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Habitat for Humanity Building Private Homes, Building Public Religion, by **Jerome P. Baggett**. Philadelphia, PA: **Temple University Press**, 2000. 295 pp. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 1-56639-803-7

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Baggett's work offers significant contributions to several fields within sociology, most notably, religion, organizations, and class inequality. Through an analysis of one of the fastest growing community volunteer organizations, Habitat for Humanity, the author demonstrates the many complex, paradoxical, and dialectical tensions that affect this organization and the individuals involved in it. In brief, Baggett claims that paradenominational organizations like Habitat are one of the strongest examples of how religion thrives in the modern context.

To this end, Baggett's methodological approach is largely an organizational analysis driven by secularization theory, understood here as the threefold process of rationalization, pluralization, and subjectivization. Habitat's history, organizational structure, founding purpose statement, and undergirding theology are laid out in vivid detail in the early chapters. Its founder, Millard Fuller, in evangelical fashion, underwent a religious conversion that led him from a worldview of wealth accumulation to a worldview of addressing the apparent social inequality evidenced particularly in the lack of adequate housing for many low-income families. Out of this conviction grew his vision of partnership across class and national lines, which, to date, has provided homes for nearly 29,000 families in the United States and nearly 90,000 worldwide. This vision, while inspired by a particular evangelical faith, also contains an inclusive ideal inviting participants of any religious perspective. Thus, Baggett sets the stage for a discussion of the various tensions that affect the organization's religious vitality and the vitality of religion in an increasingly secularized environment.

Habitat's success and vitality rest largely on a series of paradoxical tensions that influence both the organization itself and the individuals who participate in it. For instance, an

important tension lies in its empowerment of participants across class lines. Building homes provides an outlet for the middle class' financial and physical resources and an inlet for lower classes to gain a much-needed place of residence. However, this empowerment within the organization is defined by achieving the middle class status of the volunteers, a goal that is never completely attainable by most lower class families, especially those who may be most in need of housing.

Another important tension exists between Habitat's organizational values and the values of the market system that operates in the surrounding culture. Habitat claims that volunteering educates many to the massive discrepancies in housing. However, the pervasive influence of market logic directs many within the staff leadership to consider hiring paid professionals to do the work at the housing sites since professionals are more cost efficient and their work of higher quality or reliability. Hence, accommodation to market logic may bring with it a loss in the skills gained for the citizenship that Habitat seeks to engender. A second force created by market logic is commercialization. Habitat's original vision includes a self-sustaining fund based on the charitable giving of volunteers and mortgage payments from Habitat homeowners, partly as a means of developing community across class lines. As market forces drive up the price of housebuilding, Habitat is forced to consider receiving support from government resources or enacting more stringent policies in receiving mortgage payments from homeowners. Commercialization then inhibits the possibility of developing community across class lines, again a departure from the religious vision of the organization.

Modernity also creates tensions within the religious elements of Habitat through three processes: rationalization, pluralization, and subjectivization. Habitat's religious vision, understood as housebuilding, evidences a rationalization when the activity of housebuilding itself increasingly becomes the motivation of the volunteers. Secondly, the process of pluralization, which has shaped the organization's theology of inclusion, is the very same process that may undermine its existence. Ironically, while its inclusivity brings in many religious hands to work on each house, these many religious voices unintentionally threaten to deteriorate its religious

identity, especially since exclusivist religious expression becomes less tolerated. Thirdly, subjectivization creates another ironic tension within Habitat's religious character. The shift from communal understandings of identity to individually focused identity in society brings with it a weakened bond within church congregations in favor of a self-directed and self-created spirituality and religion. Hence, Habitat is popular for its self-directed approach but its popularity rests on the degree to which the participants' religious interests are met. This tenuous relationship may not be sufficient grounds for developing the workforce necessary to end the housing dilemma that Habitat seeks to address.

Through vignettes and interviews with organizational leaders and ordinary volunteers, Baggett clearly demonstrates that Habitat **serves** an important role within the voluntary sector in enabling individuals to bring their faith into action and in raising consciousness of the problems of social inequality. Its adaptive nature allows this religious organization to thrive under the modern conditions of market instrumentality, rationalization, pluralism, and subjectivization. Baggett cautions the reader of the consequences of accommodation to market forces, especially to those who are motivated by religion. The author also notes that Habitat and voluntary organizations would serve society better by greater recognition of their inability to solve social problems on their own since voluntarism rests primarily on the residual time and labor of others. Baggett's **work** stands as an important contribution to our understanding of how religious organizations thrive in the modern context and of the paradoxical tensions that entangle them as they challenge systemic inequalities, and often unknowingly, legitimize them as well.