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Urban theology

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Theological Paper: Feeding the Poor in Port-au-Prince Haiti

A.)Describe the chosen urban community and focal group, including their social/cultural/ economic/religious issues, and other related life situation factors; (Create a breakfast program Weekend, create a food pantry once a week, then teach them how to grow their own food)

Haiti is a small Island with Great History located in the Caribbean Sea in the western part of the Island of Hispaniola. They own smaller islands such as Gonâve, Tortue (Tortuga), Grande Caye, and Vache. Christopher Columbus renamed the Island La Isla Española ('The Spanish Island') when he arrived in 1492. After Columbus claimed it for Spain, the Spanish maintained control over the whole Island for over one hundred years. Spain, in 1697, ceded the western third of Hispaniola to France. As the years went on, Saint Dominique became increasingly valuable. Its exports, especially sugar, earned the French nickname the "Pearl of the Antilles," the most beautiful land human eyes have ever seen. But the indigenous Taíno-Arawak name for the entire Island of Hispaniola is Ayi-ti, the land of mountains.' Haiti's population almost entirely descended

from enslaved Africans, winning independence from France in 1804.¹ Haiti was the only country slavery that took its and the second country in the Americas, after the United States, to free itself from colonial rule. It was the first black republic that took their freedom. Over the centuries, economic, political, and social difficulties and several natural disasters have beset Haiti with chronic poverty and other serious problems. In addition, Port-au-Prince, the capital city, has battled a severe issue regarding hunger among its population. Implementing core values is one method of addressing the needs of the essential requirements of the people.²

Even in the 1980s, Haiti had advanced agriculture, and the hunger problem was far from this country. However, political conflicts and presidential cores that happened in the 1990s changed this. In 2010, former President Bill Clinton publicly apologized for forcing Haiti to drop tariffs on imported subsidized U.S. rice during his time in office. It wiped out rice farming, seriously damaging Haiti's ability to be self-sufficient. "It may have been good for some of my farmers in Arkansas, but it has not worked". Agriculture was disturbed, and the hunger problem became more and more serious. It has been a critical problem of Haitian development, so the Haitian government and international society have taken many measures to improve this situation. The significant international support was from the US and some EU countries. Plenty of data and reports show that Haiti's hunger population has been dramatically reduced.

Hunger:

Today, with more than 60% of its population living in poverty, Haiti is regarded as

1 **Mousseau**, "*Toward A Future without Want*," 3.

2 **Geggus**, "*The Haitian Revolution: A documentary History*," 17.

the poorest nation in the western hemisphere. The long history of political and economic unrest and Haiti's growing propensity for natural disasters have had a detrimental effect on the island nation's ability to develop sustainably over the long term. Nearly half of the population lacks access to the economic, educational, and health resources necessary for growth because of the circumstances in Haiti and the glaring disparity between the rich and the poor. Haiti's precarious situation only worsened after the tragic earthquake there in 2010. The current level of productivity in Haiti could be higher. Haiti's condition worsened after the tragic earthquake there in 2010. Haiti, once viewed as one of the wealthiest colonies in the New World, has evolved into a nation far from achieving the fundamental objective of "building back better." Despite the estimated 2 billion dollars and more in foreign aid, Haiti, an already impoverished country, appears to have only recently begun to recover six years after the disaster.³

Religious Belief:

The constitution of Haiti permits religious freedom notwithstanding the absence of an established state religion. Roman Catholicism, the most prevalent branch of Christianity, is practiced by more than half of the people, while about one-fourth identify as Protestant or independent Christians. Liberation theology still impacts religious life, particularly in Port-au-Prince's and other cities' shantytowns. Vodou (Voodoo, or Vodun), a religion whose gods (law) are inherited from West African traditions, is also practiced

³ Girard, *"Haiti: The Tumultuous History - From Pearl of the Caribbean to Broken Nation,"* 34.

by most Roman Catholics in Haiti. However, the majority of the Protestants in the nation believe that Christianity and Vodou are incompatible. Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Mormons arrived in Haiti during and after the era (1915–34) when the United States colonized the nation, in addition to the earlier Protestant faiths founded in the early 19th century (Methodists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians).⁴

Social Analysis

Haiti's unemployment rate for 2022 is 59 percent, nearly under the poverty level.

- Race & ethnicity: 95 Percent African
- Five percent European Mixed primarily composed of Mulattoes, Europeans, Asians, and Arabs.
- Poverty 40.3% Children (under 18) 50% Seniors (65 & older) 47%
- Persons below the poverty line (more than double by 2023)

In 2019, food riots in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, as millions took to the streets and demanded President Jovenal Moise make food affordable. Those need help from 4.4 million in 2021 to 4.9 million in 2022, humanitarian aid, including housing and access to health, education, and other necessary services. Food security in Haiti is another issue that must be described to understand it better. More than half of Haitians living in Port-au-Prince are chronically malnourished, and 22 percent of children are chronically malnourished. Some believe that because of food insecurity, cholera developed in the

4 Edwards, “*Christianity’s role in Colonial and Revolutionary Haiti. Volume 1,*” 2.

water of Haiti. Via USAID, the number of people living in extreme poverty is about 2.5 million Haitians, most of their income being forced to be spent on subsistence farming (Agriculture and Food Security).

The need for more accessible and better food is evident with statistics like 53.4% of the population is undernourished, and 21.9% of the under-5 population has experienced stunting because of the lack of nutritional intake. The problem is not getting any better. In 2000 the undernourished population was 55.2%. Today, at 53.4% (Global Hunger Index). The evidence for food security being a problem is overwhelming and where most of our attention will be spent. Exacerbating Haiti's hunger crisis, food prices were 23 percent higher in June 2022 compared to June 2021. Dramatic floods and soil erosion triggered by deforestation and watershed degradation have also undermined agricultural production in some areas. The 2010 earthquake affected Port-au-Prince estimated 250,000 people died, and at least 300,000 people were injured. Insecurity and insufficient funds stalled aid delivery to areas affected by a devastating earthquake in 2021.⁵

B.) Describe a biblical/theological framework that responds to the specific needs and issues of the target urban context and focal group, including concrete biblical and theological support, drawing from both the OT and NT, class discussions, and individual research;

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5 Nicholls, "Ideology and Political Protest in Haiti," 10.

Haiti is divided into ten departments. The West department is the largest department where the Capital of Haiti is located, Port-au-Prince. The West Department of Haiti contains a population of Haiti 4,029,705 people. About 48% of Haitians live in cities, and 22% in the country's capital, Port-au-Prince. The largest Port-au-Prince metropolitan area is home to about 2.3 million Haitian, 25,000 people per square kilometer (65,000/square mile). The metro area includes Port-au-Prince, Tabarre, Cite Soleil, Petion-Ville, Croix-Des-bouquets, and Carrefour. Our focus will be on Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti.

Our first theological framework starts with showing up. Jose Humphreys stated, "Christ draws us by numerous invitations to serve from a deep sense of partnership with God and others. This will take courage, vulnerability, and knowledge of the times (discernment). The incarnation shows us that even though we are embedded in different realities, racial, theological, cultural, and economic stories, these stories don't have the final say about us in God's image. To the degree that we as a church can individually live into our stories, neighbors, and neighborhood, ecologies can be changed through God's shalom."⁶ Humphrey wants us to show up, see and stay put so that we can transform neighborhoods, cities, and even countries. "Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked (Psalm 82:3-4)".⁷

By focusing on Port-au-Prince, we will partner with local churches in the metropolitan area and NGOs with the same objectives. Rivera stated, "My ministry has been my willingness to engage non-Christians and nonchristian institutions, which the Christian community has often

6 Rivera, 91.

7 Timothy Keller, "Loving the City: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City," 20.

called the power. Jesus does not call us to blind detachment, but to discerning engagement, which requires loyalty to the kings of God and not the kingdom of man (Mark 12:35-40)".⁸ The Church of Christ is the agent of Change which can answer and deliver Haiti from humanitarian issues such as hunger. The scripture tells us to defend the poor, do justice, and help those in need. When we feed the people of Port-au-Prince, we are proving to the world that we, the church of Jesus Christ, imitate our savior by walking in love.

The theological framework that responds to the specific needs

Identity/Vision

Identity: We are lovers of Jesus who contend for holistic restoration in and from the presence of God.

Vision: To see Port-au-Prince Haiti thriving with Shalom, reflecting its unique culture and heritage unto the glory of God.

Seeking His presence:

- **Stay in His presence-** Exodus 33:15 - Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here" (NIV)
- The key to overcoming poverty and hunger is **Jesus-** But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you (Matt.6:33).
- Keep the **great commission** by preaching the gospel. - "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, 20 and

8 **Rivera**, *"Liberty to the Captives: Our Call to Minister in a Captive World,"* 91.

teaching them to obey everything I have commanded. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (KJV)."

- Remind them God still **loves Haiti**- For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Holistic Restoration (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is a biblical concept spoken by Jesus in Luke 6:31 and Matthew 7:12; it is commonly referred to as the "Golden Rule." "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

- Feeding the poor is proof we know God- If you give some of your food to [feed] those who are hungry and to satisfy [the needs of] those who are humble, then your light will rise in the dark, and your darkness will become as bright as the noonday sun (Isaiah 58:10).
- The "gape" kind of love is based on our actions, not just our words-(By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another (John 13:35).
- Jesus teaches us we are to minister to the whole man, not just the spirit only- The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at

liberty them that are bruised (Luke 4:18).

Engage the Powers: Rivera stated, "The times my community has criticized and rejected me the most has been when I engage the powers and their systems and structures. The measuring stick for my engagement was the advancement of Kingdom values."⁹

- Be light and salt when engaging systems and structures- (Matt. 5:13-17). The best example is the life of Joseph Genesis 41-42 and Daniel 1:15-16 where God uses both of their gifts to save a nation.
- Advance kingdom values to achieve peace and justice- Psalm 103:19, Nehemiah 2:1-8, Esther 5-7 (Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia, and Esther was a Queen of Persia they both used their position so do God's work. Nehemiah helped us build the wall, and Queen Esther saved her people from being annihilated by their enemies)."

We will engage the issue of hunger in Port-au-Prince socially and spiritually. Haiti has an estimated 10,000 NGOs operating on the ground – the second largest per capita in the world – Haiti has been referred to as "a republic of NGOs." All of the NGOs have at least one office located in Port-au-Prince. We don't want to be just another organization giving food. Therefore we will engage them by partnering with these organizations to bring Change to the Port-au-Prince metropolitan community.

⁹ **Jose Humpreys**, *“Seeing Jesus: In East Harlem: What Happens when Churches Show up”*, 11.

We also encounter this hunger issue spiritually through prayer and kingdom principles. Timothy Keller states, "In every earthly city, two 'kingdoms' are present, two 'cities' vying for control. They are the City of Baal (or Satan or the God of this world) and the City of God. The city of Satan deifies power and wealth and human culture itself (making art, technology, and business an end in itself instead of a way of glorifying God). The city of God is marked by God's shalom (Jeru- shalom) - his peace. His peace is where stewardship of God, creation, justice, compassion, and righteousness leads to harmony, family building, and cultural development under God."

As we believe, our job is to understand that every social issue is always connected to a spiritual one. "Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:10-12)". The Apostle Paul wants us to understand that we are in spiritual warfare. Even when it might seem natural, there's an invisible enemy behind the issue. Therefore we believers must put on the whole armor of God when we are in ministry to be effective. We engage these invisible powers through prayer and kingdom principles. The Bible shows that when we pray, we license God to show us favor and fight our battles. Prayer is also the key to overcoming this humanitarian problem in Port-au-Prince and everywhere in Haiti. In Hebrew 4:16, God invites us to come to Him whenever there's a need, and He will provide us with grace and the help we need.

Imago Dei (Timothy Keller stated, "But the Christians came along, and they believed in the Imago Dei. And because they thought in the image of God, from the beginning, they were champions. First of all, they were totally against abortion from the start. Because if you believe in the Image of God, you have to be. If human life is good, then nascent human life has got to be good. But they were also against infanticide. Which means they were not one issue, people. They cared for people experiencing poverty. In addition, they cared for women. Champions of women, champions of the fatherless, champions of the weak, and champions of the poor.")¹⁰

Imago Dei: Mean all people—are made in the image of God.

- **Image Bearer**

- Original Design; Genesis 1:26

- **Image Breaking**

- The Fall; Genesis 3:10.

- **Image Revealing**

- Jesus Christ; Colossians 1:15-17

- **Image Restoring**

- Our Call; Ministry Focus

- **See Yourself as God Sees You**

- Renewing your mind; Romans 12:2

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D.) Present at least two concrete applications of the urban theology that respond to the needs and issues of the target urban context and focal group, including descriptions of the community-based ministries and activities used

¹⁰ **Frederick Mousseau**, "Toward a Future without want", 4.

for these applications;

Theological Application for Port-Au-Prince, Haiti

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you as a stranger, invite you in, or need clothes and clothes? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me (Matt.25:37-40).

Loving the City of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, is loving God:

- Some people will starve to death tonight.
- Some people have to eat mud pies daily.
- As Christians, we are to feed the poor and help people who are in need.
- Feeding the needy is part of our calling; as we serve others, we serve

Christ.

Feed the Poor {He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again (Prov. 19:17)}

- Food Pantry once a week in the city Croix-des-Bouquets once a week.

- Every Saturday, give free breakfast to the community of Croix des Bouquet, Cite Soleil, Martissant, and Village De Dieu and expand to other cities in the capital.
- We are partnering with local churches and communities to teach the landowners how to farm food.
- Partnerships with NGOs for Job training and small business investments

Engaging with NGOs to bring Change:

- Feed the Children
- World food program
- Farm Haiti (Faith, Agriculture, Reforestation)
- Unicef
- WorldWide Employment eligibility

Conclusion:

After my research, I concluded the key out of poverty for long-term solutions is learning how to fish for yourself instead of someone just giving you a fish. Some people find giving easier, which is good, but that's only a short-term solution. Haiti was once the wealthiest Island in the Caribbean and the first black independent nation in the world. Due to lousy politicians and natural disasters, Haiti needs our help more than ever. It's our job as believers to help Haiti with these humanitarian issues so it can get back on its feet.

Work Citation

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