

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXVIII, Number 53, 14 April 1994 — Bynum talks of death, resurrection [ARTICLE]

# Bynum talks of death, resurrection

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Morris A. and Alma Schapiro Professor of History Caroline Walker Bynum, associate vice president for Arts and Sciences, spoke on the early Christian roots of death, resurrection, and the body during the third University lecture this year, in the Low Library Rotunda yesterday evening.

At the lecture, which was attended by about 150 people, University President George Rupp presented the opening remarks and University Provost Jonathan Cole gave a short introductory speech.

Quoting from Bynum's Trilling Award-winning book "Fragmentation and Redemption," Cole un-

derlined the importance of historians who are constantly aware of their prejudices while still providing “new voices, new perspectives.”

Bynum introduced her topic by recounting the consideration of a new course in anthropology, the syllabus of which begins, “Am I my body? Or do I use my body?” The new course was proposed by Associate Professor of Anthropology Roger Lancaster.

She said theories of the body are popular topics in modern scholarship, from investigations of the body in terms of race, class, gender, and sexuality to the idea of the body as text.

Bynum’s own work focuses on the question: Is body identity? She compared the issue to similar problems raised by recent television shows, such as “Star Trek,” and movies.

“If my memories or consciousness could be transplanted into another body,” she asked, “would the resulting entity be ‘me’?”

Bynum traced the notion of body as identity to before the common era. It originated in the eschatology and millennialism—ideas of death, resurrection, and redemption—in the four Western religious traditions of Christianity, rabbinic Judaism, Islam, and Zoroastrianism.

Her lecture centered on the historiography of martyrdom and persecution of Christians during the second and third centuries of the common era.

“[The] self is a psychosomatic unity,” Bynum said. “The salvation we want for those we love is bodily. The only survival worth having is

one in which we are our gender and race and shape, our characteristic physical particularities.”

Lancaster said he found Bynum’s lecture especially applicable to problems of the modern era.

“It seems to me that questions of body and identity are apt to come up during periods of social trauma,” Lancaster said. “We live today through all kinds of crises that bring thoughts of body and identity to the fore as well—wars, the new body technologies, the new reproductive technologies, AIDS—all these raised questions about how we lived and experienced our bodies as well.”

Shawn Landres, CC ’94, a religion major, said Bynum’s lecture reflected the high quality of teaching and research at Columbia.

“Dean Bynum is one of Columbia’s more wonderful people,” Landres said. “Tonight only confirmed that brilliant teaching and original scholarship can and do go hand in hand.”

Bynum received her bachelor of arts degree from the University of Michigan and her Ph.D. from Harvard University. She has taught at Harvard and at the University of Washington in Seattle, and has received numerous awards for her outstanding scholarship, the most prestigious among them being the MacArthur “genius” grant.

Bynum’s lecture was taken from her forthcoming book, “The Resurrection of the Body,” due out this November.

The University lectures are given three times a year by outstanding scholars in the social sciences, physical sciences, and humanities.