

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY: BUILDING PRIVATE HOMES, BUILDING PUBLIC RELIGION. By Jerome P. Baggett. *Temple University Press, 2001, paperback \$24.95.*

In this book, author Jerome Baggett examines how Habitat for Humanity, one of the largest not-for-profit housing developers in the United States, serves as an institutional vessel that connects people's religious faith to efforts to provide affordable homes. The author narrates the history of Habitat for Humanity, detailing tensions as the organization seeks to fulfill its dual mission: "building private homes, building public religion."

Baggett describes the inner workings of the organization, detailing how Habitat acts as a para-denominational group and as a faith-based housing organization. The author explains that Habitat has found a unique niche in mobilizing people who, because of their core personal values, are willing to work to build homes. Both volunteers and new homeowners benefit from the work of Habitat. The reader learns how the organizational culture of Habitat supports a faith-based approach to housing renewal. The author examines the extent to which Habitat fulfilled its mission in mobilizing and empowering its army of staff and volunteers to address the issues of affordable housing and community building while at the same time balancing development work with a religious mission.

However, this detailed portrait also provides the reader with evidence that contradicts Habitat's romantic public image on how much it has reduced America's housing problems and brings into question whether or not Habitat is transforming the communities in which it works. Habitat's housing production almost matches the yearly housing production of Community Development Corporations—CDCs—across the country, yet the combined yearly housing production by Habitat and CDCs are still not sufficient to meet America's housing needs. The author's commentary and questions in the closing chapter forcefully indicate the need for further public discussion between the partners and supporters of Habitat and those who want to address the broader structural sources of social injustice.

Baggett's argument challenges many in the religious community and among Habitat "true believers" that Habitat is America's solution to the affordable housing issue. Habitat's successful housing development track record is part of the solution but it is not the solution to meet America's affordable housing crisis. For instance, many CDCs, unlike Habitat, are not just building homes, but also addressing some of the most persistent housing issues in some of the toughest communities in the United States. As the author states, Habitat's success is somewhat predictable because it can choose families who would become the most potential suc-

cessful homeowners. CDCs don't always get the same good press or community-wide support as Habitat receives because CDCs are trying to address multiple, long-term, community-wide issues such as affordable rental properties, public safety and employment issues together with their housing development strategies. In contrast, Habitat staff says that community building issues are to be addressed by their homeowners, not necessarily by the organization, its affiliates or its volunteers, even though part of Habitat's mantra is building communities.

Not enough detail is presented on the extent to which Habitat has brought about broader community change. In chapter two, for instance, Baggett offers only hearsay when he says in his closing comments in regards to the Jimmy Carter Work Project in Eagle Butte, "now word has it that gardens are growing here and there. . . ." (p. 40). In describing how he reached his conclusions on community change, the author does not indicate whether he had talked with residents who lived in the communities where the earlier Habitat houses had been built or simply did a windshield survey to look for change. Such information on research methodology would also have been useful in determining whether Habitat's homes or volunteers make any significant contribution to community building efforts and outcomes. Furthermore, it is also not evident if the author asked volunteers or staff about their efforts to connect with communities of color or low-income communities. Nor is it clear if the author discovered whether volunteers had moved from their role of being a "happy hammer" to becoming active citizens involved in advocacy work on affordable housing issues. From the material in this book, we are not sure whether Habitat has educated and empowered its people to move from a "civic" to an "activist" role.

Baggett has shown the need for further public conversation between religious activists, community members and those in the community development movement, as these groups pursue their mutual goals of building lives, homes and communities. Overall, this book provides useful information to scholars and activists concerned with the current debate on whether or not faith-based organizations are more effective vehicles than community organizations in serving community needs and building broader public participation. The readers of this book should come away not only with an appreciation for the work and accomplishments of Habitat but also with a deeper and wider understanding of the broader strategies required to effectively address the systemic issues that have created the affordable housing crisis in America.

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