



## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE SOCIAL ISSUE IN THE THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This bibliographic research work investigated the expressions of the Brazilian Social Question nowadays, starting with the understanding of what Social Question is and its current implications. Its origins, actors and expressions in the Brazilian scenario and the inequalities arising from the Social Question were analyzed, studying each of its consequences. Then, the Social Question was analyzed in the neoliberal context, analyzing each item in detail, to understand more fully the consequences of the Social Question, especially some of the cruelest phenomena, such as slums, segregation, misery, child labor, unemployment, violence and its types. Each item was discussed separately to have a more complete notion of the problem. Once the authors and their respective doctrinal positions were confronted, this study was closed with an analysis of this problem within the scope of theological studies, drawing up a succinct conclusion. The theoretical foundation of this work relied on renowned theorists on the subject, such as Montaña (2001), Netto (2001) and Marx (1984).

**Keywords:** Social issue. Society. Poverty.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This work has as its theme the expressions of the Brazilian Social Question in the present time. The approach of this work is directed to the glaring social differences between rich and poor in Brazil, mainly with regard to the insertion of the individual in life in society and the related theological cosmovision.

It is known that the workers produce the wealth and the capitalists soon take possession of it, ignoring any social benefit of the produced wealth. In these terms, a study is proposed here on the origin of the Social Question allied to the question of the primitive accumulation of goods and capital.

For Marx, the initial accumulation of capital is the formation phase of the foundations of the capitalist economic mode. It is a historical period in

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which the rupture of the producer with the means of production occurs. This phenomenon ends up generating the Social Question, object of this study.

In order to delimit the theme for a greater focus, this work will deal specifically with the Social Question in Brazil and its many facets. Therefore, it is questioned how the expressions of the Social Question are given in Brazilian society from the understanding of scholars and how they contribute to the stagnation of society in relation to poverty and social inequality, object of analysis within the theological perspective.

To answer this question, an attempt was made to reach the factors that contributed to the vertiginous growth of inequalities in contemporary Brazilian society, in such a broad way that it allows a reflection on this theme and supports further research in the sense that other works propose methodologies of combat poverty and promote the reduction of these inequalities.

A bibliographical research was carried out with the objective of identifying the Social Question expressed in a capital contradiction of the capitalist mode of production, that is, in the contradiction arising from the production and appropriation of the wealth produced in this society.

This work is justified due to the need to know the history of the Brazilian social formation with regard to the development of social inequalities, in some cases treated as a disease of spiritual origin and, therefore, without a viable solution. Therefore, a bibliographic investigation is necessary to point out the causes of this inequality and encourage further research in order to understand the social issue in the country more precisely.

In addition, it is imperative to understand social ills so that social rescue actions can be an instrument of human action, in the sense that social values can be equal for all individuals and that society becomes more humane and egalitarian. , offering dignified living conditions for all human beings.



In this sense, it is necessary to carry out a bibliographic investigation that points out the causes of this inequality and encourages more research in order to understand the Social Question in the country more precisely and, consequently, establish work guidelines that combat its effects.

To carry out this research, we searched for books, websites, magazines and periodicals that deal with social issues, listing relevant texts where one can extract the opinion of various theorists who address the object of this research. Chapters were sought in books that succinctly address the subject, in periodicals preference was given to the most recent ones and on the internet certain key words were used, such as Social Question, Society and Poverty.

The research was carried out in recommended sites, such as the library at USP, Google Scholar, among others, and after selecting the texts, a critical reading was carried out and ideas and concepts were selected. Having done a confrontation analysis of various theorists, a report was prepared, resulting in this work.

## **THE SOCIAL QUESTION**

The expression “Social question” comes from a recent history and began to be used by sociologists and historians in the third decade of the century. XIX. The expression serves to name a growing phenomenon at this time and still today: extreme poverty. This poverty is the result of wild capitalism that grew at the same time that production increased (NETTO, 2001). The concept of the Social Question is directly related to the glaring contradiction of the capital versus labor dichotomy.

Carvalho and Iamamoto (1983) explain it better, saying that:

The Social Question is nothing but the expressions of the process of formation and development of the working class and its entry into the political scenario of society, demanding its recognition as a class by the business community and the State. It is the manifestation, in everyday social life, of the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, which starts to demand other types of intervention beyond charity and repression CARVALHO E IAMAMOTO, (1983, p.77).



Teles (1996) completes, saying that

The Social Question is the aporia of modern societies that brings into focus the disjunction, always renewed, between the logic of the market and the societal dynamics, between the ethical demand for rights and the imperatives of economic efficiency, between the legal order that promises equality and the reality of inequalities and exclusions plotted in the dynamics of power and domination relations. (TELES, 1996, p. 85)

In these terms, it can be said that the Social Question is an elementary contradiction of the capitalist system, based on the production and appropriation of social wealth. The workers produce the wealth, but the capitalists keep it, not letting the producers enjoy the wealth produced by them, except in the minimum necessary so that they can produce more.

The Social Question appeared with the premise of demanding the formulation of social policies in favor of the proletariat, which was in a situation of increasing poverty.

The initiated process of urbanization and industrialization led to the impoverishment of the working class, but also made them aware of the situation and conditions in which they worked. In this sense, the Social Question reached alarming contours, mainly for the bourgeoisie, who had to resort to concrete actions that resulted in social policies

Today, the Social Question is more related to the expansion of work in capitalist society, promoting the degradation of work, the systematic reduction of labor rights and the disappearance of many jobs. This happens mainly when the State intervenes and removes the citizen from the social field with cuts, privatizations and other drastic measures.

The social issue is also directly related to social inequalities, which ends up favoring the development of the so-called Third Sector in society, which has only further aggravated the situation. In these terms, the State usually intervenes again, but this time creating programs and projects to help the needy and developing policies that apparently propose measures to change the direction of the economy.



## **THE ORIGIN OF THE SOCIAL QUESTION IN THE CONCEPTION OF MARX**

The investigation of the origin of the Social Question leads to the question of the primitive accumulation of capital. For Marx (1984), the primitive accumulation of capital is the phase of constitution of the foundations of the capitalist mode of production.

In this historical period, the separation of the direct producer from the means of production occurred, a process that became known as the prehistory of capitalism.

Marx (1984) teaches that

The so-called primitive accumulation is, therefore, nothing more than the historical process of separation between producer and means of production. It appears as “primitive” because it constitutes the prehistory of capital and the mode of production that corresponds to it. The economic structure of capitalist society grew out of the economic structure of feudal society. The decomposition of the former released the elements of the former (MARX, 1984, p.262).

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The feudal way of overcoming social relations, in effect during the process of primitive accumulation, maintained the dominance of agricultural production directed to the market. In this way, the proletariat was forced to also acquire its own subsistence goods for its own survival. It is imperative to point out that only with the expropriation of workers from the means of production and subsistence will it be possible to force them to sell their labor power, literally exchanging it for their own survival (MARX, 1984).

The proletariat must, in this economic model, buy in the market the means for its survival and that of its family. With this, the formation of a



regular labor market is an indispensable condition for the subsistence of this production system.

### **THE ENGLAND CASE**

Evidently, the primitive accumulation of capital will have different facets depending on each country or region. Marx (1984), studying the issue, decided to analyze the system within English territory. This process, which culminated in the expropriation of the peasant base, the enclosure of common lands, the appropriation of Church lands, and the advent of punitive legislation for vagrancy and begging, resulted in the accumulation of capital in England by those who at the time were at an advantage.

Marx says that the process began with the vast expropriation of land from peasants, which took place between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, this process did not manage to guarantee the formation of a regular labor market for the industry that was emerging and offered too much labor to the capitalist mode of production, denying them conditions to be consumers, since wages were too low (MARX , 1984).

With the organization of a strong State, able to represent the interests of the capitalist elite, regular work discipline was ensured through coercion and physical and moral violence against the less favored, that is, expropriated peasants, who began to offer their labor with even lower wages.

Marx says that these peasants could not be absorbed into manufacture in proportion as they became available. This ended up resulting in a serious social crisis, explicit in the increase in the number of beggars, thieves and unemployed people (MARX, 1984).

To repress the unemployed, the so-called “bloodthirsty laws” tried to violently curb begging and vagrancy in the 16th century, forcing those who did not have work to look for it, and the former peasant to subject himself to work in manufactures, or in another place where I could work. This project was carried out by the State, which, in addition to ensuring the supply of a



regular workforce, via coercion and violent and moral oppression, still managed to keep wages at such a low level that it only benefited those who sought capital accumulation (MARX, 1984).

Marx (1984) draws attention to the fact that:

Thus, the people of the countryside, having their land base expropriated by force and being expelled from it and transformed into vagrants, were framed by grotesque and terrorist laws in a necessary discipline to the salaried work system, by means of the whip, the red-hot iron and the torture. (MARX, 1984, p.277).

Engels (1985) reporting the situation of the English working class, especially in the city of Manchester, where he observed for twenty months, points out that the living conditions were the worst possible:

To sum up the result of our wanderings through these localities, we can say that almost all of the 350,000 workers in Manchester and its environs live in shabby, damp and dirty houses; that the streets through which they have to pass are most often in a deplorable state and extremely dirty and that they were built without the slightest care for ventilation, with the sole concern of the greatest possible profit for the builder. In the working-class dwellings of Manchester there is neither cleanliness nor comfort, and therefore no family life possible; only a dehumanized, degraded race, reduced to a bestial level, both intellectually and morally, physically morbid, could feel at ease and feel at home. (Engels, 1985, p.77).

So, either the proletariat adapted to the bourgeois order or they fell into alcoholism, dementia, suicide, into prostitution. In some cases, the poor had no alternative but revolt, revolution and strikes.

Under this reality, it didn't take long for workers to organize themselves into unions and associations with the aim of protecting each other, improving working conditions and strengthening the workers' struggle. There began a new chapter of social history that also reached Brazil.

## **THE SOCIAL ISSUE IN BRAZIL**

The implications of unfair ownership by capitalists of wealth produced by workers are the worst possible. Among them, illiteracy, violence, unemployment, social marginalization, hunger, political exclusion, among others, stand out.





The primitive accumulation of capital assumed varied forms depending on each region where it was observed. Marx (1984) analyzed the phenomenon in England and noted that the process took place with the collapse of the land base of rural individuals, the church's appropriation of their lands and the advent of oppressive legislation towards the poor, punishing vagrancy, begging and cutting wages.

Not infrequently, standards of living well below the quality to which human beings should have a right arise. Misery imposes harsh lifestyles, professional occupations without any social guarantee when it does not lead individuals to crime and its consequences.

In Brazil, social development was characterized by the exclusion of various sectors of society, especially people who were left outside the beginnings of modernity and the economy, as well as social and political life (LOPES, 2010).

For Marx (1984, p.277):

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Juliani (2011) corroborates and argues that the main reasons for the permanence of this long history of poverty are due to reasons that are much more cultural than political, although both are related. For the author, poverty is not limited to the absence of material possessions, but also to cultural ones. The country has a slavery heritage strongly associated with social and ethnic exclusion, becoming a current situation with few gains for some minorities, such as blacks and Indians.

Pereira (2009, p.188) says that

Brazil is a large country with the vast majority of its inhabitants living in urban centers. The economy, in per capita terms, is among the most developed. However, the levels of poverty and inequality are much





higher, being among the worst in the world. Most of the poverty is urban, located on the outskirts of large cities.

Juliani (2011) also thinks that the Brazilian Social Question is the result of an oligarchic policy that gave prestige to the elites without the majority of the country's population being able to interact, other than legitimizing through the so-called "halter vote", political power Social. These conditions not only kept the poor socially stagnant, but also the whole of society in a delay that still cannot be recovered today.

According to Pereira (2003 p. 119)

The current serious challenges are products of the same contradiction between capital and work, which generated the Social Question in the 19th century, but which, contemporaneously, have assumed enormous proportions and have not been sufficiently problematized.

One cannot simply see the Social Question. One can only see its consequences. In addition to those already mentioned, new inhumane conditions associated with savage capitalism emerge every day. Favelas arise and grow in the middle of large centers, public hospitals suffer from reduced beds, defaults in trade and much more. That is: capitalism itself suffers from the consequences of the Social Question.

### **THE ACTORS OF THE DRAMA OF THE SOCIAL QUESTION**

The work of social intervention in the environment of individual inequalities produced by capitalism, or more necessarily within the Social Question, is in fact an indisputable rhetoric. However, if you consider that the Social Question is the object of a single profession, you will be minimizing the problem, since understanding the Social Question as a specific object of Social Work, for example, which is not true.

On the other hand, if one considers the broader reach of the concept of Social Question, it will easily be concluded that the most different professional occupations have their actions determined by it, such as the health professional who attends to the sick individual due to malnutrition or the



policeman who helps the victim of urban violence, the religious minister who treats the soul and others with varied functions.

There are still those who, indirectly, are responsible for social inequalities. Everyone who bets on capitalism or who somehow invests in it as the perfect form of production of social life can be held responsible for the Social Question.

In the same way, governments – especially those that adorn neoliberal politics – and their actions expressed in economic, social or cultural policies, forged to keep the classes that live off the workforce dominated, are directly related to the Social Question.

Therefore, to determine the Social Question as an object of work only for a certain class of study, it is necessary to ignore all its facets and historical implications. The problem is too broad to be treated from a minimalist perspective and needs to be understood in a broader and more homogeneous way, in order to understand all the factors involved, which means that theologians also need to deal with the subject.

It is therefore up to all social segments to seek solutions to Brazil's problems. Professionals from different areas of knowledge need to decipher the mediations that currently permeate the Social Question, undoing its knots.

### **EXPRESSIONS OF THE SOCIAL ISSUE**

Brazilian social inequality has caused a variety of problems such as unemployment, violence, malnutrition and hunger and other ills that cause imbalances in the political and social climate of the country.

The social question is seen by many as an exclusive responsibility of the government and they expect minimization and combat actions. However, the problems arising in society in general are the result of multiple needs, especially poverty. If this social ill is seen as an individual cause, it is usually understood as the individual's personal responsibility.



Thus, the great challenge is to face social inequalities with responsibility and humanity and emphasize that injustices are often tolerated because they do not represent a direct threat to the bourgeoisie that perpetuates itself in power.

From another point of view, other ills such as urban and domestic violence receive greater attention, as they represent threats to power, whether due to public opinion or the visibility they receive and, as such, suffer state intervention. On this rests the idea that the social issue represents an area that needs to be better understood so that society can evolve in the country.

The process of modernization in Brazil was marked by the exclusion of different segments of society from the modern sectors of the economy, social life and the political system. There are those who explain the long duration of the state of poverty as not only being of an economic nature, but directly related to political and cultural institutions.

In these terms, poverty is expressed in a much greater way than mere material deprivation and its essence in Brazil comes from an already distant time, the period of slavery. This essence was configured in the midst of a game of interests that planned to structure Brazilian society in the social order that interested the elite, but full of dilemmas of a troubled and conflicting period of urban social life.

In the early 1930s, the Brazilian economy was based on two prototype types of rural activities. One of them, known as “plantations”, explored the cultivation of coffee for the foreign market and the other was limited to activities that were not very productive for national consumption. In both cases, land ownership was reserved for the elite descendants of European colonizers, most often obtained through political concessions.

With a workforce coming from enslaved African peoples until the 19th century and later from their descendant descendants, the economic and social picture that was previously simplified would become a more complex one. In



the urban area, the situation was not very different, since the country did not have an industrial park with conditions to leverage the economy, much less to establish labor organizations, which would only come a few years later.

However, the Social Question could already be perceived. The extremely precarious, dangerous and unhealthy working conditions and the permanent state of tension due to dissatisfaction with these conditions and the absence of labor legislation. At the time of slavery, an even more adverse situation, the common concept was that enslaved Africans "deserved" their ills for being adherents of "pagan" religions, proscribed and, by extension, cursed and punished by God.

A few years later, Brazil underwent an intense growth of the industrialization process, which resulted in a significant boost towards economic, social, political and cultural development (Pereira, 1999).

With the Revolution of 1930, some changes occurred in the socio-political and economic context of Brazil, in a certain way establishing a dividing mark between the validity of the agricultural and commercial system, linked to international capitalism, and the urban-industrial one, directed to the market. internal. The latter developed rapidly as it found solid bases for expansion.

The country entered a period of more pronounced economic development, with a strong increase in the rate of population growth and urbanization. With the urban areas receiving the concentration of the population, urban problems related to assistance, education, housing, basic infrastructure and others did not take long to appear.

With the consolidation of the industrialization process, the concentration of income was consolidated, increasing social inequalities and, by extension, tensions in workers' relations, finally aggravating the social question. It is imperative to point out that the government that took power



shortly after the Revolution of 1930 recognized the existence of the Social Question, interpreting it as a political question, of state confrontation.

Gorender (1990) points out that,

as in the past, these high levels of poverty are caused by a combination of economic, political and cultural heritages, conditions and choices. It is innocuous to assume that poverty and inequality could be eliminated by simple “political will”, or by redistributing resources from the rich to the poor. (GORENDER, 1990 p. 23).

If you analyze Brazilian society, which is characterized by such an uneven development, it will be understood that this occurs due to the action of some groups that benefited more, while others remain static on the margins of the process.

Gorender (1990) explains that this unequal development is noticed in society like the Brazilian one because it began its process of growth and structural change with such high inequalities in the distribution of income, wealth and opportunities that they could never be attenuated by development.

Lefebvre (2001) completes by pointing out that from the ownership of the land and its production by the capitalist regime, the demand for work in the countryside fell drastically and in the same proportion as the accumulation of capital increased, directing the population from the countryside to the urban area. .

Also according to Gorender (1990), industrialization and modernization took place more widely in the Center-South region of the country, mainly in the region where the metropolis of São Paulo is located. With the strong economic growth after World War II, the growing industrial centers began to demand waves of labor that exceeded their population growth, drawing the attention of increasing flows of migrants in search of better living conditions.

Today, the industry causes a true evolution in agricultural activities that reflects directly on social relations. It causes the growth of the cultivated



surface, generation of foreign exchange, but it also considerably reduces the rural population, causing an exodus and transforming the typical peasant into a salaried individual. “The capitalist mode of production replaces the routine exploitation of the land by the technological application of science” (Lefebvre, 2001, p. 145).

Despite all the advances experienced after such a troubled historical period of social formation, Brazil is today a country with the largest portion of its inhabitants living in large urban centers. The economy is among those that stand out the most on the international scene, but it still faces levels of poverty and inequality that are incompatible with the ideal of life in this century, often compared to the worst in the world. Brazilian poverty is urban, located on the outskirts of large metropolises, forgotten by the State and, not infrequently, exploited by pseudo-religious ministers.

### **FACING THE SOCIAL ISSUE IN THE THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT**

A social issue is understood as the conflict between capital and work, and the questioning of social needs by subjects who effectively seek political responses to the needs of the population through the implementation of public policies. The Social Question is based on the recognition of a set of new problems linked to modern urban working conditions.

However, Brazilian authors, social actors and professionals who work in this segment oppose this discussion, considering that although there is a new political order, the root of the Social Question is the same, that is, the contradiction between capital and work, social inequality, poverty, unemployment, precarious working conditions, social exclusion, violence, etc.

Among these authors, Pereira (2001) stands out for defending the idea that the Social Question is old and well-known, but disagrees with some theorists who claim that today the Social Question presents itself in a different way, as if new paradigms had been formed. .

Pereira (2001) explains:



Much has been said about a “new Social Question” and the need to face it within the framework of contemporary economic and political transformations. However, I must confess that, despite being aware that we are facing colossal social challenges - which are presented as unprecedented and unknown - I am not clear about the real existence of a "new Social Question". (PEREIRA, 2001, p.51)

External factors such as, among others, technological and scientific advances, globalization, neoliberalism, privatizations, the shortage of the labor market, the reorganization of capital and the influence of the international market caused major changes in the economic and social sphere of the country. So, the State is the one that still continues to address the Social Question through social policies, but it is necessary that other segments of society promote intervention actions.

Pereira (2001) points out that neoliberal policy is a regime with strong parasitic traits in which few benefit from the wealth created by productive investment, without offering counterparts.

Montaño (2001) recalls that

The fact that the State is responsible for responding to the “Social Question” means that society as a whole has this responsibility, in a form of “systemic solidarity”. Society is responsible for responding to the consequences of the “Social Question”, the State is, in fact, the privileged instrument for its realization (MONTANO, 2001 p. 8).

The presence of social policies is evident, but the way they are applied by the State is still questionable. As a partial solution to the capitalist crisis, neoliberalism aims to reconstitute the market, reducing or even eliminating the State's social intervention in various areas and activities. In this scenario, churches and NGOs have ample space to work, filling the gap left.

So, what was the responsibility of society as a whole becomes society itself. What was supported by the principle of universal solidarity is now supported by individual solidarity, what was developed by the State is now being implemented in the local space and what was constitutive of law becomes voluntary, fortuitous activity, concession and mere philanthropy .

Vargas (2013) says that





neoliberal policy is not concerned with the poor, nor does it impose any state intervention on them, except the minimum necessary for the popularity of a government to remain stable. This means that one cannot expect many actions from neoliberal governments to face the adverse social conditions of the population, except when these conditions also pose some kind of danger to the government itself (VARGAS, 2013 p. 45).

In this sense, the objective of withdrawing the State from the responsibility of intervening in the problem and transferring it to society itself, through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) was not given for reasons of efficiency and not only for economic reasons, such as reducing the costs necessary to sustain this state function. In fact, the reason is fundamentally political-ideological, that is, to remove and empty the citizen's universal right dimension in relation to quality social policies and to create a culture of blame for society for the ills that affect itself.

It is, therefore, in this devastating scenario that action is required from theologians and other professionals committed to eliminating, or at least reducing, the effects of the Social Question.

### **FINAL REMARKS**

When the debate about the Social Question was presented as a matter of public policies, it was demonstrated that the political methodology of the reproduction of poverty demanded a central place in the debate around the problem of poverty and its social effects. So, the question was shifted from the sphere of the consequences of poverty to the causes.

In this sense, the research helped to understand the phenomenon of poverty as an issue that concerned the most complex decision-making processes that involved a tangle of political and social actors and that acted decisively in the expansion of democracy, assuming a broader concept in this.

Social actors, society movements and others were being mobilized in the analysis of social policy and its effects, as well as in the evaluation of the effectiveness of the processes of overcoming social inequalities and in the



perspective of social rights, instead of simply contemplating or intervening in them. in its consequences.

In this sense, previous reflections allow us to consider that the search for the foundations of the social question is based on a type of social relationship that is determinant and typical of capitalist society, where the wealth produced by the whole society is privately appropriated and the result of this is the entire following problem, analyzed in this work.

The analysis of the Social Question is closely related to the analysis of the forms of production and reproduction of the individual's material, cultural and spiritual life, which broadens the scope of action for various sciences.

Thus, the very existence of the social question today at a level of greater complexity, belies the fallacy that the Marxist theory is in decline. In the same way, the analysis of theorists involved in this work pointed to the fact that the Social Question did not alone give rise to all the ills of the modern world, but contributed to the aggravation of some of them.

The Social Question then becomes a relevant object of study for the theological field exactly in its political condition, as an object of disputes of different projects in the society that constitutes it. For those who do not share this vision or for those who consider it simplistic, the understanding indicates that its confrontation will only be possible with the extinction of the current economic system, which we know is a utopia. It is believed in the political clash involving not only the case of some areas of knowledge, but also the progressive forces available for this confrontation.

In this way, the research demonstrated that the Social Question is too complex to present miraculous solutions or public policies that are capable of solving the problem of social inequalities. In the same way, capitalism is a crucial reality and to blame it for its ills would be to exhaust all efforts in the vain attempt to hide the real reason: the bankruptcy of human society, the object of continuous study of Theology.



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