

# Women and The Word: a variety of views

Interview by Elaine Ostry

The Edmund Kemper Broadus lectures, named for the first head of the U of A English department, are held annually. This year's lecturer is Dr. Patricia Demers, who will discuss "Women as Interpreters of the Bible."

Demers says her interest in the "revisionist work of contemporary feminist theology," led her to explore the "long-standing tradition of women's work, which is often forgotten, as interpreters of the Bible...it is not a phenomenon of the last couple of decades."

Demers will discuss this topic in a series of four lectures. The titles are eye-catching: "Beyond God the Mother," "The power of Holiness: the Medieval Mystic Tradition," "Milk for Babes: Governesses, Matriarchs, and the Moral Tradition," and "An Ablative Estate: The Challenge of Liberating the Word."

The first lecture, "Beyond God the Mother," will consider some of the examples of the Bible in which God speaks to, consoles, and admonishes Israel as a mother," says Demers.

"I'm not trying to neuter God, I'm not trying to say God the Father or God the Mother." But it is important, she claims, to see how God takes on a female role.

"In Isaiah 42:14, God promises to cry like a woman in labour to his people. He refers to Himself as a rock who bore his people.

The second and third lectures show how women from various historical periods have interpreted the Bible.

"The Power of Holiness: the Medieval Mystic Tradition" is about "listening to the voices of medieval visionaries, whose mysticism grew on and enlarged scriptural texts," she explains.

Many of these women hailed from the Continent, such as Hildegard of Bingen and Hadewijch of Brabant ("a leading figure in medieval Dutch literature").

"Milk for Babes: Governesses Matriarchs, and the Moral Tradition" is about the women who, as Demers says, "wrote for children and used the Bible to teach children a certain



Genesis 2:22: "And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man."

understanding of Christian morality.

"These women were not usually associated with religious orders. They usually had the patronage of a tract society or some religious group which was publishing their work."

These writers of the Georgian and pre-Victorian times include Hannah More, Mrs. Sherwood and Dorothy Kilner.

These women do not criticize patriarchal aspects of the Bible. "That is one of the big differences between the interpretations of the past and those of today," comments

Demers. "(They were) mining the Bible for its pedagogical materials."

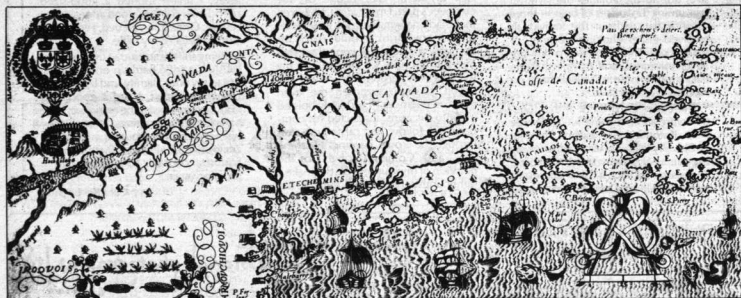
The fourth lecture "looks at the ways feminist theology is challenging traditional Biblical Theology, including 'inclusive language.'" Demers defines inclusive language as "an attempt to write women into the text of the Bible...to make the Bible apply to both men and women." Much of this criticism, Demers adds, is "revisionist in character."

"The most frequent stories seem to be those in which women are used for mother-

hood and then forgotten." But this is not always the case, she says, citing Deborah's "exuberant lovingmaking" in the Song of Solomon.

Feminist criticism of the Bible has been active since the late nineteen sixties "in re-examining the Biblical text and the whole mode of Biblical scholarship," concludes Demers.

If you are interested in hearing these different interpretations of the Bible, the Edmund Kemper Broadus Lectures will be held from January 25-28, at 4 p.m., HC L-1.



A map from the hand of Samuel de Champlain, "France's Greatest Explorer."

## Colourful chronicles de Champlain

review by Don Tremblath

oe C.W. Armstrong does not withhold his feelings towards Samuel de Champlain in his biography of the French explorer. As he states in the prologue: "It will become clear to readers of this work that I view de Champlain as a great heroic figure"—and he is right. In chronicling de Champlain's life from his birth in the port of Brouage on the Bay of Biscay in 1567 (a date that is often disputed) to his death on Christmas Day in 1635 in Quebec, Armstrong does indeed reveal his respect and admiration for "France's Greatest Explorer."

The main source of information for Armstrong throughout the biography is de Champlain's own personal journals, which he scrupulously wrote on his voyages and during his stays in France and Quebec. In parts, this close association with the journals and the direct quotes from them are most interesting. De Champlain's description of war and the brutality of the Indians with whom he fought are so vivid that it not include them, or even

to paraphrase them, would tarnish the events.

Yet, in parts of this book Armstrong seems to spend too much time either analyzing de Champlain's journals (thereby making the biography seem more like a review of de Champlain's writing than a portrayal of his life) or using material from them which is not relevant to the explorer's life.

Such digressions, however, do not occur often enough to make the book boring or difficult to read. Armstrong's writing is clear and his unabashed biasness towards de Champlain is refreshing. In fact, the book may be taken as a rallying cry from supporters of the French explorer who is not loved or liked by all. Armstrong cites Pierre Berton Berton and Rene Levesque as at least two prominent Canadians who are not big fans of de Champlain, and throughout the book, Armstrong offers their reasons why. For although de Champlain is credited with sowing the seeds of "an empire on this continent", he has also been called a coward

and a warmonger.

Armstrong addresses each of these issues as well as de Champlain's marriage to Helene Bouille in 1610, which was controversial because he was forty-three and she was twelve. Critics say that de Champlain married her for her family's money. Armstrong claims that such talk is ridiculous because de Champlain never received any. De Champlain has also been criticized for promising his leaders and sponsors in France to explore new regions and to expand his settlement in New France only to not follow through.

But in every case, Armstrong defends the explorer and, to be sure, he has good reason to do so. Under the tutelage of his uncle, Captain Provincial, de Champlain began his career as a seaman, learned the importance of illustrations and accurate recordings of explorations, developed his navigational skills and hence built the foundation upon which he would base his future.

By 1603, experienced and financially se-

ture, de Champlain set out "to make a commitment in search of a destiny. That commitment was to be New France." For the next thirty-two years, his life consisted of war, politics, discoveries, exhilarating highs and devastating lows. His relationship with the Indians, whose land he settled on and whose furs his leaders in France desperately wanted him to monopolize, was unsteady at best. The Hurons and Algonquins were considered to be allies, but neither the two tribes nor de Champlain were reliable. The Iroquois were never considered to be allies.

Nor were the English, who dealt de Champlain his greatest loss. The Kirkes of England began challenging his small colony in 1627 and in 1629 they "arrived at Quebec to take possession of the settlement." De Champlain, faced with a severe shortage of supplies and virtually no help from his mother country, could do nothing but quietly surrender. For him, "this was the lowest point in his career." But he rebounded quickly and fought hard to restore France's hold on Quebec, and the signing of the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1632 culminated perhaps his greatest feat: bringing Quebec again under French control.

Armstrong cites the growing tension between French- and English-speaking Canadians, which exploded in 1976 with the election of a separatist government in Quebec, as his reason for writing a book on the life of de Champlain. Throughout it, he alludes to de Champlain's skills as a politician with the Indians; a negotiator with the Indians, the French, and the English; a writer; a leader and an explorer. He also includes de Champlain's entire "inventory of cartography and illustrations pertaining to North America," which offer interesting and sometimes amusing insight into how de Champlain viewed some of his own discoveries.

These illustrations, the journals, and ten years of research have enabled Armstrong to compose an excellent biography of one of Canada's founding fathers. In this, his second book, Armstrong has fulfilled the challenge that he took upon himself of documenting the life of the man who is responsible for "the beginning of French culture in this country."