

*Habitat for Humanity: Building Private Homes, Building Public Religion.* By Jerome P. Baggett. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001. Pp. xvi+295.

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Habitat for Humanity is a para-denominational religious organization. It also considers itself a global social movement. Its success as a movement can be assessed by the fact that, since its founding 26 years ago, it has become the twenty-first largest home-building company in the United States: in 1999 alone, the organization built 4,906 homes in the United States and 8,776 in other nations. With the backing of Jimmy Carter and other prominent persons, Habitat for Humanity is considered a model nonprofit social service organization. Jerome Baggett presents a readable and balanced appreciation and critique of the organization based on two years of qualitative research in a variety of sites in the United States.

Baggett's organizing theme is to present the organization in its "social ecology." Specifically, he presents this successful voluntary organization as suspended in tension between state, market, and religious forces. He asks how it balances these tensions, what effects they have, and what shortcomings or pitfalls they present. Taking up themes from Tocqueville, Bellah, Putnam, and Verba, he also asks the extent to which Habitat promotes citizenship and civic engagement, and for whom.

Habitat for Humanity grew out of the spiritual malaise of a southern lawyer and businessman. Quitting his job and traveling with his family, Millard Fuller fell in with a spiritual leader who advocated putting faith into action. With Clarence Jordan, Fuller conceived of a Christian ministry that would "eliminate poverty housing from the face of the earth" (p. 51). This religious vision grew directly out of a critique of both state and market forces, which generate social inequality. Conceived as a way of uniting these sectors in partnership, the movement would create both a motor of social mobility for the poor and an outlet for charitable giving for the rich.

Working in partnership with states and markets, however, subjects the organization to the rationalizing impulses of these institutional sectors. Ironically, this results from pressure to effectively achieve the nonrational goal of eliminating poverty housing. At both local and national levels, Baggett shows, early institution builders motivated by a religious vision of charity and partnership are being replaced by construction and man-

agement professionals motivated by professional salaries to get houses built efficiently.

The rational emphasis on building houses efficiently not only threatens Habitat's religious foundations but also its effectiveness as a voluntary association that generates civic virtues. The argument here, from Tocqueville, is that the individualist and democratic state must be tempered by collective moral expression, and moral education, in the voluntary sector. Though Baggett amply demonstrates that Habitat is successful in generating civic engagement and civic empowerment, he questions which partners it actually empowers. Underprivileged homeowners are empowered by gaining title to comfortable housing, but the organization is so strongly influenced by the need to engage middle-class volunteers that these new homeowners find themselves disempowered within the organization, reproducing rather than transcending their status as second-class citizens in the larger society. This is the case even though middle-class volunteers select homeowner families that reflect their middle-class ideals. "It is no accident, for example, that while 76 percent of families using public housing nationwide are female headed, only about a third of Habitat families are" (p. 244).

The main drawback of this book in its own terms is that the organizational effects of the social environment are not sufficiently probed. The rationalizing forces of professionalization are discussed, but not the rationalizing forces of state-mandated building codes, accounting practices, and requirements for nonprofit incorporation. Nor does Baggett discuss the rationalizing force of successful organizational models. Specifically, Habitat has adopted the McDonald's-like franchise model that dominates most service markets. Complaints about his management style led Millard Fuller to be replaced by a pure management professional, but the organizational genius from his past in business and law should not be discounted. Despite the lack of theoretical elaboration here, Baggett does discuss the organization in enough depth to make this case. A more surprising shortcoming, given its thematic centrality in the book, is that Baggett does not systematically analyze how individuals' civic engagement is transformed by their participation in the movement. In his defense, his emphasis is on the organization first. A study of its effects on its members would have a different research design.

Despite not pushing his analysis in these directions as far as I would like, Baggett offers a readable account of a successful and well-known voluntary organization. It will be helpful to scholars and enlightening to students in courses in social movements, political sociology, and the sociology of religion.