

All religions make some use of the material to represent or lead to something beyond. But not all religions emphasize materiality to the extent that Christianity does, impelled by the doctrines of creation *ex nihilo* and of the Incarnation. Hence a paradox: if the Christian God is understood to redeem, not merely to transcend, the material, then corruptible, partible matter must be capable of incorruption and eternal wholeness. In her lecture, Caroline Bynum will explore one consequence of this paradox: Christianity's insistence on material fragmentation as a way of distributing the holy, while embedding this in the idea of synecdoche. Describing first the cult of holy matter and the way in which the anxieties about decay attendant upon it are reflected in theology and reliquaries, she will then look at five wound piety (which has often been understood as erotic or proto-feminist) as an example of the devotional sense of *pars pro toto*.

Caroline Walker Bynum is professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton and University professor emerita at Columbia University in New York City. She works on theology, religion and culture in the later Middle Ages. Her book *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (1987) was instrumental in introducing the concept of gender into Medieval Studies. Her books *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (1991) and *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity* (1995) provided a paradigm for the history of the body. Her recent book, *Wonderful Blood* (2007) focuses on devotion to the blood of Christ in northern Germany in the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. This lecture is based on a chapter in her new study *Christian Materiality* (2011), which is due out from Zone Books late this spring.

Lecture

Caroline Walker Bynum

**Contradiction, Paradox, Synecdoche:
Parts and Wholes in Medieval Devotion**

**Monday
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7.30 pm
In English**

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