

Guerrillas of peace

Liberation theology and the Central American revolution



Blase Bonpane

By PAT SAVAGE

Guerrillas of Peace, by Blase Bonpane, South End Press. Blase Bonpane is speaking Thursday, March 5 at 8 pm at the Henson Centre, corner of University and Seymour.

"A truly good sermon would lead either to opposition or to a change of heart. In contrast, middle-class religion simply asks assurance of being better than someone else, assurance of eternal life, and assurance of membership. But it does not want involvement."

— Blase Bonpane

Guerrillas of Peace, by Blase Bonpane, is written with the same end in mind as his ideal of the good sermon. His intention is to kickstart North American consciences into action against an immoral American foreign policy in Central America, and explain the need for change in the region's static, corpulent Catholic church. *Guerrillas of Peace* is a call to action.

Advocacy books tend to annoy precisely because they are dogmatic in what they assert and the response they hope to evoke. Nobody really likes to be told what to think.

What saves *Guerrillas of Peace* from being simply a sermon to the already converted is the evolution of thought in Bonpane's criticism of the traditional church in Central America. This criticism carries particular weight as he draws on his own personal experience as a Maryknoll priest asked to leave Guatemala in 1967.

Bonpane's major criticism of the Catholic church is that it has been paralyzed from taking action against injustice because of its excessive emphasis on "personal sin and personal guilt at the expense of understanding or even perceiving institutional sin." The church Bonpane finds lacking is a church more concerned with a peasant stealing bread than with addressing the larger question of what makes such a theft necessary. It is this passivity in the fight for justice that Bonpane finds abhorrent.

The conditions which would make theft necessary are what Bonpane would call institutional

sin. And institutional sin is as much a sin as personal sin; hence it is the church's concern. The task Bonpane sees ahead is "the radical removal of all causes of alienation which prevent a person from being developed." That is the task Liberation Theology sets for itself.

Liberation Theology would then greatly change the role the Church would play in the world.

Traditionally in Western society, churches are in the salvation business, tending to the needs of individual souls. What we would consider political considerations — distribution of incomes, justice systems and human rights — are the concern of the state. If injustice in this realm can now be seen as institutional sin, the traditional division between Church and State has been broken.

How, then, is the Church to act?

In answering this question, Bonpane seems to put his faith in an inarticulate common sense. Just as people distrust lawyers who remove the law from the realm of common sense, Bonpane has a similar distrust of theologians. "It seems safe to say those who attempt to define God are always wrong. Those who attempt to love their brothers and sisters are often right."

Thus Bonpane's book and theology have consequences far beyond only the Central American Revolutions. Liberation Theology would be as revolutionary in Canada as it is in Central America, and more likely to meet opposition than a change of heart.



Love on the Rock

By ELLEN REYNOLDS

As Matt Munn puts it, the beauty of Newfoundland is "some slap in the face, what!" The opening shot of *John and the Missus* is more gentle than a slap in the face but it has the same eye-opening effect.

Set in Cup Cove, Newfoundland (shaped like a cup around the harbour) during the early 60s, this memoir is, for the most part, a love story and a story of family roots. The copper mine, which employs most of the town is unsafe and is closed indefinitely. The government puts on its "kid gloves" to deal with the situation, keeping the truth from the people of Cup Cove.

Pinsent is the stubborn John Munn, challenging the government's "only way out" — leaving Cup Cove and resettling in a larger centre. John Munn was born in Cup Cove and his father is buried there. In fact, his father's ghost is keeping his eye on John and shows up a few times to show his disapproval about the resettlement idea.

Written by, directed and starring Gordon Pinsent, *John and the Missus* is certainly a showcase of Pinsent's work. He pulls it off as a sincere and passionate actor. Unfortunately, the rest of the cast don't have the same opportunity. The Missus (Jackie Burroughs) is a simple and understated "woman behind the man". Burroughs, like Pinsent, is a convincing and weathered actor but without the lines, there is only so much she can do. John's son Matt

(Randy Follet), though full of energy, is also understated and thwarted by his father's character.

There's a mixture of other people who make up the rest of Cup Cove revealing Pinsent's slightly romantic idea of Newfoundland. Although Pinsent himself, left Newfoundland as a young man, he is still very attached to his native home and this is a strong theme in *John and the Missus*.

During the early 60s, when the movie is set, Joey Smallwood was modernizing Newfoundland with paved roads, television and resettlement of entire villages and towns. *John and the Missus* doesn't attempt to explain this situation so instead of John Munn's stubbornness being representative of what many Newfoundlanders were feeling at the time, he comes across as a man, alone, committed to his idea but without much support. Most of the town sees the government relocation money as a blessing or at least a solution to part of their problem.

There are some heartwrenching goodbyes as the townsfolk pick up and leave their home, especially when the newlyweds, Matt and Faith leave for St. John's.

The scenery of Newfoundland's coastline is breathtaking. Photographed by Frank Tidy with clarity and colour, you certainly never forget you're in Newfoundland. As at the beginning of the movie, the final shot is "a slap in the face" and keeps you from thinking too much about the unclear ending.

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