. Numen Book Series: Studies in the History of Religions, 156 . BRILL . ISBN 978-90-04-33745-9

Western Christianity as Part of Postcolonial World Christianity: The 'Body of Christ with AIDS' as an Interstitial Space

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Some African theologians, such as Musa Dube, Emmanuel Katongole and Tinyiko Maluleke, challenge 'us' in the Western world to think of contemporary world Christianity as the Body of Christ. They point out that in Africa, this Body is infected with HIV and living with AIDS.[1] They succinctly capture this in the statement: "The Body of Christ has AIDS". They make this statement, among other reasons, to remind Western Christianity that it is part of this metaphorical Body. They challenge Christians in 'the West' to reflect on the question what it means to be part of the global Body of Christ, which today, in Africa and in other parts of the world, is so deeply affected by the HIV epidemic.

These African theologians do not only challenge Christians, churches and theologians in the Western world to reflect on this question, but they also present their own interpretations. Drawing from the metaphor of the Body of Christ with AIDS, they raise issues that are highly critical to Western Christianity. Among other considerations, they point to the low level of solidarity that Western Christians show to African Christians living with HIV, the Western world's stereotypical view of AIDS in Africa, and the global economic and political structures which benefit the Western world but which make Africa the continent most affected by HIV and AIDS. What is happening here at a meta-level, is that African theologians employ the notion of the Body of Christ – which is at the heart of classic Christian theological formulations of identity – to critically address Western Christianity. This is a fascinating example of contesting religious identities within contemporary global Christianity, wherein the centre of gravity is shifting to the South.[2]

Today it is widely acknowledged that Christianity, considered by some people as a Western religion, is a world religion that has its major centres in the non-Western parts of the world.[3] Subsequently a new academic field of study has emerged: the study of World Christianity. A key issue in this field is the interaction between the diversity of expressions of Christian faith, practice and theology across time and space.[4] One of the approaches to this interdisciplinary field of study is Intercultural Theology.[5] A mainly European project, intercultural theology investigates theological articulations from the various geographical,

[1] HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome).
[2] Cf. P. Jenkins, "Christianity Moves South" in F. Wijsen and R. Schreiter (eds.), Global Christianity: Contested Claims, Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi 2007, 15-34; D.L. Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945" in International Bulletin of Missionary Research 24/2 (2000), 50-58.
[3] K. Bediako, Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion, Edinburgh and Maryknoll: Edinburgh University Press and Orbis 1995; L. Sanneh, Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing 2003; A.F. Walls, The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith, Maryknoll: Orbis.
[4] D.T. Irving, "World Christianity: An Introduction" in The Journal of World Christianity 1/1 (2008), 1-26; R.J. Schreiter, The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local, Maryknoll: Orbis 1997.
[5] M.J. Cartledge and D. Cheetham (eds.), Intercultural Theology: Approaches and Themes, London: SCM Press 2011; V. Küster, Einführung in die Interkulturelle Theologie, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2011.

social and cultural contexts of world Christianity. In turn, it reflects on the questions and challenges these articulations raise to Christianity and Christian theology in the Western world.[6] This is particularly relevant from the perspective of postcolonial criticism that, on the one hand, makes us critically aware of the historical Western hegemony in the definition and formulation of Christian identity and theology, and, on the other, points to the increasing interconnectedness, interdependence and hybridity in our globalising world, including world Christianity.[7] Various theologians and biblical scholars have recently rediscovered the notion of the Body of Christ to reflect on the postcolonial situation of our contemporary world and of Christianity.[8] Following this trend, in this chapter I will discuss some African theologians, their use of the metaphor of the Body of Christ with AIDS, and their critical questions to Western Christianity, from intercultural and postcolonial theological perspectives. This will contribute to our understanding of some of the dynamics in contemporary world Christianity.

The accounts of the African theologians discussed in this article exemplify how Western Christianity is contested by non-Western contextual theologies representing the concerns of people living at the socio-economic margins of our world. First, in this chapter I will show that the issues raised by these theologians illustrate the delicate position and contested identity of Western Christianity, as part of postcolonial world Christianity. Second, I will demonstrate that the metaphor of the Body of Christ, put forward by these theologians, can be highly appropriate for Western Christianity to reconsider its identity. The metaphor may open up a space that the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha has called an 'interstice': an in-between space where Western Christianity can meet Christianities from other parts of the world and be reshaped by this encounter. With this two-fold argument, I hope to make a postcolonial theological contribution to the understanding of Christianity in the West as part of contemporary world Christianity. Before unfolding this argument, however, I provide a more general and fundamental discussion of the relationship of Western Christianity to contemporary world Christianity from a postcolonial perspective.

Western Christianity and World Christianity

In our present-day world, Christianity is a rapidly changing phenomenon. In his trilogy on world Christianity, Philip Jenkins speaks of "the next Christendom", where Christianity has shifted to the global South (Africa, Asia and Latin-America), and where Christianity in Europe (formerly known as "God's continent") is in a deep institutional crisis and may only survive due to the, so-called, reversed mission of the immigrant churches.[9] Thus, the process

[6] Cf. W. Ustorf, "The Cultural Origins of 'Intercultural' Theology" in M.J. Cartledge and D. Cheetham (eds.), Intercultural Theology: Approaches and Themes, London: SCM Press 2011, 11-28.
[7] Cf. S.Y. Pang, "A Postcolonial Theological Project: Creating Space for the Studies of World Christianity" in International Review of Mission 97/384-385 (2008), 78-90.
[8] T.B. Liew, "Redressing Bodies at Corinth: Racial/Ethnic Politics and Religious Difference in the Context of Empire" in C.D. Stanley (ed.), The Colonized Apostle: Paul Through Postcolonial Eyes, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2011, 127-145; A.K. Min, The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology After Postmodernism, New York: T&T Clark Publishers 2004, 134-155; Yung Suk Kim, *Christ's Body in Corinth:* The Politics of a Metaphor, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2008.
[9] P. Jenkins, The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity, New York: Oxford University Press 2002; P. Jenkins, The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South, New York: Oxford

of secularisation in Europe, the expansion of Christianity in other parts of the world (especially in the 'third world'), and developments such as migration and globalisation have a great impact on the appearance of Christianity as a global religion in our contemporary world.

My interest is in Western Christianity as part of the rapidly changing global configuration of Christianity. The vague term 'Western Christianity', as used here, refers broadly to the established, or mainstream, Christianity of 'the Western world' that is intricately related to Western cultural, political and economical powers, both in history and today. However, the term 'Western' of course is also rather vague. Gayatri Spivak considers it a codename, but a code for what?[10] The 'West' may refer to a historical or geo-political entity or a cultural construct, and most often it refers to the collusion of these aspects.[11] Although I am aware that 'the West' is an idea and a project (cultural, economical, and/or political) rather than a place, in the context of this article, I acknowledge the geographical and geo-political underpinnings of this idea or project. Following the African theologians discussed in this paper, I use the terms 'West' and 'Western' as codenames primarily for (North) Western Europe and North America as powerful geo-political and economic regions in our world. My questions are: How is Christianity in these regions challenged by the developments taking place in world Christianity, particularly by the shift of the centre of gravity, in global Christianity, from the Western world to the global South?[12] What does it mean theologically for Western Christianity to find itself today as a minority – not only on its own continent (in the case of Europe), but also within global Christianity, where it is far outnumbered by Christians from other continents? What does it mean for Western Christianity to be part of a religion that is predominantly found in the 'third world', in countries that have often been colonised, and that today are faced with challenges brought about by neo-colonialism and globalisation? What is the position and identity of Western Christianity in the changing configurations of world Christianity? Put briefly, these questions draw our attention to the theological implications of the changes in world Christianity for Western perspectives on Christian identity.

One starting point to deal with these questions is formed by the contextual theologies that emerge from other parts of the world, and that represent other voices in world Christianity. This route is the key to developing what I call a postcolonial theological approach to the study of world Christianity. Characteristics of postcolonial Christianity, as Catherine Keller points out, are the new voices that have emerged from contexts that were formerly colonised and have achieved independence, but yet experience marginalisation in the

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University Press 2006; P. Jenkins, *God' s Continent. Christianity, Islam and Europe's Religious Crisis*, New York: Oxford University Press 2007.

[10] G.C. Spivak, A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of Vanishing the Present, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP 1999, 6.

[11] Cf. S. Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power" in S. Hall, D. Held, D. Hubert and K. Thompson (eds.), Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies, Malden, MA and Oxford: The Open University 1996, 184-227.

[12] Namsoon Kang has critically mentioned that the current discourse on world Christianity reflects a residue of Westcentrism, as it often creates a binary of "Christianity-the West" versus "World Christianity-the Rest". In her opinion, 'the West' disappears behind and is absent from the 'world Christianity' discourse. (N. Kang, "Whose/Which World in World Christianity?: Toward World Christianity as Christianity of Worldly-Responsibility" in A.E. Akinade (ed.), A New Day: Essays on World Christianity in Honor of Lamin Sanneh, New York: Peter Lang 2010, 35.) In this article I seek to overcome the binary observed by Kang, through explicitly discussing and questioning the identity of Western Christianity in, and as part of, world Christianity.

global economic and political order. Referring to Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and Africa, Keller says:

> The postcolonial contribution [to world Christianity, AvK] properly comes from the peripheries, diasporas, and boundary zones of empire, from people in some sense speaking for those who over the past century and a half achieved national independence, and yet find themselves subject to new forms of imperial subjugation.[13]

This realisation leads Keller into a critical reflection on the relationship of Christianity to 'empire', as part of her postcolonial theological project.

I would like to dwell a little longer than Keller on her observation that postcolonial world Christianity is largely located in the geo-political peripheries and at the socio-economic margins of our globalising world. This observation can be illustrated with the various theologies emerging from 'third world' contexts in world Christianity, from the late 1960s until now.[14] These theologies often present a fundamental critique of the dominant Western theological tradition with its claims of timelessness and universal significance. As Kwok Pui-lan points out, contextual theologians reflect on the lived experiences of people and on the concrete social and political concerns in particular contexts in relation to the Christian tradition. They also denounce the theological hegemony of Europe and North America, and reclaim the right to speak about God.[15] Even more, these theologians often raise critical issues to theology, churches and Christians in the West about their complicity with historical and contemporary (neo)colonial structures that, in their opinion, are at the root of many problems faced by people living at the margins of our postcolonial and globalising world. Clearly, Western Christianity is contested by the contextual theological voices from world Christianity. According to these postcolonial critics, Western Christianity was 'on the wrong side of history', that is, both the theological, economic and political histories of Christianity that all have shaped our contemporary world.

Western Christianity and its theology(-ies) have often ignored the voices from other parts of world Christianity. When attention is paid to them, they are easily considered to be exotic theologies that are interesting objects of comparative study, rather than dialogue partners which raise critical theological questions that could lead to self-reflection. In the words of R.S. Sugirtharajah, the various contextual theologies emerging from the 'third world' tend to be commoditised and ghettoised in what he calls "the Western metropolitan centres".[16] A strong argument for Western Christianity to take these theologies seriously has been provided by Joerg Rieger. Rieger criticises Western postmodern theology for celebrating otherness and difference, without, however, allowing itself to be reshaped in the encounter with those who are 'other' and different. He argues that "the so-called postmodern turn to the

[13] C. Keller, "The Love of Postcolonialism: Theology in the Interstices of Empire" in C. Keller, M. Nausner and M. Rivera (eds.), Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire, St. Louis: Chalice Press 2004, 223.
[14] For an introduction to these theologies, see J. Parratt (ed.), An Introduction to Third World Theologies, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004.
[15] P.-L. Kwok, Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2005, 150.
[16] R.S. Sugirtharajah, Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology, London: SCM Press 2003, 162-175.

other is in danger of covering up the challenge of the other" because the interest in the other rarely leads into "the question of who and what put (and is holding) the other in its place."[17] Hence, Rieger says that postmodern discourse, particularly its critique of modern notions of identity, needs to be broadened by postcolonial thought. This line of thought suggests that difference and otherness are not primarily philosophical principles, but are embedded in structures of power that are deeply ingrained in societies, and in our globalising world. According to Rieger:

> Current [postmodern] notions of otherness and difference – celebrating an end to the rigid identities of modernity and the free flow of difference – end up being smoke screens if they do not take into account those deeper ruptures of global society and the harsh character of its margins.[18]

Applying this to the various contextual theologies emerging from world Christianity, Rieger points to the fact that these are often considered special interest theologies for particular groups of people; for example, the poor in Latin American liberation theology, or women in feminist theologies. As such, they may attract some attention from Western postmodern theology. However, drawing from the perception that there is no identity that exists apart from relationships and structures of power, and thus that all identities in our global society are intricately connected, Rieger argues that the contextual theologies "from the margins" are actually "common-interest theologies since they hold an important key to understanding the truth about all of us."[19]

Rieger further explains this with a reference to the Pauline metaphor of the Body of Christ. In this body, according to the apostle Paul, if one member suffers, all members suffer together (1 Corinthians 12,26). In Rieger's reading, this notion broadens the horizons of those who belong 'to the mainline'. He considers it a crucial broadening move because "[w]e may never understand God without the perspective of those who are different, including in a special way the perspectives of those on the margins."[20] Thus, according to Rieger, the various contextual theologies emerging from postcolonial world Christianity are crucial for Western Christianity and its theology in order to understand itself and the world it lives in, and, finally, to understand God.

In my opinion, Rieger provides an argument that is key to the development of a postcolonial theological approach to world Christianity in general, and to the question concerning the identity of Western Christianity as part of world Christianity in particular. Engaging the argument of Rieger, I will now discuss the African theologies addressing HIV and AIDS, in order to see what 'truth about all of us', in this case about Western Christianity, might be revealed in this particular contextual theology.

African Challenges to Western Christianity

[17] J. Rieger, "Theology and the Power of the Margins in a Postmodern World" in J. Rieger (ed.), Opting for the Margins: Postmodernity and Liberation in Christian Theology, New York: Oxford University Press 2003, 190 and 191.
[18] Rieger, "Theology and the Power of the Margins", 193.
[19] Rieger, "Theology and the Power of the Margins", 193.
[20] Rieger, "Theology and the Power of the Margins", 180-181.

From its discovery in the early 1980s, HIV has grown into a huge, global pandemic, particularly ravaging the African continent. African theology being characterised by a quest for contextual relevance and an engagement with local realities and concerns, African theologians could hardly ignore the impact of the epidemic on their communities and societies. As South African theologian Tinyiko Maluleke puts it with reference to the famous Kairos Document that addressed Apartheid, HIV poses a new kairos (i.e. one of the most urgent theological issues of our time) that is to be faced by churches and theologians.[21]

Expressing the impact and significance of the epidemic, several theologians have employed the theological metaphor of the Body of Christ.[22] This notion originates from the Pauline writings in the New Testament, specifically the letter to the Corinthians, and is generally understood as a metaphor for the church (both local and global). African theologians creatively employ this metaphor to call for the solidarity of churches for people living with HIV and AIDS. Therefore, they paraphrase 1 Corinthians 12,26, which reads that if one member of Christ's Body suffers, all members suffer together. For example, Musa Dube, a biblical scholar and theologian from Botswana, states:

> If one member of the church is infected, the church cannot separate itself. If one member is suffering from AIDS, the church cannot separate itself from his/her suffering. ... The church, in other words, should not shy away from saying: 'We have AIDS'.[23]

It is noteworthy that Dube and others employ the metaphor of the Body of Christ, not only to call upon African churches, but upon churches worldwide. Arguing that the epidemic is the new kairos of our time, Maluleke emphasises that it is a kairos for the church in Africa, as well as the church globally: "While we in the church may not all be infected, we all can be infected and once one member of the body is infected we are certainly all affected!"[24] Following this line of thought, because of the interconnectedness in the Body of Christ, when Christians in Africa are living with HIV and AIDS, Christians all over the world are, in a certain sense, also living with HIV and AIDS. However, these African theologians are of the opinion that this sense of solidarity is yet to be developed among Christians in the Western world. In the words of Ugandan theologian Emmanuel Katongole, metaphorically speaking the latter are "yet to be infected".[25] From this perception, he and others raise several criticisms of the Western world in order to challenge Western Christianity.

Firstly, Katongole contests the apparent posture of Western Christianity that it is immune from the interruptions of HIV and AIDS. In his observation, Western churches view

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[21] T.S. Maluleke, "The Challenge of HIV/AIDS for Theological Education in Africa: Towards an HIV/AIDS Sensitive Curriculum" in Missionalia 29/2 (2001), 125.
[22] Cf. A.S. van Klinken, "The Body of Christ has AIDS: A Study on the Notion of the Body of Christ in African Theologies Responding to HIV&AIDS" in Missionalia 36/2-3 (2008), 319-336.
[23] M.W. Dube, A Theology of Compassion in the HIV and AIDS Era. Module 7 of the HIV and AIDS Curriculum for TEE Programmes and Institutions in Africa, Geneva: WCC Publications 2007, 214.
[24] Maluleke, The Challenge of HIV/AIDS for Theological Education in Africa, 125 (italics original).
[25] E.M. Katongole, "AIDS in Africa, the Church, and the Politics of Interruption" in F.X. D'Sa and J. Lohmayer (eds.), Heil und Befreiung in Afrika. Die Kirchen vor der Missionarischen Herausforderung durch HIV/AIDS, Wurzburg: Echter 2007, 175.

the epidemic as an African problem to which they, at best, respond to through advocacy and humanitarian assistance, as if they were just another NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation or aid agency). The epidemic has not interrupted their "illusion of power and self-sufficiency" and has not, fundamentally, shocked their life and mission.[26] Katongole underlines the need for Western churches to be 'interrupted' in their view of the devastating consequences of HIV in Africa and to become aware of their own brokenness. Only when they are radically interrupted by the epidemic, can they share the pain of African churches, and together look for ways to offer "any hope of salvation".[27] Like Katongole, Dube also critically addresses Western churches who consider HIV and AIDS African or third-world problems, and she points to the metaphor of the Body of Christ to argue for the contrary.[28] Employing this metaphor she challenges "the global Christian church" to own up to the epidemic as its 'own' pain and as its 'own' problem.[29]

A second critical issue concerns Western discourse about HIV and AIDS in Africa. The concern is that these discourses simply echo colonial representations of Africa as the subaltern Other. On the basis of a review of the publications of some prominent AIDS researchers, Edward Antonio points out that the magnitude of HIV in Africa is often explained from a distinct "African sexuality" or a "hyper-sexualized pan-African culture".[30] He points out that such perceptions "represent a long history of stereotypical Western portrayals of Africans as sexually immoral, exotic, aberrant, and totally other", and they "constitute a discursive hegemony that uses the crisis of AIDS to recolonize language about African sex and sexuality."[31] Similar concerns are also expressed by Dube.[32] Katongole puts it succinctly, when he states:

> If the standard view of Africa within Western imagination has tended to associate Africa with 'blackness,' darkness and barbarism, the AIDS pandemic has helped to push this negative characterisation of the continent and of Africans generally to its radical extreme.[33]

The third issue concerns the key argument of Dube that HIV in Africa has become such a huge and devastating epidemic because of neo-colonial structures in our globalising world. Dube is at the forefront of what can be called an HIV and AIDS liberation theology. In this

[26] Katongole, "AIDS in Africa", 174.
[27] Katongole, "AIDS in Africa", 177.
[28] M.W. Dube, "Theological Challenges: Proclaiming the Fullness of Life in the HIV/AIDS & Global Era" in International Review of Mission 91/363 (2002), 539.
[29] M.W. Dube, The HIV & AIDS Bible: Selected Essays, Scranton and London: University of Scranton Press 2008, 152.
[30] In this context, Antonio discusses at length the joint publications of the Australian scholars John Caldwell, Pat Caldwell and Pat Quiggin.
[31] E.P. Antonio, "Eros, AIDS, and African Bodies: A Theological Commentary on Deadly Desires" in M.D. Kamitsuka (ed.), The Embrace of Eros. Bodies, Desires and Sexuality in Christianity, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2010, 187.
[32] M.W. Dube, "HIV+ Feminisms, Postcoloniality and the Global AIDS Crisis" in D.N. Hopkins and M. Lewis (eds.), Another World is Possible: Spiritualities and Religions of Global Darker People, London: Equinox 2009, 152-155. See also Dube, The HIV & AIDS Bible, 105 and 149.
[33] E.M. Katongole, "Christian Ethics and AIDS in Africa Today. Exploring the Limits of a Culture of Suspicion and Despair" in Missionalia 29/2 (2001), 147.

theology, HIV is not primarily explained by the moral or sexual lives of individuals, but from social structures such as poverty and gender, which are analysed and prophetically addressed in a discourse of (in)justice. Additionally, Dube is one of the few African theologians intensively trained in postcolonial theory. Combining the liberation and postcolonial approach in her work on HIV and AIDS, she explains the African HIV epidemic as arising mainly from unjust international relationships and economic structures in the global society:

> HIV&AIDS is not simply about individual morality. Rather it is about social injustice ... [and] about international injustice. It is about globalization, which increasingly makes social welfare services such as health and education privatized, commercialized and unaffordable; and globalization, which creates job insecurity and separates families as people go searching for jobs. ... HIV&AIDS is also about unjust international relations that have reduced some countries to economic unviability. It is about refusal to allow countries in the Two-Thirds World patent permissions to produce affordable drugs for managing HIV&AIDS opportunistic infections.[34]

It is from this understanding that Dube argues that HIV in Africa is a "postcolonial global epidemic" which cannot be understood, apart from the "colonial politics of yesterday and current global/international relations".[35] Therefore, she considers it urgent to develop an international and ecumenical theological response to the epidemic, and she indicates that Western theologians should also engage in this.[36] She specifically calls upon Christians in the West, saying that people who do not live in the 'hot zones' of HIV must still ask how the "unjust international relations of their particular countries and regions contribute to the ill health of other countries and nations" and how "the economic and political policies of their country have led to the bleeding and death of many nations".[37]

This brief survey shows that several African theologians, from their engagement with the HIV epidemic, raise issues that are critical to the Western world and are challenging to Western Christianity in particular. They present an example par excellence of a contextual theology that emerges from the socio-economic margins of our world and that gives a voice to the concerns of people living in the midst of poverty and disease. Although emerging from 'the margins', this theology derives from one of the major centres of contemporary world Christianity. These African theologians illustrate the postcolonial contribution to contemporary world Christianity, and they demonstrate how in postcolonial world Christianity, Western Christianity is severely criticised and contested.

The Body of Christ as a Postcolonial Interstitial Space

In the light of the insight of Rieger that contextual theologies are actually "common-interest theologies", the question emerges what "truth about all of us" is revealed by the African

[34] Dube, The HIV & AIDS Bible, 93-94.
[35] Dube, "HIV+ Feminisms, Postcoloniality and the Global AIDS Crisis", 153.
[36] Dube, The HIV & AIDS Bible, 46-47.
[37] Dube, The HIV & AIDS Bible, 96.

theology discussed above.[38] Basically, the point made by theologians such as Dube, Katongole, and Maluleke is that Christians in the West are related to, and therefore should be affected by the realities of Christians in Africa living in the shadow of HIV and AIDS. Hence they call for solidarity between Western and African churches – a solidarity expressed, not just in terms of financial support, but also in an emotional and spiritual sharing of pain, despair, and hope. Thus, Western Christianity is reminded by these African theologians that it is part of world Christianity, and that in world Christianity most Christians live in conditions far worse than in the West. Moreover, with their explanation of HIV as an epidemic embedded in global injustice, the theologians make Christians in the West critically aware that they are part of, and probably benefit from, economic powers and structures that give rise to poverty and disease in Africa (and elsewhere). In this way they also point out that the ethics of the Body of Christ is not simply about solidarity understood as compassion, but also about social and economic justice in our postcolonial world. In the Body of Christ, religion, economics and politics are not separated but closely intertwined.[39]

Similar points have been made by Latin American liberation theologians some decades ago, but they did not systematically relate their arguments for solidarity and justice to the theological concept of the Body of Christ. The African theologians creatively employ this evocative metaphor, which makes their argument theologically powerful. The metaphor is at the heart of Christian theological traditions and is a key to theological formulations of Christian identity (such as "the church is the Body of Christ" or "Christians are members of the Body of Christ"). The African theologians add a new dimension to the metaphor when they assert that the Body of Christ has AIDS, and when they remind Western Christianity of being part of this metaphorical body. Here we have 'the truth' they reveal, namely that Western Christianity is part of the global Body of Christ which today is living with AIDS, and that Western Christians are principally affected by the HIV epidemic as much as their fellow Christians in Africa.

The questions raised by African theologians are presented in this chapter in order to demonstrate how Western Christianity is contested by non-Western contextual theologies. However, the thoughts of these theologians on the global Body of Christ with AIDS, and their subsequent criticisms, are more than just an illustration of the delicate position and contested identity of Western Christianity as part of postcolonial world Christianity. With the metaphor of the Body of Christ, African theologians present a meaningful theological concept, enabling Western Christianity to reconsider its identity, and to reconfigure its position as part of world Christianity in our postcolonial and globalising world. In my opinion, the metaphor of the Body of Christ could be a stepping stone to a postcolonial theological understanding of Western Christianity. This is because the metaphor opens up, what in postcolonial theory is called, an interstice or interstitial space.

For postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, the concept of the interstice refers to "in between spaces" where constructions of identity and difference (in terms of culture, nationalities and subjectivities) are called into question and interrogated, and where inter-

[38] Cf. Rieger, "Theology and the Power of the Margins", 193.

[39] About the relation and intertwinement of religion, politics and economics in our globalising world, see also the contributions of Joerg Rieger and Patrick Eisenlohr to this volume.

subjectivities and collective experiences are negotiated.[40] As an intervening space, an interstice may also become "a space of intervention in the here and now" as it enables us "to reinscribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; to touch the future on its hither side."[41] In other words, in interstitial spaces the boundaries and differences that split human community are called into question. This results in a growing awareness of interdependence and intersubjectivity. Hence new global coalitions can emerge from these spaces that seek to overcome the cultural, social and economical divisions in our postcolonial world. In this way, as Catherine Keller points out, the interstitial perspective presented by Bhabha "seems to offer a space in which we can risk new politico-religious experimentations."[42]

Keller and the other editors of the volume Postcolonial Theologies suggest that contemporary world Christianity can be understood from the concept of "interstice". In their opinion, the "labyrinth of identities" characterising global Christianity

> winds through an intriguing space: the space of postcolonial theory, an 'in between space' in which the boundaries between identities and difference, between cultures, nationalities, and subjects, are called into question.[43]

This results, they argue, in "another global hybridity, with both its wounds and its potentiality" which characterises Christianity in our day and age.[44] Though these authors note that the concepts of postcolonial theory need to be decoded, concretised and contextualised before they can support a theological project, they do not do so with the concept of the interstice, which thus remains rather abstract. The African theologians who are discussed in this article, however, do present a contextual-theological equivalent of the interstitial space opened up by postcolonial theory. With the image of the Body of Christ with AIDS, they create an imaginative space where the boundaries characterising world Christianity are questioned, where the interdependence of Christians and Christian communities all over the world is recognised, where Christian identities are renegotiated and concepts of community are radically revised, and from where new global coalitions of solidarity may emerge.[45] These theologians challenge Western Christianity to enter this space and, in the words of Katongole, to "reconstitute" its identity in the interstitial space of the Body of Christ which today has AIDS.[46] What then, would it mean for Western Christianity to take up this challenge and enter this space, and how would it be reshaped?

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[40] See H.K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, London and New York: Routledge 1994 (reprint 2010), 1-12.
[41] Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 10 (original italics).
[42] C. Keller, God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2005, 103.
[43] C. Keller, M. Nausner and M. Rivera, "Introduction: Alien/nation, Liberation and the Postcolonial Underground" in C. Keller, M. Nausner and M. Rivera (eds.), Postcolonial Theologies. Divinity and Empire, St. Louis: Chalice Press 2004, 3.
[44] Keller, Nausner and Rivera, "Introduction", 4.
[45] Cf. A.S. van Klinken, "When the Body of Christ has AIDS: Towards a Theology of Global Solidarity in View of the HIV Epidemic" in International Journal of Public Theology 4/4 (2010), 446-465.
[46] Katongole, "AIDS in Africa", 177. In the terminology used by Claudia Camp in her contribution to this volume, the Body of Christ may also be conceptualised as a Thirdspace which embodies the real and imagined lifeworld of experiences, emotions, events, and political choices and has possibilities for alterity and subversion.

Western Christianity in the Interstitial Space of the Body of Christ with AIDS

When the Body of Christ can be considered an intervening space, it could give birth to what Bhabha calls an "interstitial intimacy" within postcolonial world Christianity. Bhabha describes this as "an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which (…) spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed."[47] The metaphor of the Body of Christ with AIDS refers to one of the social experiences within world Christianity that indeed is spatially opposed: the experience of being infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.[48] As these theologians point out, the division between a metaphorically HIV positive African Christianity and an HIV negative Western Christianity is related with other binary divisions of social experience. For instance, divisions such as those between poor and rich, black and white, formerly colonised and formerly colonising continents, and countries that are marginalised by and countries that benefit from current neo-colonial economic structures.

In the intervening space of the Body of Christ, Western Christianity could become critically aware of the different social experiences within world Christianity, and of the binary divisions through which these experiences are spatially opposed. As an imaginative theological space, the Body of Christ transcends geographical location, and in this way it makes Western Christianity thoroughly aware of the significance of location in our postcolonial and globalising world: theologically it might not matter where one is located in the global Body of Christ, but in reality it matters a lot.

The intervening space of the Body of Christ enables Western Christianity to become aware of the different social experiences in world Christianity, and also of the complicit interconnectedness of these various experiences. African theologians challenge Western Christianity to acknowledge that HIV and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa is part of the shadow side of globalisation. Furthermore, they remind Western Christianity of its complicity with the social, political and economical powers and structures that underlie the global HIV epidemic, making Africa the poorest and the most affected continent of the world. In the space of the Body of Christ, then, Western Christianity is challenged to reconsider its intricate involvement with neo-colonial politics and structures in the era of globalisation.

The understanding of HIV in Africa as a by-product of the globalisation processes shaping today's world, is in opposition to a popular opinion in the Western world, often reproduced in subtle ways, that HIV in Africa is largely a result of sexual promiscuity.[49] This popular view, as Dube, Katongole and Antonio point out, seems to echo colonial perceptions of African sexuality. The critique of these scholars on Western discourses on HIV and AIDS challenges Western Christians not only to rethink their own perceptions about HIV in Africa,

[47] Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 19.
[48] This is not to suggest that HIV does not occur in the Western world, however at a completely different scale and far more under control.
[49] Wikipedia (sometimes called the most democratic encyclopedia) presents a good example of the popular understanding of AIDS in Africa. The lemma on 'HIV/AIDS in Africa', explaining the spread of the epidemic on the continent, reads: 'Aside from polygynous relationships, which can be quite prevalent in parts of Africa, there are also widespread practices of sexual networking that involve multiple overlapping or concurrent sexual partners. Men's sexual networks, in particular, tend to be quite extensive, a fact that is tacitly accepted by many communities.' (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HIV/AIDS_in_Africa, accessed 31 January 2012). Polygeny and 'sexual networking' (the equivalents of 'traditional' and 'modern' forms of 'promiscuity') are mentioned as the primary factors contributing to the spread of HIV in Africa.

but also to look at the roots of these perceptions, such as the symbolic representations of 'black' and 'white' deeply rooted in their theological traditions.[50] More generally, it underlines the need for Western Christianity to confront its colonial history; something that has hardly been done. The "failure to consider our colonial heritage", in the words of Rieger, "may result in failure to understand who we are today".[51] In his opinion, this is a roadblock that prevents Christians and churches in the West from building genuine relationships with Christians in other parts of the world. In the intervening space of the Body of Christ, this failure can be confronted and overcome.

Apart from an intervening space that interrogates boundaries and divisions in postcolonial world Christianity, the metaphor of the Body of Christ with AIDS can also become a space of intervention. Crucial for this is the awareness of interdependence which negotiates collective experiences. Traditionally, the metaphor of the Body of Christ includes a strong notion of interdependence, as appears from Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 12,26, that if one member of the body suffers, all suffer together, and when one member is honoured, all rejoice together. For this reason, it has been called a "master metaphor of solidarity" in a divided world.[52]

Clearly, the metaphor of the Body of Christ puts a similar ethical impetus as the concept of the interstice derived from postcolonial theory. However, the metaphor adds a strong theological dimension. Particular identities and subjectivities are renegotiated and transcended by a shared identity 'in Christ'. And Christ, so the African theologians remind 'us', is suffering with those people currently living with HIV and AIDS, and searches with them for justice, hope and healing.[53] Thus, these theologians point to the theological identity 'in Christ', in order to challenge Western Christianity to own up the HIV epidemic as its own pain, and its own problem.

In the interstitial space of the Body of Christ, Western Christianity could rediscover that it is intricately related to, and somehow shares the experiences of, the majority of Christians living at the margins of today's world. In this way, Western Christianity is challenged to engage in a quest for solidarity, or, in the words of Keller, "a counter imperial ecology of love".[54] This solidarity will seek to overcome the socio-economic and political divisions that underlie the HIV epidemic and that characterise postcolonial world Christianity. The Body of Christ produces, what Namsoon Kang calls, a "cosmopolitanism from below". This form of cosmopolitanism is grounded in "a radically egalitarian view of human beings".[55] It recognises and transforms the hegemonic view from the perspective of people 'from below', which have been formerly devalued, silenced and marginalised. It further promotes 'border-thinking' in the Body of Christ, as "an opportunity to engage the multiple

[50] Cf. J.W. Perkinson, White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity, New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2004.
[51] J. Rieger, "Theology and Mission between Neocolonialism and Postcolonialism" in Mission Studies 21/2 (2004), 202.
[52] Min, The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World, 148.
[53] Dube, "Theological Challenges", 539-540.
[54] Keller, "The Love of Postcolonialism", 224.
[55] N. Kang, "Toward a Cosmopolitan Theology: Constructing Public Theology from the Future" in S.D. Moore and M. Rivera (eds.), Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality and Theology, New York: Fordham University Press 2011, 271.

contexts, communities, and identities that constitute different experiences of marginalization, oppression and exclusion of people."[56]

From this perspective, it is not enough for Western churches to act like an NGO in Africa and other parts of the world affected by HIV and AIDS, poverty, and disease. The project at hand is far more fundamental. In the interstitial space of the Body of Christ with AIDS, Western Christianity is urged to enter current debates on religion, empire, globalisation, (post)colonialism and neo-colonial politics, to reposition itself in the present global economic and political order, and to reconsider its identity in light of the realities of postcolonial world Christianity.

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[56] Kang, "Toward a Cosmopolitan Theology", 272.

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