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## **On Urban Renewal: Man's Struggle for Shelter**

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# Book Reviews

## ON URBAN RENEWAL

MAN'S STRUGGLE FOR SHELTER (IN AN URBANIZING WORLD). By Charles Abrams. Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1964. viii, 307 pp. 46 plates.

In the flood of literature pouring into the Philippines from the United States and Europe on urban renewal, Charles Abrams' contribution stands out. Unlike most other books received here which analyze the problems of specific cities, or of one country, or of Western industrialized societies, Abrams brings his impressive international experience to bear on the problem of housing all over the world, and in particular, the underdeveloped nations. Local planners will be gratified at his insistence that models proven successful in the West are frequently inappropriate for Asia, Africa and Latin America (unless revised to coincide with indigenous traditions and economic realities), as in the case of prefabricated home construction and certain financing schemes. They will also appreciate his discussion of large- and small-scale solutions attempted in countries whose economies and social structures do not diverge too greatly from our own.

The 18 chapter headings run the gamut of urban invasion and squatting to core housing, financing schemes, and the need for genuine international cooperation. The importance of an interdisciplinary approach to the provision of adequate housing is underscored in this book with the author himself, a visiting professor in regional planning and development at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, providing the model. While his area of primary competence appears to be urban land policies, his grasp of other aspects of housing provides the broad framework so necessary for a deeper, more thorough analysis:

Although the book highlights housing as an important component of the urbanizing process, its discussion cannot be separated from numerous other aspects of the development process. A book about housing must be a book about cities as well, and a book on housing and cities must also deal with the implications of the urban land problem. Housing is not only shelter but part of the fabric of neighborhood life and of the whole social milieu; it also touches upon many facets of industrialization, economic activity, and development. The social aspects of change, the immaturity of the legal, political, and administrative devices, as well as the need for training and education are only a few of the challenges to the emerging societies. The place of private and public investment in building and in materials production, together with the unsettled and often primitive financing, tax, land, savings, and transportation policies, is another (p. vi).

The book is aimed not only at the professional reader but the layman as well, with the author suggesting that the latter skip over the more technical chapters, still absorbing the essence of the discussion. Even the professional, however, may get the urge to skim at times especially in the latter half of the book because of the intense detail and Abrams' somewhat disconcerting tendency to drive home certain points again and again.

Among his chief concerns are: (1) that housing must not be relegated to low priority status in development planning; (2) that planners in underdeveloped countries be realistic and allow the building of "improvable and renewable slums" to ease immediate housing shortages and yet provide for future renovation and upgrading; (3) that slum clearance follow rather than precede the building of low-cost housing; (4) that squatters not be viewed as lawbreakers but as persons meriting a policy of firmness with flexibility, since they have been denied the opportunity of acquiring land legally in central city sites close to their place of work, and; (5) that prevention of squatting constitutes a far more effective approach to the problem than does clearance later on.

Both the United States government and the United Nations receive their share of criticism in regard to international housing programs, the former for its rather rigid outlook toward foreign housing aid and for its hindering collaboration between American technical assistants and their United Nations counterparts. The United Nations on the other hand is scored for its cumbersome machinery, whereby U.N. Mission consultants must take into consideration the reactions of over 100 sensitive member nations if they wish their reports and recommendations ever to be made public

and implemented. Having served as United Nations consultant in at least 10 countries (Philippines, Bolivia, Ghana, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Singapore, and Turkey) and several more in behalf of the United States and other entities (Barbados, Colombia, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela), Abrams' criticisms carry a convincing air.

The reliability of his statements and assessments of various programs is further strengthened for the local reader by numerous, apparently accurate references scattered through the book to familiar situations in the Philippines. He devotes several pages to a consideration of the Philippines by itself in the matters of squatting (pp.15-17), the urban land problem (pp. 56-57), and administrative difficulties (pp. 80-84). With refreshing candor he presents his indictment of the PHHC (People's Homesite and Housing Corporation) for its failure to provide low-income housing, largely because of poor coordination of the many government agencies responsible for various aspects of housing, inadequate financing, and the PHHC's having been saddled by politicians with "at least a thousand temporary employees, most of whom were useless" (p. 84).

For those Filipinos not yet aware of the critical character of the world's and their nation's housing problems, *Man's Struggle for Shelter* should shock them into an active realization of them. When they join the ranks of those yet few individuals in positions of being able to do something about it, they will find the book an indispensable aid to their planning efforts.

MARY R. HOLLNSTEINER

## PREACHING FOR SPECIAL SITUATIONS

✓ **HANDBOOK FOR SPECIAL PREACHING.** Edited by Anatole O. Baillargeon, O.M.I. New York: Herder and Herder, 1965. 192 pp.

The purpose of this little volume as stated in its preface is to give some solid practical advice on preaching which will benefit young priests in a variety of special situations other than that of the Sunday homily. The editor has called on a number of experts in these typical preaching forms to distil the essence of their experience as a guide for the first-timer.

Among the subjects treated are: The Bible Service, an adequate description of this new form of worship service, which is attaining a growing popularity. This is followed by the Conference to Sisters,