

For Kim, valuing diversity, difference, inclusion, and solidarity is an ethical priority. His critiques of standard interpretations of Paul's metaphor of the body of Christ are thus ethically grounded. He rejects the "ecclesiological organism approach" because "it leaves no room for taking into account marginalized voices or diversity" (p. 30). He finds that other standard approaches to the metaphor of the body of Christ, including what he terms "the christological approach" and the "corporate solidarity approach," fall short of his goal of an ethically multicultural interpretation that makes room for interreligious dialogue. --- Jennifer A. Glancy, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 74 no 2 Ap 2012, p 378-379.

Although much has been written on the Pauline notion of the "body of Christ," this contribution by Presbyterian scholar Kim offers a thoughtful and provocative insight worth considering. Kim observes that the Pauline metaphor can be interpreted as setting boundaries or differentiations between the Christian community and those outside. However, if we consider the "body of Christ" as the crucified body of Christ it can be seen as a means of dissolving boundaries and being more inclusive, particularly of those who are pushed to the margins or who suffer. Kim draws out from this key Pauline symbol the implications for the church and society today, particularly in the Gospel call for solidarity with those who are marginalized. --Donald Senior, *The Bible Today*, 47(2) p.141. (Mar-Apr 2009).

"This book questions the usual understanding of 'the body of Christ' in Paul's writings. Most scholars see it as an idea describing and emphasizing the unity of the church; Kim argues that it has more to do with diversity and with 'collective participation in Christ crucified'. The traditional understanding, he says, is not satisfying in today's diverse world; it operates with exclusive boundaries, and is often used in oppressive and colonial ways. On the other hand, 'the image of Christ crucified deconstructs the conception of the community based on powers of wealth, status, and identity, and reconstructs the community based on sacrificial love and solidarity with those who are broken in society. This power of the cross ... makes possible a new formation of the community of all in diversity' (p.21)." -- Reviewed by David Wenham, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32.5 (2010): 94-97.

a response to a book review

Recently, I saw Daniel Christiansen's review of my book (*Christ's Body in Corinth*) at *The Bible and Critical Theory* 5.3 (2009) and I appreciate it. I admit his critique of the book's length (slender volume) and less-connectedness of the pictures in the book. However, to be honest, his review is not fair-minded as he labels my interpretation as ideological. The biggest weakness of his review is not to state a main thesis of the book at all; in his review is there no summary or main argument of the book. A typical way of being fair to any book review is to write main points and development of the book, and then to evaluate it critically. But he skipped this part of being fair to the book; instead, he himself becomes ideologically driven, hastily and vehemently rejecting the idea of diversity even without looking at the main argument of the body metaphor that this book argues.

By the way, according to a theory (Althusser Louis in particular), all interpretations are ideological. So is mine and are all others'. What is at stake for anyone's interpretation is not whether his or her reading is ideological or not, but what kind of ideology is operative in interpretation and/or whether that kind of ideology helps us to read the text clearer or healthier than other kind of ideology. So it is nothing wrong with reading texts through an ideological lens. But here the problem of his review is not to discuss the book's main points and hastily judge it on the basis of what he believes true while ignoring what the book says entirely. For instance, in his review, he rebuts the idea of "Christic body" by asserting that every community is run by "doctrine or practice." But he is not aware of the book chapters on Community and Body in which various conceptions of the community and different understandings about the body are discussed. So in the book nowhere I am saying there is a community possible without boundaries. Rather, I talk about the role of boundary and the function of Christ's body as a metaphor in the Corinthian context. The question is not whether or not the community is bounded but how the given community functions. In so doing, my book focuses on the roles of the boundary, the conceptions of the community and the different understandings about the body. The real question is which interpretation of the body might be closer to the reality of early Christian life experience in Corinth.

I would welcome any challenge to or critical evaluation of my book if there were a fair balance between what the book really says and what it lacks. I would expect that any reviewer recognizes various approaches to the "body of Christ" discussed in the book, and engages the main argument of the book that lies in the figurative, discursive analysis of 1 Corinthians: an alternative reading of the "body of Christ" understood as **a metaphor for a way of life or living (Christic body)**, on the basis of re-imagination of the "body of Christ" as *the crucified body of Christ*.

By contrast, Donald Senior's review of my book at *The Bible Today* clearly states the gist of the book as follows: "Although much has been written on the Pauline notion of the "body of Christ," this contribution by Presbyterian scholar Kim offers a thoughtful and provocative insight worth considering. Kim observes that the Pauline metaphor can be interpreted as setting boundaries or differentiations between the Christian community and those outside. However, if we consider the "body of Christ" as the crucified body of Christ it can be seen as a means of dissolving boundaries and being more inclusive, particularly of those who are pushed to the margins or who

suffer. Kim draws out from this key Pauline symbol the implications for the church and society today, particularly in the Gospel call for solidarity with those who are marginalized" (excerpt from Donald Senior's review, *The Bible Today* 47(2) p.141. Mar-Apr 2009). --Yung Suk Kim

In *Christ's Body in Corinth: The Politics of a Metaphor* (Fortress Press Minneapolis, 2008), Yung Suk Kim addresses those who inhabit the margins of the global church. British churches in urban neighbourhoods often find they have much in common with the global church's many theological positions and ecclesiological contexts. This short analysis of Paul's metaphor of the Body of Christ might illuminate their experience of unity as part of the global church. Kim asks, how does this metaphor inform our understanding of unity and diversity? Paradoxically, unity leads to divisiveness, whilst diversity leads to unity.

'Paul's argument presupposes that the divisiveness of the Corinthian community results not from a lack of unity but from a failure on the part of its members to acknowledge and respect the diversity present in the community.' (Page 4)

Kim argues the Gospels' radical commitment is to those marginalised by state or church. So, there must be a paradoxical co-existence of competing truths. Paul's goal in his first letter to the Corinthian churches is therefore not unity but reconciliation.

'Being united in the same mind and the same purpose is not a matter of belonging to an ecclesiological body, but rather is a matter of having a mind and purpose framed by the same gospel that does not empty the cross of Christ of its power.' (Page 74)

The metaphor of the Body of Christ is not the assembled church so much as the broken body of Christ on the cross. The cross is fundamental to what Paul means by the Body of Christ. Crucifixion was for slaves, the marginalised and the poor. The problem in Corinth was the perception of unity as between leaders, rather than as the solidarity of the most marginal people. Through Jesus' death, God identifies with the lowest in society.

'How could we believe that Paul would disregard the experiences of the most vulnerable, the slaves and victims of the Empire, when he talks about Christ crucified? How could we believe that the same Paul who made the cross central to his message would side with the hegemonic body politic based on the Stoic ideal of unity? It appears, to the contrary, that the image of Christ crucified deconstructs society's wisdom, power and glory.' (Page 53)

Unity is not drawing boundaries between those who believe correctly and those who do not. Rather it is solidarity between those who know the crucified Christ and bear his scars. It is not formal ecumenical talks that matter, but the wider oikoumene.

'Instead, Paul identifies himself with the most foolish people: "[W]hen slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day" (1 Cor 4:13). Paul's sarcasm represents a rhetoric of protest against the dominant oppressive systems of the world; systems that suffocate the powerless and make them hungry.' (Page 36)

To identify with the marginalised is to be engaged with the world as it is, to choose to live on the knife edge. This diversity enables all who believe to subject their beliefs to debate with others. The aim is commitment to each other despite our differences. The complexities of the world demand a complex and diverse church in response. As churches work for transformation, they need the diverse insights of a diverse church. Book review source: [Churches Together in England](#).

[Lawrence Garcia Reviews Yung Suk Kim's "Christ's Body In Corinth: The Politics of A Metaphor"](#)
[February 17, 2012](#)

QUOTE:

For those on whom it is being imposed, “unity” can be an ominous word. After all, history has proven such words—unity, concord, and harmony—are usually employed ideologically by the social elite upon the marginal, a sort of rhetorical tool in the ideological tool belt of those situated at the pinnacle of power. Ancient statesmen and philosophers like Cicero and Seneca—Rome’s ruling elite—wrote about homonoia (concord) in which everyone was to do their part within the empire by helping to maintain the status quo; the radical social division between rich and poor, free and enslaved, male and female. Was Paul’s “Body of Christ” metaphor analogous to the concept of homonia? Did Paul develop this image of the Christological body as a way to promote an ideology that served to maintain their positions of power? No, says Yung Suk Kim in his book titled *Christ’s Body In Corinth: The Politics of A Metaphor*, a radical break from the traditional ecclesial-organic understanding of Paul’s metaphor “body of Christ.” In his book Kim argues:

In the context of a deepening fragmentation of the world today, we need to embrace a different conception of community—a community of all diversity and solidarity. I believe such a conception is available in Paul’s new imagination of the body of Christ as a collective participation in Christ crucified. In that community, the image of Christ crucified deconstructs the conception of the community based on powers of wealth, status, and identity and reconstructs the community based on sacrificial love and solidarity with those who are broken in society.

However, if Paul’s metaphor is going to take on new relevance, the vulnerabilities in the traditional ways we have understood Paul’s body image will have to be exposed. To this end, Kim deals head-on with both the “organic unity” approach that often results in the silencing of the marginal by trumpeting the social-norms of the “hegemonic voices” in the community, and the “corporate solidarity” approach which has a “broader conception of community,” but still fails in alleviating the plight of those residing at the margins. What is needed is a proposal that won’t wind up being the functional equivalent to the Roman concept of homonoia, after all, the problems in the Corinthian body are because they are practicing the very social values of the wider culture—“concord.” Thus, we have to wonder how a re-affirmation of the wider Greco-Roman values actually solves the problem of abuse of the poor by the rich at Corinth. Kim writes:

A new conception of community in the context of marginalization and social fragmentation requires that we imagine anew the Pauline “body of Christ” as a social site for realizing the ethical, holistic, and life-giving potentialities of Christ’s life and death. In particular, the image of Christ crucified may be seen as deconstructing powers and ideologies of wealth, status, or belonging and reconstructing the community through sacrificial love.

This will likewise entail a re-sketching of the “in Christ” metaphor, not as a static boundary marker per se, but as a spatial “gathering of differences” where the “weak” in Corinth can claim a place of significance and appreciation. This theory has a practical strength to it as Paul is not just conjuring up abstract metaphors, but aiming at cruciforming concrete ways of life in Corinth. To be “in Christ” is neither mystical nor existential, but a manner of life that participates and identifies with those—“the not many mighty” in Corinth for whom Christ has died. Such a reading actually addresses the problems we see cropping up throughout the Corinthian correspondence: ideological power struggles linked either to Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ; the freedom touting that caused the weaker in Corinth to fall; and the exclusion of the marginal by the rich at communal meals, and especially, at the Eucharist. So, far from solidifying the existing hierarchies in Corinth, Paul’s “body of Christ” metaphor urges the strong to practice an active identification with the marginalized in Corinth for whom God identified himself with at Calvary.

Among the many volumes in the Paul In Critical Contexts series, Kim’s proposal is one of the most plausible re-imaginings of Paul and his writings. It both lays bare our often uncritical use of the “body of Christ” metaphor which if used to maintain ideological or social hierarchy in the church can actually rub against Paul’s reason for employing it. And if allowed to do its deconstruction/reconstruction of how we understand Paul’s term we will certainly witness an improvement in the way the wealthy and powerful in our churches relate with the lowly and weak, crystalizing Paul’s grand vision of a new creation at last. UNQUOTE ---[From Lawrence Garcia Blog](#)