

Socio-critical Sayings of Amos

**A Contextualized Interpretation Focusing on Implications
for Theological Social Ethics**

Inaugural-Dissertation

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| General Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter 1: A Study of the Texts with Socio-critical Contents in the Book of Amos (2,6-16; 4,1-3; 5,7+10.11.12+16-17; 6,1-14; 8,4-14) | 8 |
| 1.1. Delimitation of Time: Historical Time and Time of Composition..... | 8 |
| 1.1.1. Narrated Time or Historical Time | 8 |
| 1.1.2. Time of Composition of the Text | 10 |
| 1.1.3. Factors Affecting the Reconstruction of Socio-historical Background..... | 12 |
| 1.2. Amos 2,6-16: A Specimen Text of Prophetic Speech on Behalf of the Weak..... | 13 |
| 1.2.1. Delimitation, Structure, Destination and Translation of the Text | 14 |
| 1.2.1.1. Delimitation of the Text | 14 |
| 1.2.1.2. Structure of the Oracle..... | 16 |
| 1.2.1.3. Destination..... | 16 |
| 1.2.1.4. Translation | 17 |
| 1.2.2. The Accusations: A Catalogue of Seven Transgressions (vv. 6-8)..... | 18 |
| 1.2.2.1. Introductory Formula and Numerical Saying (v. 6a-b) | 18 |
| 1.2.2.2. Selling of the Righteous and the Needy (v. 6c)..... | 19 |
| 1.2.2.3. Oppression of the Poor (v. 7a)..... | 24 |
| 1.2.2.4. Perverting the Way of the Afflicted (v. 7b)..... | 26 |
| 1.2.2.5. Fifth Transgression: A man and his Father Going to the Same Girl (v. 7c)... | 28 |
| 1.2.2.6. Cultic Activities on Distained Garments (v. 8a) | 31 |
| 1.2.2.7. Drinking Wine Taken as Fines in the House of God (v. 8b)..... | 33 |
| 1.2.3. YHWH's Benevolent Actions and the Ingratitude of Israel (vv. 9-12)..... | 34 |
| 1.2.3.1. Annihilation of Amorites (v. 9) | 36 |
| 1.2.3.2. Bringing out of the Land of Egypt and Wandering in the Desert (v. 10)..... | 36 |
| 1.2.3.3. Appointing of Nazirites and Prophets (v. 11)..... | 37 |
| 1.2.3.4. Two More Transgressions (v. 12)..... | 38 |
| 1.2.4. The Punishment: Defeat and the End of Normal Life (vv. 13-16)..... | 38 |
| 1.2.4.1. Life shall Come to a Halt (v. 13) | 39 |
| 1.2.4.2. Military Defeat (vv. 14-16) | 40 |
| 1.3. Accusations against the Upper Class Women of Samaria (4,1-3)..... | 41 |
| 1.3.1. The Addressees: "the Cows of Bashan" | 41 |
| 1.3.2. The Accusations: Partakers in Exploitation (v. 1bc) | 42 |
| 1.3.2.1. Oppression of the Poor (v. 1b)..... | 42 |
| 1.3.2.2. Trampling on the Needy (v. 1b) | 43 |
| 1.3.2.3. Collusion in the Exploitative Deeds of their Husbands (v. 1d)..... | 43 |
| 1.3.3. Swearing by YHWH (v. 2) | 44 |
| 1.3.4. The Punishment: Exile (vv. 2b-3)..... | 45 |
| 1.4. The Socio-critical Sayings 5,7+10.11.12+16-17 | 46 |
| 1.4.1. The Addressees: "the House of Israel" | 46 |
| 1.4.2. The Accusations: Ignoring Justice (vv. 7.10.11a.b.c.e.12)..... | 47 |
| 1.4.2.1. Ignoring "Justice" and "Righteousness" (vv. 7.10)..... | 47 |
| 1.4.2.2. Exploitation of the Poor (v. 11a) | 48 |
| 1.4.2.3. Luxurious Houses and Pleasant Vineyards (vv. 11c.e.12) | 50 |
| 1.4.3. YHWH Knows and Authorizes the Punishment (vv. 12a.16a.17)..... | 51 |

| | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1.4.4. | The Punishment: Futility, Mourning (vv. 11d.f. 16-17)..... | 51 |
| 1.4.4.1. | Futility of Construction and Agricultural Activities (vv. 11d.f)..... | 51 |
| 1.4.4.2. | All Pervasive Mourning (vv. 16-17)..... | 52 |
| 1.5. | Affluent People Living in False Security (6,1-14) | 53 |
| 1.5.1. | The Addressees: “the House of Israel” | 53 |
| 1.5.2. | The Accusations: Disregard for the Will of YHWH (6,1-6.12-13)..... | 53 |
| 1.5.2.1. | Futility of False Security (vv. 1-3) | 53 |
| 1.5.2.2. | Leading Indulgent Life Unconcerned about the Plight of the Poor (vv. 4-6). 55 | |
| 1.5.2.3. | Disregard for Justice, Righteousness and Actions of YHWH (vv. 12-13)..... | 57 |
| 1.5.3. | YHWH Abhors “the Pride of Jacob” (v. 8a-c) | 58 |
| 1.5.4. | The Punishment: Defeat, Destruction, Exile (vv. 7. 8d-11.14) | 59 |
| 1.5.4.1. | Exile and End of Revelry (v. 7) | 59 |
| 1.5.4.2. | Devastation of the City (vv. 8d-11) | 60 |
| 1.5.4.3. | Oppression by a Nation Raised up by YHWH (v. 14) | 60 |
| 1.6. | Greedy Merchants who appropriate Wealth at the Expense of the Poor (8,4-14).... | 60 |
| 1.6.1. | The Accusations: Oppression through Malpractices in Trade (vv. 4-6)..... | 61 |
| 1.6.1.1. | Oppressing the Needy and Afflicted (v. 4) | 61 |
| 1.6.1.2. | Malpractices in Trade to the Disadvantage of the Poor and Needy (vv. 5-6) 61 | |
| 1.6.2. | YHWH Swears by “the Pride of Jacob” and does not “Forget” (v.7) | 63 |
| 1.6.3. | The Punishment: Natural Catastrophe, Abandonment, and Fall (vv. 8-14) ... | 64 |
| 1.6.3.1. | Terrestrial and Celestial Catastrophe and Resultant Mourning (vv. 8-10)..... | 64 |
| 1.6.3.2. | Abandonment by YHWH (vv. 11-12) | 64 |
| 1.6.3.3. | The Fall of Young Men and Women (vv. 13-14)..... | 65 |
| 1.7. | Concluding Summary | 66 |
| Chapter 2: The Social Crisis in the Light of Archaeological and Sociological Research | | 73 |
| 2.1. | Two Models to Understand the Crisis | 76 |
| 2.1.1. | Model of Canaanite Officers | 76 |
| 2.1.2. | Model of Rent Capitalism..... | 77 |
| 2.2. | Factors Responsible for Social Crisis in Ancient Israel | 79 |
| 2.2.1. | Urbanisation and Population Growth | 80 |
| 2.2.1.1. | Increase in Number of Settlements and Population in Archaeology..... | 80 |
| 2.2.1.2. | Impact of Demographic Factors on Israelite Society | 83 |
| 2.2.2. | Increased Building Activities, Heavy Taxes and Forced Labour | 85 |
| 2.2.3. | Break-up of Tribal Solidarity | 88 |
| 2.2.4. | Emergence of a Class Society | 92 |
| 2.2.4.1. | Formation of an Upper Class in Israel..... | 95 |
| 2.2.4.2. | Signs of Affluence and Officers in the Light of Samaria Ostraca..... | 101 |
| 2.2.4.3. | Class Distinctions in Archaeology: Tell el-Fār‘a | 103 |
| 2.2.5. | Debt System..... | 103 |
| 2.3. | Concluding Summary | 104 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Chapter 3: Amos' Call for Justice, the Institutional Response and their Implications for Theological Social Ethics | 107 |
| 3.1. The Realization-Focused Justice of Amos | 107 |
| 3.1.1. Amos' Idea of Justice – Re-establishing Proper Relationships | 110 |
| 3.1.2. Assuring Justice to the Deprived Sections | 118 |
| 3.1.3. Condemning Injustice and Oppression | 122 |
| 3.1.4. Critique on the Perpetrators of Injustice | 129 |
| 3.1.5. Amos' Vision of Just Society and Jesus' Idea of Kingdom of God | 136 |
| 3.1.6. Impact of the Prophetic Critique on the Church | 139 |
| 3.2. The Institutional Response to Injustice: the Biblical Social Laws | 142 |
| 3.2.1. The Prophets and the Torah | 143 |
| 3.2.2. A Socio-Historical Understanding of the Law Codes in the Bible | 146 |
| 3.2.3. Concern for the Deprived Sections in the Biblical Law Codes | 148 |
| 3.2.3.1. Laws to Protect the Interests of Slaves | 149 |
| 3.2.3.2. Lending on Interest and Pledging | 153 |
| 3.2.3.3. Securing Justice for the Poor before Law | 157 |
| 3.2.3.4. Seventh Year Rest and Jubilee Releases | 158 |
| 3.3. Theological Frameworks: Justice as Affirmation of God-Willed Dignity | 163 |
| 3.3.1. Involvement of YHWH through the Signs of the Times | 166 |
| 3.3.2. Recollecting the Past to Live in the Present | 169 |
| 3.3.3. Punishment: Shattering False Confidence and Restoring Identity | 174 |
| 3.3.4. YHWH-Willed Justice and Human Freedom | 182 |
| 3.4. Concluding Summary | 188 |
| Chapter 4: An Actualization of the Message Using the Principles of Social Ethics | 191 |
| 4.1. Amos' Response and its Implications for Socio-ethical Principles | 192 |
| 4.1.1. Methodological Reflection | 193 |
| 4.1.2. Principle of Personality | 194 |
| 4.1.3. Principle of Solidarity | 200 |
| 4.1.4. Principle of Subsidiarity | 204 |
| 4.1.5. Principle of Sustainability | 211 |
| 4.2. Actualization of the Message for the Tribal People of Chotanagpur, India | 217 |
| 4.2.1. Description of the Destination Community for Actualization | 218 |
| 4.2.2. Identifying the Present Situation and Implications of the Message | 220 |
| 4.2.2.1. Aspect of Personality | 220 |
| 4.2.2.1.1. Challenges to the Tribal Concept of Personality Today | 222 |
| 4.2.2.1.2. Implications of the Prophetic Call to Rights and Dignity | 226 |
| 4.2.2.2. The Aspect of Solidarity | 228 |
| 4.2.2.2.1. The Challenges to the Solidarity Network of the Tribals | 228 |
| 4.2.2.2.2. Implications of the Prophetic Call of Justice | 236 |
| 4.2.2.3. Aspect of Subsidiarity | 238 |
| 4.2.2.3.1. Strengthening Help for Self-Help | 238 |
| 4.2.2.3.2. Strengthening Institutions of Self-Rule | 241 |
| 4.2.2.4. Aspect of Sustainability | 246 |
| 4.2.2.4.1. Challenges to Sustainability Today | 248 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 4.2.2.4.2. Prophetic Vision for a Sustainable Society Today | 250 |
| 4.3. Amos' Theological Framework: a Model for Church's Social Engagement | 254 |
| 4.3.1. Recollection of the Actions of God in the History | 255 |
| 4.3.2. God's Awareness of Injustice and Re-establishing True Identity | 256 |
| 4.4. Concluding Summary | 258 |
| General Conclusion | 261 |
| Bibliography | 266 |

Abbreviations

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|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5x | Number followed by ‘x’ to indicate the number of occurrences of a word or expression (5x = five times/occurrences) |
| AB | <i>The Anchor Bible</i> |
| ANET | J.B. Pritchard (ed.), <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> |
| ATD | Das Alte Testament Deutsch |
| BASOR | <i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i> |
| BBB | Bonner Biblische Beiträge |
| BDB | F. Brown / S.R. Driver / C.A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> |
| BHK | R. Kittel, <i>Biblia Hebraica</i> |
| BHS | <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> |
| BKAT | Biblische Kommentar Altes Testament |
| BZAW | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft |
| ch/s. | chapter/s |
| chr | Chronicler |
| CIG | <i>Christ in der Gegenwart</i> |
| dtm | Deuteronomy, Deuteronomic |
| dtr | Deuteronomists, Deuteronomistic |
| ed. | edited by; edition |
| ELB | (Revidierte) Elberfelder Bibel |
| ESV | English Standard Version |
| GKC | W. Gesenius, <i>Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar</i> , E. Kautzsch (ed.), A.E. Cowley (trans.) |
| HThKAT | Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament |
| HUCA | <i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i> |
| IEJ | <i>Israel Exploration Journal</i> |
| JBL | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> |
| JJDMS | <i>Jharkhand Journal of Development and Management Studies</i> |
| JM | P. Joüion / T. Muraoka, <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> |
| JSOT | <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> |
| JSOTSS | Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement series |
| KAT | Kommentar zum Alten Testament |
| KB | L. Koehler / W. Baumgartner (eds.), <i>A Bilingual Dictionary of the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament</i> |
| KS | <i>Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel</i> |
| LXX | Septuagint |
| MT | Masoretic Text |
| MThZ | <i>Münchener theologische Zeitschrift</i> |
| <i>n</i> | The letter <i>n</i> followed by a number indicates the reference to a footnote in this dissertation or reference to footnotes in other sources when so indicated. |
| NIBC | New International Biblical Commentary |
| NKJV | New King James Version |
| NRSV | New Revised Standard Version |
| OTL | Old Testament Library |
| SBLDS | Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series |
| TA | <i>Tel Aviv</i> |

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|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>TDOT</i> | G.J. Botterweck / H. Ringgren / H.J. Fabry (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> |
| trans. | Translated by; translation |
| <i>TrThZ</i> | <i>Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift</i> |
| <i>UF</i> | <i>Ugarit - Forschungen</i> |
| vol. | Volume |
| <i>VT</i> | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i> |
| WBC | Word Biblical Commentary |
| <i>ZDPV</i> | <i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina Vereins</i> |

General Introduction

This study has as its first inspiration the affirmation of the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, No. 4, which says,

the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other.

In order to be faithful to this task, the biblical exegete today is called upon to actualize the message of the biblical text to reveal its meaning for the men and women of today. This involves re-reading the biblical text in the new circumstances and applying it to the contemporary situation of the People of God, as the Pontifical Biblical Commission's Document on the Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, 1993, suggests.¹

The conviction that underlies this study is that when interpreting a biblical text today, especially in a context like India, where pluralistic religious faiths, structural injustices and abject poverty determine the reality of life, one should first and foremost think about its relevance. One of the widely respected Indian biblical scholars, George Soares Prabhu, mentions: "Relevance has always been the goal of traditional Indian (Hindu) theology, where a study of the sacred books was never a merely academic exercise (truth for truth's sake) but always a quest for liberation."² And the German theologian Hans Waldenfels also points out: "The origin of theology had to do with the spreading of Christianity and its claim to have a message for all people."³ This claim was the driving force behind the presentation of its message in a language understandable to all, though care was also taken that the message was not lost in this endeavour.⁴ The contextualization of a text springs from the following two aspects suggested by Waldenfels⁵:

i. The text is the sum total of the speaker and his intention, speech, attitude to the hearer, thinking, language, and mood.

¹ Cf. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, See J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commissions Document: The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church: Text and Commentary*, Subsidia Biblica 18, Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995. The Commission finds such an actualization possible "... because the richness of the meaning contained in the biblical text gives it a value for all times and all cultures (cf. *Isa* 40:8; 66:18-21; *Matt* 28:19-20)." P. 171.

² G.M. Soares-Prabhu, "Towards an Indian Interpretation of the Bible", in Padinjarekuttu I. (ed.), *Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J., vol. 1: Biblical Themes for a Contextual Theology Today*, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series 2, Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999, p. 216.

³ My translation from "Die Entstehung der Theologie hatte also mit der Ausbreitung des Christentums und seinen Anspruch, eine Botschaft für alle Menschen zu haben, zu tun." H. Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, Paderborn / München / Wien / et al: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995, p. 24.

⁴ Cf. H. Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, p. 24.

⁵ Cf. H. Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, p. 50.

ii. Every text has a capacity to integrate, which goes above the text itself. He calls the context “*die mitschwingenden nicht-sprachlichen Momente*”⁶ (the swinging silent moments) or something that is not expressed in language, but comes alive when it comes into contact with another context. Every text comes from one context and goes into another context, understanding the new context: λόγος making the διάλογος possible – making the text to speak again.

Re-readings of biblical texts and events are found in the Bible itself. The Biblical Commission’s Document mentioned above describes how the promise of land made to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 15,7.18)⁷ later “becomes entrance into the sanctuary of God” (Exod 15,17), “a participation in God’s “rest” (*Ps* 132:7-8)”, and lastly “the eternal inheritance” (Heb 9,5).⁸ Similarly, Daniel finds a new interpretation, which “could throw light upon his own day”, in the “prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the 70 years of chastisement incurred by Jerusalem and Judah” (cf. Jer 25,11-12; 29,10; Dan 9,24-27).⁹ This attempt by the biblical author to make his faith values relevant in the changing social, historical and economic situations is key to theology even today. Theology today has three *loci theologici* or sources: scripture, tradition and present human experience, according to Stephen B. Bevans, the author of *Models of Contextual Theology*.¹⁰ He asserts that by saying that there are three sources of Theology, he means “not just adding context as a third element; ... [*but*] *changing the whole equation*”¹¹. He explains it further:

When we recognize the importance of context for theology, we are also acknowledging the absolute importance of context for the development of both scripture and tradition. The writings of scripture and the content, practices, and feel of tradition did not simply fall from the sky. They themselves are products of human beings, written and conceived in human terms, and conditioned by human personality and human circumstances. As we study scripture and tradition, we not only have to be aware of their inevitable contextual nature; we have to read and interpret them within *our own* context as well.¹²

Here it is also important that the understanding of the biblical text is sufficiently hermeneutically informed. The Bible is not like any other historical or literary work and cannot be considered in the same way. It contains the faith experience of a community or communities, which “contains in manifest or hidden form the unchanging kernel of an eternal

⁶ H. Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, p. 50.

⁷ All the chapter and verse numbers from Hebrew Bible in this dissertation correspond to the MT.

⁸ Cf. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 135.

⁹ Cf. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 135.

¹⁰ Cf. S.B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Maryknoll / New York: Orbis Books, 2002 p. 4.

¹¹ S.B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 5.

¹² S.B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 5.

truth”.¹³ One who accepts this truth is called to respectfully handle it and to properly discern between the fundamental truths of faith and the facts that are restricted by time and space.

I believe that a contextualized interpretation cannot replace or exclude the historical critical study of the Bible. In fact, one should base the contextualized interpretation on the firm foundation of the text. An interpreter, who does not know the biblical text, builds his contextualization in the air. In order to have a message, which is easier decipherable from the canonical text, it will do no good to sweep the real tensions and textual problems with regard to the variant readings or the time of composition under the carpet. The historical critical interpretation makes us aware of the cultural distance to the biblical text, so that we perceive it as a “strange text” and avoid rash identification of the text as answer to our own questions and interests¹⁴ without well grounded theological and sociological research.¹⁵

Contextualization of the text is, in fact, a further step beyond the historical critical interpretation. But unfortunately most biblical scholars show no interest in this step or consider it beyond their competence. In my opinion, this lack of interest is detrimental not only to Christian theology, but also to the Christian faith today, as this would make the Bible and Theology irrelevant to the life of the faithful. On the other hand, contextualization helps us to draw out the inspiring power of the scriptures for Christian faith and practice today. A contextual reading of the Bible corresponds to the postmodern spirit of pluralism and brings out in a very unconventional way the richness of the biblical text.¹⁶ Underlying the contextualized interpretation of the Bible is also the conviction that, as Bevans points out, theology has to be faithful to the contexts of its past, but it has to also “pass through the sieve of our own individual and contemporary-collective experience”.¹⁷ In Bevans’ scheme, contextual theology is the “experience of the past recorded in scripture, preserved and defended in tradition” meeting the “experience of the present” involving “personal/communal experience, culture, social location [*and*] social change”.¹⁸

¹³ My translation from “- manifest oder verborgen – der unwandelbare Kern einer ewigen Wahrheit vorhanden ist”. W. Lesch, “Bibelhermeneutik und theologische Ethik: Philosophische Anfragen” in A. Bondolfi / H.J. Münk (eds.), *Theologische Ethik Heute*, Zürich: NZN Buchverlag, 1999, p. 19.

¹⁴ Cf. M. Heimbach-Steins, “Biblische Hermeneutik und Christliche Sozialethik”, in her (ed.) *Christliche Sozialethik. Ein Lehrbuch*, vol. 1, Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2004, p. 93.

¹⁵ However, the task of solving textual problems, though in itself noble and challenging, should not be the only task of a biblical exegete today. The historical critical studies themselves have demonstrated the historical process behind the growth of the Hebrew Scriptures – that the construction of the history of Israel is a later phenomenon influenced greatly by the crisis of Assyrian and Babylonian exiles. This realization should have a bearing on the interpretation of the text. Cf. W. Lesch, “Bibelhermeneutik und theologische Ethik”, p. 25.

¹⁶ Cf. W. Lesch, “Bibelhermeneutik und theologische Ethik”, p. 26.

¹⁷ S.B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 5.

¹⁸ S.B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 7. (See his table on p. 7)

Heimbach-Steins too has affirmed in her understanding of the contextual reading the connection between text and practice.¹⁹ I would say that a contextualized interpretation understands the Bible as the faith experience of a community, transmitted through oral and written traditions, reinterpreted and reformulated by later generations in the light of their own experience of the continued revelation of God in their history. The contextualized interpretation then understands the text in the light of one's life experience, without ignoring or relativizing the importance of the original meaning and context/s of the text. It means understanding the biblical text as God's word, and making it relevant and meaningful for one's self-understanding. Contextual interpretation involves a "*Hermeneutik der Inkarnation*"²⁰ (hermeneutics of incarnation), as Heimbach-Steins puts it, which sees the text not as a past historical event, but recognizing the actual presence of God in the world, as his will in a given situation.²¹

Of course, to restrict the meaning of the biblical text to a particular context would be to deny its richness. The biblical text is boundless in its application possibilities. It would be also impossible and beyond the ability of an exegete to interpret it in all the possible contexts. But at the same time, the text can set us norms, the meaning of which must be discerned in context through the working of the Holy Spirit who guides and preserves its authentic interpretation. So the exegete should not shy away from the responsibility of "bringing out" (as the word 'exegesis' suggest) the meaning and demands of the word of God in a context. A contextual interpretation of the biblical text has also an immense capacity to transform. It is not to claim in any way that the Bible can give us solutions for all the contemporary sociological, economic and ecological problems. However, it can motivate us and help us to describe our horizons of meaning, and give us orientation for a committed Christian life, as Lesch points out.²²

Another presupposition that underlies the following study is the conviction that the Bible is the foundation on which theology is built and it is, as the Second Vatican Council unambiguously states, "the soul of sacred theology" (*Dei verbum*, No. 24).²³ This new understanding brought about a drastic change not only in biblical exegesis, but also in the whole of theology itself as it called for the readiness to understand the claims of faith in the

¹⁹ Cf. M. Heimbach-Steins, "Biblische Hermeneutik", p. 99.

²⁰ M. Heimbach-Steins, "Biblische Hermeneutik", p. 95.

²¹ In this sense, contextual interpretation does not necessarily need a political motive, though the texts which stress liberation may not exclude a call to conversion and justice in the political sphere.

²² Cf. W. Lesch, "Bibelhermeneutik und theologische Ethik", pp. 27-28.

²³ Pope Benedict XVI has underlined the importance of the mutually complementing relationship of exegesis and other theological disciplines again in his recent post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, No. 35.

light of historical and contextual background and it affected the foundations of the understanding of revelation that were previously considered strong.²⁴ It makes the interpretation of the Bible in the postmodern world an interdisciplinary practice. In particular, the ability of the biblical message “at the same time to both relativize and enrich the value systems and norms of behavior of each generation”²⁵ suggests its close association to the discipline of Christian social ethics. Ethics is the search for an answer to the question “what should I do?” The answer to this question has to be formulated in the light of the word of God, or in other words, the word of God serves to answer this question. The Bible is concerned about people’s real lives and it cannot remain untouched by the Socratic question “How should one live?”, though neither the Bible, nor the precepts of social ethics offer readymade answers. But both help human beings to reflection as to what is expected of them in a given situation and motivates and sets them guidelines to freely decide on the course of actions.²⁶

Above all, the Old Testament and the New Testament together are the foundational experience of the Christian faith, laying down the values that determine the Christian worldview. Therefore biblical exegesis must, along with historical critical interpretation, bring the text in contact with theological ethical, more specifically with socio-ethical questions.²⁷ Here the biblical texts are not to be seen just as decorative to the socio-ethical precepts, but as constituting the spirit of their convictions and principles. An attempt to base socio-ethical and moral principles literally on the biblical premises can easily lead to fundamentalism and to an outdated social ethics. This makes it necessary to re-interpret the scriptural texts with the living context of Christians today in mind. It will also help Christian social ethics to reflect the life of faith, whose fundamental documents are the Holy Scriptures.²⁸ Finally, the contextualized interpretation necessitates reading the scriptures according to the signs of the times. But it does not mean just matching the scriptures to the developments of the time and

²⁴ Cf. W. Lesch, “Bibelhermeneutik und theologische Ethik”, p. 16.

²⁵ *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 171.

²⁶ Social ethics helps one to “a politically sound faith” in dialogue with science and society and it opens great perspectives of hope with scientific analysis of facts and tries to find out what human beings today are in search of. Even when precise answers are not possible, Christian social ethics offers a scientific arena for a diversified and critical dialogue between faith and politics, as Markus Vogt points out. Cf. M. Vogt, “Grundlagen der Christlichen Sozialethik” Lecture notes offered in Winter Semester 2009-10 at Ludwig Maximilians Universität, München, p. 6. Moreover, Christian social ethics aims to interpret the empirical comprehension of reality in the light of theological sources with reference to Bible and Tradition.

²⁷ Heimbach-Steins says, “So unverzichtbar die historische Erschließung und Erhellung der Texte in ihrer uns fremden Welt und so wenig ersetzbar deshalb das methodische Instrumentarium historisch-kritischer Forschung für die biblische Theologie ist, so steril wird die Exegese, wenn sie den einzelnen Text historisch zwar zu fixieren und zu zergliedern, ihn aber nicht in seiner heute vorliegenden kanonischen Gestalt für gegenwärtige Rezipienten als bedeutungsvoll zu erschließen vermag.” Marianne Heimbach-Steins, “Biblische Hermeneutik”, pp. 84-85.

²⁸ Cf. W. Lesch, “Bibelhermeneutik und theologische Ethik”, p. 18.

running behind every development, but it signifies deciphering the biblical message for the present in the light of the gospels.²⁹

Based on the above assumptions, I propose the following steps for a contextualized interpretation of the socio-critical oracles and sayings of the prophet Amos for a community today. The four steps outlined below correspond to the four chapters of this dissertation.

i. *A respectful critical analysis of the biblical text, stressing the message of the text.* The text is seen here as the faith document of a community, fundamental to which was the experience of a God who was active in their history and acted in their present. The prophetic social critique is an affirmation that this God is especially concerned about the practice of justice in the community. The textual study will show us how Amos condemned unjust practices in the community and presented God's call for justice for the weaker sections. He understands that the practice of justice is so important for his God that the mode of their continued existence depends on it. We shall see how his theological understanding of justice motivated him and gave him a framework for benevolence to the weak.

ii. *A scientific analysis of the actual context of the text using the findings of archeological, sociological and philological studies.* Here we shall see how far the message of the text reflected on the actual social and economic context of the people. Even if we accept that the biblical texts are often later compositions, reflecting the situations of later times, the impact of the social context on the text cannot be minimized. It also appears that the factors that played a role in the developments of early states around the world have played a role in Israel too as she emerged as a monarchical state. A study of these factors will help us to understand the actual message of the text.

iii. *A description of the prophetic idea of justice and its implication for theological social ethics today.* Here we shall try to understand the idea of justice implied in the social critique of Amos and other socio-critical prophets. The prophets do not propose a theory of justice, but react to a situation of injustice, reading the signs of the times in the light of God's will. Their response combined with the institutional response found in the biblical social laws can help us formulate a biblical idea of justice in response to the social crisis. Their idea of justice is characterized by their uncompromising stand for human freedom and dignity, which they understand as inseparable from the imitation of their God, who sets historical precedents for the recognition of human freedom and liberation.

iv. *An actualization of the message of the text in the life of the community today.* It includes an attempt to paraphrase the prophetic idea of justice according to the principles of Christian

²⁹ Cf. J. Ostheimer, *Zeichen der Zeit lesen. Erkenntnistheoretische Bedingungen einer praktisch-theologischen Gegenwartsanalyse*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008, p. 173.

social ethics, viz., personality, solidarity, subsidiarity and sustainability. These categorizations, though not directly springing from the biblical texts as such, shall help us to reformulate the message of social justice and to draw out their consequences for the present. The latter part of this chapter aims at drawing out the practical implications of the text for a community today. The community on which this is based is an indigenous tribal community in central India, which experiences various kinds of structural injustice. Though this community is geographically restricted, the implications of this process could be relevant for indigenous people all over the world.

Chapter 1: A Study of the Texts with Socio-critical Contents in the Book of Amos (2,6-16; 4,1-3; 5,7+10.11.12+16-17; 6,1-14; 8,4-14)

Much of the interest of the modern world in the prophet Amos is presumably due to his outcry on behalf of the downtrodden. The texts that we study below are models of prophetic speech on behalf of the poor and oppressed and they formulate in a theological framework the demands of YHWH on the people of Israel as they lived their faith in a turbulent epoch in history.

1.1. Delimitation of Time: Historical Time and Time of Composition

Simian-Yofre in his commentary on Amos has tried to delimit the narrated time (“il tempo raccontato”), i.e., the historical time (“la cornice storica”) which the text sets out to communicate through the chronological and other historical references in the text itself, and the time of narration (“il tempo del racconto”) or the time of composition of the text (“la datazione del testo stesso”).³⁰ This delimitation is important because the narrated time and the time of composition do not always correspond in the biblical texts. The survey below shows that this is also the case with the book of Amos. It is necessary to keep in mind this distinction, i.e., the distinction between the historical time that is narrated in the text and the time of composition of the text, as we try to understand his historical critical oracles and sayings.

1.1.1. Narrated Time or Historical Time

The first verse of the book locates the ministry of Amos during the reigns of Uzziah and Jeroboam II in the Southern and Northern Kingdoms of Judah and Israel respectively.³¹ Scholars differ in determining the precise period of both these kings.³² Considering the common years of Uzziah and Jeroboam II, we can approximately place the ministry of Amos somewhere between the years 792-753 BCE. Amos 1,1 gives a further geological clue to the approximate time of Amos' ministry: “two years before the earthquake”. Archaeologists have tried to match this dating to the signs of an earthquake which they have found in the remains

³⁰ H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos: nuova versione, introduzione e commento*, I Libri Biblici, Prima Testamento 15, Milan: Pauline, 2002, p. 16.

³¹ It is typical of the dtc redactors to synchronise the names of the kings of both kingdoms of the divided monarchy, as we see also in the beginning of Isa, Jer, Hos, Mic and Zeph.

³² The two widely respected attempts at reconstructing the chronology of Ancient Israel are those of Edwin R. Thiele and of John H. Hayes. Thiele places Jeroboam II between 793-753 BCE (cf. E.R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, New Revised Ed., Grand Rapids MI: Kregel Publications, 1983, p. 12) and Hayes places him between 788-748 BCE (cf. J.H. Hayes / P.K. Hooker, *A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah and its Implications for Biblical History and Literature*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988, p. 50). These authors place Uzziah between 792-740 and 785-734 BCE respectively. The dating provided by most commentators either corresponds to the above dating, or is close to it.

of some of the ancient cities of Israel around the year 750 BCE.³³ There is no way to date the transgressions that are mentioned in the various oracles of Amos, as John Barton has pointed out with regard to the oracles against nations 1,3-2,5. They may refer to events that are remote as well as close to the time of the composition of the text.³⁴

The historical time is also mentioned as a time of prosperity in Israel. There are references to winter houses and summer houses (3,15); rich women of Samaria (4,1); houses of dressed stones (5,11); beds of ivory (6,4); and eating and revelry (6,4-6). Such prosperity would have naturally meant political success during the reign of Jeroboam II. However, direct reference to this king and his political successes are surprisingly few in the Bible. Of the mere seven verses that are attributed to this long reigning monarch in 2 Kgs 14,23-29 only v. 27 mentions that the Lord saved the Israelites “by the hand of Jeroboam, son of Joash”, and v. 28 attributes the recovery of Damascus and Hamath to him. Historians have pointed out that the political scenario in the ancient Near East in the first half of the 8th century was conducive to the success of small powers like Israel and Judah. This is linked to the situation in their neighbouring countries. The stability of Israel and Judah depended very much on their relationship with their northern neighbour, Syria, and the distant super power, Assyria. Historians attribute the relative calm in Palestine during the initial years of Jeroboam II to a lull in the Assyrian campaigns due to their preoccupation with the rebellion of their northern neighbour Urartu. The Syrians closer to the northern boundary of Israel were probably still recovering from their defeats at the hands of the Assyrians under Adad-Nirari III.³⁵ Relief from paying heavy tribute to Assyria may have boosted peace and prosperity in Israel.³⁶ The

³³ Cf. J.A. Soggin, *The Prophet Amos*, J. Bowdon, (trans.), London: SCM Press, 1987, pp. 5-6.

³⁴ J. Barton, *Amos' Oracles against Nations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 35. Barton, who has made a detailed study of these oracles, is convinced that “There is no hope of dating the events Amos refers to with anything approaching certainty”.

³⁵ According to S. Cohen, the political situation in the ancient Near East between 806 and 782 was conducive to Jeroboam II's success: this period “was practically identical with the reign of the Assyrian king Adad-Nirari III, who made a series of campaigns to the West. The Assyrian protectorate was re-extended over Israel and most of the surrounding states, and Syria was defeated in war and heavily fined. Here was Israel's opportunity. Jehoash won three battles and restored to Israel some of the cities that had been lost (II Kings 13:25). The beginning of Jeroboam II's reign also fell within this period and, as Syria was unable to fight successfully on two fronts, the king of Israel could readily restore the ancient boundary of the palmy days of Israel”. S. Cohen, “The Political Background of the Words of Amos”, *HUCA* 36 (1965), p. 157. Also Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, A.F. Rainey (trans.), London: Burns & Oates, 1967, p. 311; and J.G. Botterweck, “Die soziale Kritik des Propheten Amos”, in *Die Kirche im Wandel der Zeit. Festgabe für J. Kardinal Höffner zur Vollendung des 65. Lebensjahres*, Köln: Verlag J.P. Bachem, 1971, p. 42. According to Botterweck, “Der Staat Israel erlebt unter Jerobeam II. den Höhepunkt seiner Macht; er dürfte der mächtigste Staat in Großsyrien gewesen sein. Wahrscheinlich siedelte er in Transjordanien Israeliten an, um seine Herrschaft hier zu festigen...”

³⁶ According to Gunther Fleischer, “Eine solche Zeit äußeren Friedens ist gegeben zwischen 796 v.Chr., dem Jahr der letzten erwähnten Tributzahlung Israels an Assyrien, und 738 v.Chr., da König Menahem erneut Zahlungen an Assyrien leisten muss...” G. Fleischer, *Die Bücher Joel und Amos*, Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar – Altes Testament 23/2, Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk GmbH, 2001, p. 121.

weakened position of Syria thereafter may be the reason for the implied success of Israel in taking Karnaim in the taunt of Amos in 6,13. Among the archaeological evidence for the prosperity cited for the time of Jeroboam II is a collection of sixty-three ostraca with unique inscriptions found in the excavations at Samaria. According to Aharoni, these ostraca belonged approximately to the time of Joash or Jeroboam II and bear inscriptions concerning the dispatch of oil and wine.³⁷ This archaeological find shows that some kind of trading activity in oil and wine took place during this period. Though there are contrary opinions³⁸, it is generally assumed that Jeroboam II ruled over a period of political and economic stability.

The historical time, as perceivable in the text, is also one of rampant social inequality and injustice. The text refers to selling “the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals”, “trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth”, “push the afflicted out of the way”, “father and son go to the same girl”, “lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge”, and “and the wine taken as fines they drink in the house of their God” (2,6b-8) as instances of unjust behavior in Israel. The affluent women of Samaria are referred to as “who oppress the poor” and “who crush the needy” (4,1). Am 5,10.12 mentions perversion of justice at the city gate by abhorring the one who speaks the truth, afflicting the righteous, taking bribes and sidelining the needy. Am 8,4-6 also refers to many malpractices in corn trade to the disadvantage of the poor and needy.

1.1.2. Time of Composition of the Text

To talk about the time of composition is to touch a hornet’s nest. The opinions of scholars differ substantially. There are scholars who attribute almost the whole book of Amos to the historical Amos,³⁹ while many others would disagree with such a view. The

³⁷ Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible*, pp. 315-327. See 2.2.4.2 below for the signs of affluence in Samaria ostraca.

³⁸ For a contrary position see J.H. Hayes, *Amos: The Eighth Century Prophet: His Times and his Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988, p. 27. According to the author, “The prophet Amos thus addressed a situation of great political and economic decline in Israel. Numerous references in the book point to such circumstances. The attacks against Israelite territory noted in chapter 1 describe recent and contemporary circumstances, not conditions from the previous century or decades. The land was surrounded by adversary (3:11) and in recent battles the people had suffered severe defeats (4:10). What was left of the house of Joseph was only a remnant of its former state (5:15; 6:6). Jacob is described as “so small” (7:2,5). The upper class which Amos condemns was accustomed to prosperity and economic indulgences, but under the circumstances it was forced to live not of the fat but the lean of the land. The state’s recent victories at Lo-debar and Karnaim (6:13) were probably counteroffensives against Damascus; the prophet recognized them as temporary successes only, not a trend in the state’s struggles with foreign encroachment.” P. 27

³⁹ The following are some of the commentators who attest to this view: F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, AB 24A, New York / London / Toronto et al: Doubleday, 1989; J.H. Hayes, *Amos*; S.M. Paul, *Amos*, Hermeneia, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991; S.N. Rosenbaum, *Amos of Israel: A New Interpretation*, Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press: 1990. The commentary of Andersen and Freedman attributes almost the whole of the work to the prophet himself and attributes the contradictions in the text to the diverging attitudes of the prophet or to his changing spiritual dispositions. J.H. Hayes also preferred to uphold the unity of the book and believes that almost the whole of the book comes from Amos himself. Shalom Paul would exclude only a few verses (Am 3,1b.7; 5,8-9; 6,2) as later additions.

monumental commentary of Hans Walter Wolff, which still remains a master commentary on Amos, and as such well accepted even today, proposed a “*längere literarische Wachstumsgeschichte*”⁴⁰ (longer literary evolution) for this book and distinguished six levels in the text. The first three levels, according to Wolff, could most probably go back to Amos himself and to his contemporary followers.⁴¹ The three further levels are later interpretations with their own linguistic and thematic distinctions.⁴² The six levels proposed by Wolff are the following:⁴³

- i. The oracles in chs. 3-6 are the oldest part of the book and they belong to the time of the prophet himself.
- ii. The five reports about the visions in 7,1-8; 8,1-2; and 9,1-4 go back certainly to Amos himself due to their autobiographical style, as do the oracles against the nations (against Damascus, Gaza, Ammon, Moab and Israel) in chs. 1-2. However, these have been reworked by the disciples or the so called school of Amos.⁴⁴
- iii. The visions in chs. 7-9: belong to the old school of Amos, or the disciples who knew the teachings of the prophet.
- iv. The Bethel interpretation in 3,14b; 4,6-11 et al were composed during the time of king Josiah.
- v. The oracles against Tyre, Edom and Judah were added by the dtr redactors after the fall of Jerusalem.
- vi. A post exilic redaction promising eschatological hope occurs in 9,11-15.

Jörg Jeremias reversed the stages of composition proposed by Wolff with regard to the first three levels. According to Jeremias, the oldest element in the book of Amos is the vision in chs. 7-9.⁴⁵ Here we have the historical and biographical material originally coming from Amos. The five oracles against the nations in chs. 1-2 follow as a reason for the judgement described in the visions. The disciples of Amos may have added the chs. 3-6, probably during the time of exile.

⁴⁰ H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2. Joel und Amos*, BKAT 14/2, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969, p. 129.

⁴¹ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2*, p. 130.

⁴² Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2*, p. 130.

⁴³ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2*, pp. 130-138. I shall only summarise the six levels without citing every verse that he attributes to each stage.

⁴⁴ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2*, The literary features of these two parts have similarities with regard to “die Fünfgliedrigkeit mit Paarbildung und Klimax zum letzten Stück hin, die Wiederholung von Rahmen- und Hauptsätzen, die enge thematische Verwandtschaft der Schlusstücke (2,13-16 und 9,1-4 und bezeichnende Kleinigkeiten wie die im Amosbuch sonst ungewöhnliche Schlussformel der Botenrede אָמַר יְהוָה (1,5.8.15; 2,3 und 7,3.6).” pp. 130-131.

⁴⁵ Cf. J. Jeremias, *Hosea und Amos: Studien zu den Anfängen des Dodekapropheten*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 13, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1996, pp. 144-156.

Gunther Fleischer has classified the composition in three stages taking the Babylonian exile as the point of departure.⁴⁶

- i. Pre-exilic book of Amos: Major parts of chs. 1-2 on the one side and the cycle of visions and call in Am 7-9 on the other side. Chs. 3-6 narrate the sins of the people and predict the destruction.
- ii. Exilic book of Amos: From the exilic time come the texts that have similarities to the book of Deuteronomy and the dtr history.
- iii. Post-exilic book of Amos: The possibility of salvation and the promise of salvation are proclaimed in 9,7-15 and form “*eine jubelnde Heilsverheißung als Ausklang des Amosbuches*”⁴⁷ (a joyful promise of salvation as an end to the book of Amos) .

As is evident from the above, the composition of the book of Amos is a complex process. Though it is true that the central themes and the core of the book derive from Amos himself, a later redactor (or later redactors) has edited these themes and added new material in order to make the message of the prophet relevant to his times. As Simian-Yofre rightly points out, this redactor may have had his own theological preoccupations, but at the same time, was well informed about the Hebrew Bible and has made use of his knowledge in giving a theological framework to the book.⁴⁸ Since the passages dealing with socio-critical themes too are editorially reworked, no single historical setting can be proposed. Nevertheless, the socio-critical message of the text being the subject matter of this study, I shall use henceforth the title “Amos” in this dissertation to refer to the socio-critical sayings of the book of Amos without making a distinction whether they go back to the historical Amos.

1.1.3. Factors Affecting the Reconstruction of Socio-historical Background

The process of composition with the variance of time has a bearing on the socio-historical background of the book. It is simplistic to understand it strictly as the historical background during one year or so when Amos may have exercised his ministry during the reign of Jeroboam II. The narrated time should be understood in a wider perspective. It follows that not all events and features mentioned in the book of Amos need to have the reign of Jeroboam II or the life time of Amos himself as the *Sitz im Leben*. Keeping these factors in mind, one may rightly ask: Is it possible to reconstruct the historical and sociological background of the book at all? Many scholars still believe that though we stand a great

⁴⁶ Cf. G. Fleischer, *Die Bücher Joel und Amos*, pp. 123-129. According to Fleischer, this kind of a presentation is meaningful, but darkens the original structure. Here it is made evident that the message and its clarification are more important than the structures (cf. p. 123).

⁴⁷ G. Fleischer, *Die Bücher Joel und Amos*, p. 129.

⁴⁸ Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, p. 23.

distance in time from the events of Amos' time, we have materials to reconstruct his times.⁴⁹ We shall study the models proposed by these scholars in the second chapter of this dissertation.

As far as the reconstruction models are concerned, one must keep in mind what M.D Carroll has said:

Indeed, one could go further and state that reconstruction models cannot provide the kind of information required to posit confidently and with a high degree of certainty either a model for modern 'prophetic' socio-political activity or the identification of a specific system for 'prophetic' denunciation. ...the data are too scanty and complex to allow the consideration of using any reconstruction model in some ethically *prescriptive* way. These models are in final analysis, potentially *illuminative* of textual particulars and context; they can be nothing else.⁵⁰

At the same time one should accept that it is the light thrown by such particulars that can help to enlighten the whole picture. However, the observations of Carroll cause us to reflect where the emphasis should be. Though archaeological and sociological knowledge can also contribute to better understanding of the text, the socio-ethical teaching of the book of Amos could be better understood by investigation of the text itself. Herein lies the importance of the following study of the texts with socio-critical contents in Amos. A detailed study of these texts can provide us with a sound foundation to reconstruct their socio-historical contexts in the second chapter and to draw out their socio-ethical implications in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

1.2. Amos 2,6-16: A Specimen Text of Prophetic Speech on Behalf of the Weak

The oracle against Israel (Amos 2,6-16) is in various places called the "grand finale" of Amos' oracles against nations or is seen as the "raison d'être" of the prophet's commission⁵¹. What gives this oracle its distinctive character, when compared with previous oracles against the foreign nations, is however, the detailed presentation of the transgressions,⁵² a flashback into the past and a warning with regard to the future. According to Arthur Weiser, this detailed nature of the presentation can also be seen as an indication that Amos has here expressed the whole purpose of his proclamation.⁵³ The following study shows

⁴⁹ S.N. Rosenbaum, *Amos of Israel: A New Interpretation*, Mercer University Press: Macon, Georgia, 1990, p.10.

⁵⁰ M.D Carroll, *Contexts for Amos: Prophetic Poetics in Latin American Perspective*, JSOTSS 132, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992, p. 47.

⁵¹ Cf. S.M. Paul, Amos, 1991, p. 76. The book of Amos opens with a series of 8 oracles (Am 1,3-2,16).

⁵² Whereas Amos cites only one sin each case in his accusations against the nations, he cites seven areas of misconduct in the case of Israel in vv. 6-8. He then follows up with the mention of two more wrong doings in v. 12.

⁵³ Cf. A. Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf kleinen Propheten*, ATD, Göttingen / Zürich: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985, pp. 140-41.

that the Israel oracle has integrated within itself stylistic and thematic elements which are characteristic of social oracles dealing with crises during a particular epoch.

This oracle may be considered a specimen text for prophetic speech on behalf of the poor and the oppressed.⁵⁴ The structure of this text reflects a profound theology, which is well rooted in the Bible. One finds here a God who is active in the history of his people, a God who is on the side of the weak, and a God who is concerned about whether or not justice is practised in the community. The oracle has three clearly defined parts: a description of the evils committed against the weak, a reminder of the benevolent actions of Yahweh in history; and the declaration of a punishment. It is undoubtedly biblical prophetic poetry on behalf of the poor and downtrodden at its best.

The text is not very corrupted and therefore the text-critical study can be limited to a few words which are not clear or where differing readings are possible.⁵⁵ One of the major problems in understanding this oracle is the lack of mention of any context; this leaves room for interpreting the allusions in this oracle in more than one way.

1.2.1. Delimitation, Structure, Destination and Translation of the Text

1.2.1.1. Delimitation of the Text

The Israel oracle (Amos 2,6-16) is preceded by a series of seven oracles against the foreign nations (Amos 1,3-2,5) and it has some similarities with them. As per the macro structure of the text, the Israel oracle appears to be part of the eight oracles against the nations, as there is no clear formal element separating it from them, like in 3,1: *šim'û 'et-haddābār hazze(h)* “Hear this word ...”. The beginning of the Israel oracle is indicated by the prophetic messenger formula, as in all the oracles against the foreign nations: *kōh 'āmar yhw* “Thus says the Lord” and the repetition of the numerical proverb with the affirmation of irrevocability *'al-šəlōšā(h) piš'ê ... wə'al-'arbā'ā(h) lō' 'āšībennū* “for the three transgressions of ... and for four I will not reverse it”.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ This text is also an example of the prophetic consolation to the distressed and an inspiration to those who take a stand with the poor and the oppressed. R.J. Coggins has affirmed this fact: “Naturally enough, those who are themselves oppressed, together with those who take seriously the many social evils in the world, will seize on this section as a biblical vindication of the rightness of their cause.” R.J. Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, The New Century Bible Commentary, Sheffield: Academic Press, 2000, p. 104.

⁵⁵ The textual problems are dealt with in my textual analysis.

⁵⁶ Amos uses the messenger formula to open each of his oracles against the nations (cf. 1,3a.6a.9a.11a.13a; 2,1a.4a). The numerical proverb follows the messenger formula in all the other oracles too.

It cannot be denied, however, that the Israel oracle differs from the previous oracles and stands out as a unit with a distinct form and content.⁵⁷ Given below are some of the prominent reasons for considering the Israel oracle as a distinct unit:

- i. Amos 2,6-16 has a distinct content with an elaborate description of the transgressions of Israel (vv. 6-8), a historical recital (vv. 9-12) and a description of a climactic battle (vv. 13-16).
- ii. In the structuring of the oracles against nations, a numerical pattern 7 + 1 is used which probably has a symbolic meaning.⁵⁸ The number seven is important in the scheme of the oracles with all the oracles beginning with the stereotypic formula: “for the three transgressions of [*name of the nation*] and for four”. The author, after having narrated the seven sins⁵⁹ of the seven nations, brings in the eighth nation, Israel, the present occupant of the land, which, in his eyes, is no better in its conduct, or is even worse. The circle of seven is completed with the oracle against Judah⁶⁰ and the Israel oracle, being the eighth one in the pattern of 7+1, stands out as a special unit.
- iii. Another formal consideration that shows the distinctness of the Israel oracle is the repetition of the pattern of 7 in the mention of seven sins accused against Israel in vv. 6-8.⁶¹
- iv. There is also an internal consideration why the Israel oracle must be considered apart from the other oracles. While the other oracles against nations speak about war crimes, the Israel oracle deals with the inner order of the communal and social life of Israel.⁶² The sins mentioned here are concerned with the day to day life of the people and with their conduct before YHWH.

Thus, in the final structure of the book of Amos, the oracle against Israel is a distinct section within the larger unit of the oracles against nations. The macro structure 1,3-2,16 is oriented to project the Israel oracle as the climax and the focus of the oracles against nations. The emphatic formula *nə'um-yhwh* “the oracle of the Lord” (v. 16b) marks the end of this oracle. The end of the oracle and the major section is also earmarked by the phrase *šim 'û 'et-*

⁵⁷ It does not mean that all the other seven oracles have the same form. Only the so called ‘original oracles’ against Damascus (1,3-5), against Gaza (1,6-8), against Ammon (1,13-15), and against Moab (2,1-3) have a similar form.

⁵⁸ Andersen and Freedman have mentioned that the number seven points symbolically to the seven traditional enemies of Israel, who were driven out of the land as Israel took possession of it (cf. Deut 7,1; Josh 3,10; 24,11; Acts 13,19). Cf. F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, p. 208. The seven nations in the list are: the Hittites, the Gergashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

⁵⁹ It should be noted that even though Amos makes only a single accusation against each of the first seven nations, the sum total is seven.

⁶⁰ Judah has a special place in the scheme of “for the three transgressions [*name of the nation*] and for four” as the extra one in the “four”.

⁶¹ See the structure of the oracle below for the seven transgressions. The first accusation (6c) contains two transgressions making the total seven according to this scheme.

⁶² Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2*, p. 200.

haddābār hazze(h) (Amos 3,1), which also begins a new textual unit in 4,1 (without the particle *'et*) and in 5,1. The renewed naming of the addressees as *bənē yiśrā'el* “sons of Israel” (3,1) also indicates the beginning of a new unit.

1.2.1.2. Structure of the Oracle

- I. vv. 6-8: A catalogue of Israel’s seven transgressions.
 - v. 6ab: The prophetic messenger formula, the numerical saying and the assertion of irrevocability.
 - vv. 6c-8: A catalogue of transgressions.
 - i. v. 6c: Selling of the righteous (*šāddīq*) and the needy (*'ebyôn*)
 - ii. v. 7a: Oppression of the poor (*dallīm*)
 - iii. v. 7b: Perverting the afflicted (*'ānāwīm*)
 - iv. v. 7c: A man and his father going to same girl (*hanna 'ārā(h)*)
 - v. v. 8a: Cultic activities on distraised garments
 - vi. v. 8b: Drinking wine confiscated as fines in the house of God
- II. vv. 9-12: YHWH’s benevolent actions and the ingratitude of Israel.
 - i. v. 9: Annihilation of Amorites
 - ii. v. 10a: Bringing out of the land of Egypt
 - iii. v. 10b: Leading the Israelites for forty years in the wilderness
 - iv. v. 10c: Gift of the land
 - v. v. 11: Sending of spiritual leaders in the form of prophets and Nazirites
- v. 12: Two more transgressions of Israel.
 - i. v. 12a: Making Nazirites drink wine
 - ii. v. 12b: Forbidding prophets to prophesy
- III. vv. 13-16: Announcement of punishment.

1.2.1.3. Destination

It is commonly believed that this oracle is addressed to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This belief is not misplaced as the other important political players in the crescent around this historical time – Damascus, Gaza, Ammonites and Moab – are all among the addressees in the preceding oracles against the nations. However, considering the long period of composition of the book, it is possible that sections of the oracle have the people living in the Southern Kingdom also in view.⁶³ Wolff has rightly pointed out that “Israel” here also

⁶³ The addressees of the book of Amos are referred to as *bənē yiśrā'el* “the children of Israel” 5 times (Am 2,11; 3,1.12; 4,5; 9,7). Only in 3,12 the specification “those who live in Samaria” limits the addressees to the people of the Northern Kingdom. Am 3,1, on the other hand, paraphrases *bənē yiśrā'el* as “the whole family

needs to be understood in the framework of the demands on the people of God.⁶⁴ Moreover, the beneficiaries of the benevolent actions mentioned in vv. 9-11 encompass the people of both Northern and Southern Kingdoms.⁶⁵

Unlike the other oracles which deal with crimes mostly in the political sphere, whose perpetrators are the ruling classes, the Israel oracle, as mentioned above, is about the everyday life of the people and concerns their conduct with one another and God. The issues dealt with in this oracle are about ethical and moral attitudes and behaviour. Israel is guilty of crimes that ignore the will of YHWH regarding their dealings with one another and God. Amos' tirade is concentrated against those who are responsible for unethical actions in the social sphere against the weaker sections of the community.

1.2.1.4. Translation

- v. 6.
 - a. Thus says the Lord:
 - b. For the three transgressions of Israel and for the four I will not reverse it:
 - c. because they sell for money the righteous and the needy for a pair of sandals.
- v. 7
 - a. They trample (upon the dust of the earth) on the head of the poor,
 - b. and they pervert the way of the afflicted,
 - c. and a man and his father go to the same girl in order to defile my holy name.
- v. 8
 - a. And upon distrained garments they stretch out beside every altar,
 - b. and the wine taken as fines they drink in the house of their God.
- v. 9.
 - a. Yet I destroyed the Amorites before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong like oaks;
 - b. yet I destroyed his fruit above and his roots below.
- v. 10
 - a. And I brought you out of the land of Egypt,
 - b. and I led you in the desert forty years
 - c. to take possession of the land of the Amorites.
- v. 11.
 - a. And I raised up some of your sons to be prophets
 - b. and some of your young ones to be Nazirites.
 - c. Is that not really so, you sons of Israel? Oracle of the Lord.
- v. 12
 - a. But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink
 - b. and you commanded the prophets, "Do not prophesy".

that I [YHWH] brought out of the land of Egypt". This is an indication that when we read this book the destination should not be narrowly understood as the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

⁶⁴ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten* 2, p. 200.

⁶⁵ Cf. also F.I Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, p. 308. These commentators argue that the historical recital of vv. 9-11 applies equally to all Israelites and that "sons of Israel" in v. 11 refers to "the people of both the kingdoms".

- v. 13 a. See, I will make it press down under you,
 b. just like a cart is pressed down, full of cut grains.
- v. 14 a. Flight shall perish from all,
 b. and the strong shall not retain his strength,
 c. nor the warrior be able to save his life;
- v. 15 a. and the bearer of the bow shall not resist,
 b. and those who are swift of foot shall not be saved,
 c. and the rider of the horse shall not save his life;
- v. 16 a. and the stout-hearted among the warriors shall flee naked on that day, oracle of
 the Lord.

1.2.2. **The Accusations: A Catalogue of Seven Transgressions (vv. 6-8)**

1.2.2.1. **Introductory Formula and Numerical Saying (v. 6a-b)**

The Messenger Formula *kōh 'āmar yhw*h “Thus says the Lord” (6a) taken from the diplomatic language of ancient nations, begins the whole section containing the Israel oracle (2,6-16) and shows Amos’ prophetic awareness that his speech is to be identified with the words of YHWH. This formula occurs 13x in the book of Amos (1,3.6.9.11.13; 2,1.4.6; 3,12; 5,3.4.16; 7,17) and 1x as *kōh 'āmar 'ăḏōnāy yhw*h (3,11). Wolff has pointed out that the formula usually functions as a conjunction and it marks the beginning of a new unit only in chapters 1-2 and in 3,12.⁶⁶

The numerical saying with the assertion of irrevocability “for the three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not reverse it” (v. 6b) means that it is a carefully considered decision on the part of YHWH and he will not change his mind. This sequence of $x // x+1$ is a well attested rhetorical device in the ancient Near East and it had a mnemonic effect on the hearers. The sequence $3 // 3+1$ occurs a few times in the book of Proverbs (30,15-33) and once in the book of Sirach (26,5). The numerical sequence probably has its origin in the wisdom traditions of the ancient Near East, where it was used as a method for listing things. Commentator Arndt Meinhold makes an observation which may explain the use of this formula in the context of Amos. He says that the numerical sequence in the book of Proverbs is associated more or less with the world of human behaviour.⁶⁷ Even though the application of numerical sequence may not be restricted to one particular area, the biblical occurrences of it tend to be largely in the communal sphere, mostly in connection with the expected moral

⁶⁶ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten* 2, p. 165.

⁶⁷ Cf. A. Meinhold, *Die Sprüche: Teil 2: Sprüche Kapitel 16-31*, Zürich Bibelkommentare, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991, p. 506. He further explains that even when they speak about the facts of nature, it is always as a parable to speak about human behavior.

behaviour of human beings (cf. Prov 6,16-19 [6/6+1]; 30,15b-16.18ff.21-23.29-31[3/3+1 occurring 4x]; Sir 23,16-21; 26,5ff.28; 50,25ff.).⁶⁸ This rhetorical device is used mostly to speak about the negative side of human behaviour, the only exception being Sir 23,16-21. In Amos too, the sequence fits the usual pattern as it is used while speaking about the transgressions of the nations, including Israel. The rhetorical device made his oral message more effective, and it prepared the hearers for the moral and ethical attack that followed.

It is also pointed out that in the structure of Amos 1,3-2,16, the numerical sequence is specially introduced in view of the oracle against Israel, because only in this oracle do we have the precise 3 // 3+1 pattern present.⁶⁹ It gives the strong impression that the whole cycle of the oracle against nations has its climax in the Israel oracle because the numerical saying is repeated for all the oracles but finds its actual use only in the Israel oracle. The sequence makes it clear that the transgressions of Israel have reached their climax and they invite God's irrevocable intervention.

Vv. 6c-8 is a highly formulaic poetic text like the previous oracles against the nations. There are seven accusations in vv. 6-8 and the number seven could be a way of expressing the totality of Israel's sinfulness.⁷⁰

1.2.2.2. Selling of the Righteous and the Needy (v. 6c)

V. 6c contains two transgressions: selling of the righteous for money and the needy for a pair of sandals. Amos challenges the administration of justice in the first accusation: *'al-miḵrām bakkeseḇ ṣāddīq* "because they sell for money the righteous". The verb *miḵrām*⁷¹ "their selling" falls back on the subject *yīsrā'ēl*. The *qal* infinitive construct here functions like a *qal* third person plural verb and gives the impression that the action referred to is done by a group of Israelites. But the verse does not give us any more details of the composition of this group. Whether they refer to the judges who let themselves be bribed, or to the creditors who sell the debtors into slavery in order to redeem the debt is not clear. The Hebrew

⁶⁸ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 2*, p. 167.

⁶⁹ It is to be noted that the sequence 3//3+1 is present only in the oracle against Israel with regard to the number of transgressions. The other oracles each mention only one transgression. Simian-Yofre suggests that the transgressions mentioned of the nations are not only numerous, but are so grave that it is sufficient to cite only one. Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, p. 36. Wolff, on the other hand, finds here a concentration of the sequence on the climax. He notes from the other biblical occurrences of the numerical sequence that it is the last mentioned element which is often the most important or the most grave (cf. Sir 26,5ff.; 23,16-21). Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 2*, p. 168.

⁷⁰ There are two more accusations in v. 12, but these are probably editorial additions.

⁷¹ This is a rare instance of a *qal* inf. cst. *qatol* becoming a *qīl*. cf. JM §65b; GKC §61b. The 'i' in the first syllable of these forms points probably to the former 'i'-imperfects. Here *miḵrām* literally means "their act of selling".

preposition *bêt* here in *bakkeseḇ*, is used as a “*bêt pretii*”⁷² with the meaning to give something away, to sell, or to pay. The preposition is used with this meaning with the verb *mākar* “to sell” 5x in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Gen 37,28; Deut 21,14; Joel 4,3b; Amos 2,6 and Ps 44,13)⁷³. In Amos 2,6c it would mean that the righteous are sold for money.⁷⁴

The word *ṣāddîq* is generally translated as “righteous” and literally means “those whose cause is just”. The biblical understanding of this word has the following nuances:

i. In a moral sense as someone who leads a good life according to the will of God as expected of all Israelites. For example Noah (cf. Gen 6,9; 7,1) was a righteous man who “walked with God” (cf. Gen 6,9).⁷⁵ In Mal 3,18 *ṣāddîq* is “one who serves God” or in Hos 14,10 it refers to those who walk in the ways of YHWH.

ii. The second meaning of the term *ṣāddîq* is righteous or innocent in the context of a trial (cf. Exod 23,7; Deut 16,19; 25,1; Ps 94,21; Prov 18,17; Isa 5,23; 29,21; 45,21). Here the term means an “innocent” or an “honest person”. Deut 25,1 makes this nuance apparent: “Suppose two persons have a dispute and enter into litigation, and the judges decide between them, declaring one to be in the right (*haṣṣāddîq*) and the other to be in the wrong (*hārāšā*).” (NRSV) Dtn legislation has taken special care to prevent judicial malpractices against the righteous: “You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.” (Deut 16,19 NRSV)

The second meaning of the term, i.e., *ṣāddîq* as an innocent person, condemned unjustly by the judges in a legal procedure, seems to be implied in v. 6c. Therefore a juridical background to this word cannot be discounted and the crime that is referred to may mean a subversion of judicial process either by false witness, or by bribing the judges. The indictment of Amos concerns the legal injustice and the judges who are incapable of protecting the innocent from evil accusers or are accomplices in this operation.⁷⁶ The opinion of many earlier scholars in this regard is clearly stated by Wellhausen: “The expression *צדיק* in v. 6 has a juridical meaning; it deals with corrupt judges, who sell the rights of the poor for tainted

⁷² The preposition *bêt* can have the following realizations: *bêt essentiae*; *bêt causae*; *bêt instrumenti*; *bêt pretii*; and *bêt communicationis*. E. Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen. Band 1: Die Präposition Beth*, Stuttgart / Berlin / Köln: Kohlhammer, 1992, pp. 71-170.

⁷³ Cf. E. Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, p. 151, n 253.

⁷⁴ Arguing with G. Fleischer, *Von Menschenverkäufern, Baschankühen und Rechtsverkehrern. Die Sozialkritik des Amosbuches in historisch-kritischer, sozialgeschichtlicher und archäologischer Perspektive*, BBB 74; Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1989, p. 47.

⁷⁵ Similarly also Ezek 18,5.9. *ṣāddîq* is described as a “model citizen” in the manifold instances of this word in the book of Proverbs, especially in ch. 10 (cf. vv. 3.6.7.11.16.20.21.30.32).

⁷⁶ Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, p. 51.

money, or even for a pair of shoes, to the party who was able to pay.”⁷⁷ However, as many modern scholars would argue, it is not absolutely necessary to limit the denotation of this term to the judicial sphere.⁷⁸ The sale of a creditor into debt slavery through the active connivance of the judges could be the injustice that is being condemned in this accusation. It is to be noted that Amos considers one who is indebted not as a defaulter in law but as a righteous person. This could be because the prophet is aware of the situation of exploitation and injustice that has forced this person into this situation. The improper use of money to make the weak vulnerable and to exploit them, even to the extent of selling them for money, comes under the scrutiny of the prophet here.

The second transgression referred to in v. 6c is selling of the “needy” (*'ebyôn*) “for a pair of sandals”. The phrase *wə'eb̄yôn ba'ăb̄ûr na'ălāyim* shares the common verb *mākar* with the first part. While the subject too remains the same, the object is changed to *'ebyôn* “needy”. So, the second group of people who are objects of exploitation are the needy. The preposition *bēt* in *ba'ăb̄ûr* is to be taken here once again as a *pretii* usage in a pleonastic relation with *'ăb̄ûr*.⁷⁹ When used with nouns, as is the case in Amos 2,6c or with pronominal suffixes it has the meaning “on account of” or “for the price of” (cf. Gen 3,17; 12,13.16; Jer 14,4; Amos 8,6; Mic 2,10 et al⁸⁰). After verbs of selling and buying *ba'ăb̄ûr* is a variation of *bēt pretii*.⁸¹ In Amos 2,6c it is parallel to the *bēt* in *bakkeseḇ* in the first part. Here the reference could be to the bribery of the judges involving “a pair of sandals”. Many understand the expression *ba'ăb̄ûr na'ălāyim*⁸² literally “for a pair of sandals” to mean “for a trivial sum”⁸³ or sandals as “surety against a debt”⁸⁴.

The condemnation of those who “trample on the needy” is repeated in 8,4 with the added revelation that they are bought (cf. Am 8,6) for a pair of sandals. Under the banner *'ebyôn* “needy” one can include the landless (cf. Exod 23,11) impoverished daily wage earner (cf. Deut 24,14-15). In the latter instance it is not allowed to oppress or to unjustly withhold

⁷⁷ My translation from “Der Ausdruck קִדְּוָה hat v. 6 einfach juristischen Sinn; es handelt sich um käufliche Richter, die das Recht der Armen um schnödes Geld, um ein paar Schuh dem zahlungsfähigen Gegenpart preisgeben.” J. Wellhausen, *Die kleinen Propheten*, 3. Auflage, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1963, p. 72. Keil and Delitzsch also hold this view. Cf. C.F. Keil / F. Delitzsch, *Biblischer Kommentar über die zwölf kleinen Propheten*, Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1866, p. 180. Cf. also H.-J. Fabry, “לָדַל *dal*”, *TDOT* III (1974-1975; English trans. 1978), p. 223.

⁷⁸ Cf. R. Meynet / P. Bovati, *Il libro del profeta Amos*, Bologna: EDB, 1995, p. 83.

⁷⁹ Cf. E. Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, p. 158.

⁸⁰ Cf. E. Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, p. 159.

⁸¹ Cf. E. Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, p. 158.

⁸² Only here and in Am 8,6 the dual form *na'ălāyim* is used. Cf. JM §91c.

⁸³ E. Hammerschaimb, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*, J. Sturdy (trans.), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970, p. 47; A. Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf*, p. 141.

⁸⁴ M.A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, vol. 1, Berit Olam, Collegeville / Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000, p. 215.

their wages and elsewhere in the Bible it is forbidden “to pervert the justice due to the poor in their lawsuits” (Exod 23,6). According to the biblical wisdom literature, it was the duty of a just person to protect the needy (cf. Job 29,16; 31,19; Prov 14,31; 31,20), to grieve with him (cf. Job 30,25) and to defend his rights (Prov 31,9).

In other occurrences of the noun *na'ālāyim* and its LXX equivalent ὑπόδημά three different semantic nuances can be detected. In the first, in Ps 60,10 and in Ps 108,10, the word signifies a violent taking of land by Yahweh. The second, in Deut 25,9-10 and Ru 4,7, refers to the gesture of confirming something, especially the ratification of abdication of a lawful duty. The third, in 1 Sam 12,3 (LXX), implies some illegal practice involving bribery.⁸⁵

Attempts have been made to associate the action mentioned in Amos to the selling of a needy person through the means of a contract, as implied by the gesture of exchanging the sandals. This interpretation may draw strength from the fact that the gesture of exchanging the sandals in Ru 4,20 signified a transfer of the responsibility to redeem an indebted relative. In Amos selling the poor for a pair of sandals might mean some malpractice related to this custom. This interpretation, however, as Simian-Yofre points out, faces a serious difficulty in the face of the proposition *ba'ābûr* used with a noun which normally means “on account of” or “for the cause of” and never has an instrumental meaning “by means of”.

The practice of transferring the duties of a kinsman redeemer to a third party is sometimes mentioned in the Bible and such a practice involved the exchange of sandals in some way as we read in Ru 4,4-8. Here it is interesting to note that the criticism of Amos in 2,6c (repeated in Amos 8,6) has reference to “selling the needy” and in this context reference is made to some malpractice involving “a pair of sandals”. Could it mean that the responsibility of redeeming a relative was sometimes misused to sell him into the hands of scrupulous exploiters? Hubbard is convinced that the custom of transferring the sandal “symbolized the transfer of something from one party to another”.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Based on his analysis of 1 Sam 12,3d (LXX); Am 2,6; 8,6 and Ben Sira 49,16, E.A. Speiser has remarked that the practice of exchanging a shoe in legal matters was associated with some illegal practices in transferring the land. He further says that “In the light of these remarks the allusions in Amos to “selling of the needy for a pair of shoes” can easily be appreciated. We have here a proverbial saying which refers to the oppression of the poor by means which may be legal but do not conform to the spirit of the law. The ordinary interpretation of this saying that the poor could be enslaved for so trifling a thing as a pair of shoes is unconvincing, by comparison, and economically improbable.” E.A. Speiser, “Of Shoes and Shekels (I Samuel 12: 3; 13: 21)” *BASOR* 77 (1940), p. 18.

⁸⁶ R.L. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988, p. 250. Syntactically this interpretation is improbable as we have seen above. However, since no other satisfactory interpretation for this expression is proposed, such a practice cannot be ruled out.

Many others assume that *na'ālāyim* denotes the value of a petty debt, and hence the needy are sold into debt slavery as they are not able to repay an insignificant sum.⁸⁷ For them, the crime consists in the fact that one is sold into debt slavery on account of a trivial sum. Nevertheless, it may be interesting to note that according to Ex 21,2-11 and Deut 15,1-18, debt slavery can be resorted to when a person is not able to pay back the debt, although with many provisions to protect the interests of those who are subjected to slavery. For instance, a slave was supposed to be set free at the end of six years (cf. Exod 21,2; Deut 15,12). Amos may not be condemning the casuistic law regarding debt slavery here but rather the “unjust and unscrupulous slavery as payment for debts which are not real or serious”⁸⁸. But this argument too faces the difficulty that nowhere in the Bible does the image of *na'ālāyim* symbolise a paltry sum.⁸⁹

Another attempt is to understand *na'ālāyim* as a bribe paid to the judges in order to harm the rightful interests of the needy in a court of law. But one has to explain here, again, how bribery is related to the image of “sandals” as signified by *na'ālāyim*. To solve this ambiguity, S.M Paul suggests another root *'lm* for the word *na'ālāyim*, meaning “to hide”, thus the word denoting a “hidden gift” or “pay off”.⁹⁰ His argument rests on the hypothesis that the Masoretes have wrongly pointed the word. This again is an ad hoc interpretation, though in the context of Amos a “hidden” gift makes sense. The fact that *na'ālāyim* occurs only in Amos (also in Amos 8,6) on the other hand argues for its originality, and hence a change of the root as suggested by S.M. Paul is unwarranted.

To conclude, we must accept that we do not have sufficient evidence to identify the exact context and meaning of this phrase. But the spirit and the message of the text are obvious: Amos is shocked by the indifference with which the needy or the destitute in the society are treated by the affluent sections of the society. The needy, who are at the mercy of

⁸⁷ Cf. F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, p. 313.

⁸⁸ G.J. Botterweck, “עֲבִיּוֹן *'ebhyôn*”, *TDOT I* (1970; English trans. 1974), p. 31.

⁸⁹ Cf. S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 77. He further says, “Moreover, the assumption that sandals must have been so cheap and so insignificant an item that they eventually became synonymous for any extremely small amount of money is completely an ad hoc interpretation. The entire line of interpretation is totally without any foundation and has misguided most exegetes.” p. 78.

⁹⁰ He says, “The hapax legomenon singular noun נעלם, derived from the root עלם (“to hide”), was confused with the dual and/or plural form נעלמ (‘sandals’) and was repointed accordingly, the final *mem* mistakenly understood as the masculine plural suffix rather than the third radical of the stem. This rare substantive develops semantically from the basic root meaning of that which is “hidden” to a “hidden gift” or “pay off”. S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 78. However, the attestations of the single form in Ru 4,7 and 1 Sam 12,3 (LXX) suggest that the word meant actually “sandals”. In the absence of sufficient evidence to understand the exact meaning of the phrase *ba'ābūr na'ālāyim*, various suggestions have been proposed. Soggin understands it as “the sign or the pledge for a legally valid transaction” J.A. Soggin, *The Prophet Amos*, p. 47. Simian-Yofre thinks that the needy are sold because of their inability to pay for a pair of sandals bought. It is a disproportionate penal action against a *persona misera* who has not been able to fulfil the minimum economic obligations. Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, p. 51.

the rich, are brought before the court and their interests are harmed with the collusion of corrupt judges. The needy person is sold like a slave for the reason that he was forced to borrow in order to survive.⁹¹ The gravity of the crime is deepened by the fact that even the process of selling is not free from judicial manipulation to the disadvantage of the needy. Once again, exploiting the vulnerability of the poor for economic gain is being criticized here. It must be nonetheless pointed out that Amos does not speak here as a defender of the legal traditions of Israel but as one who defends the rights of the poor and needy.⁹² He condemns with Rudolph what the latter calls, “the lack of compassion of the day and contempt for human dignity”.⁹³

1.2.2.3. Oppression of the Poor (v. 7a)

The third transgression refers to the oppression of the poor: *haššō'āpīm 'al-'āpār-'eres bārō's dallīm* “They trample upon the dust of the earth on the head of the poor”. The text poses problems with regard to the wording and meaning. The first textual problem in this verse is with regard to the phrase *'al-'āpār-'eres* “upon the dust of the earth”. It does not fit the poetic meter of the verse and makes the meaning vague. Therefore, this phrase is to be considered as an addition as the *BHS* too suggests. Leaving it out, the text reads smoothly and makes good sense: “they trample on the head of the poor”.⁹⁴ The presence of the preposition *bēt* in *bārō's dallīm* is to be explained as expressing a hostile crushing against a high object, here the head.⁹⁵ The severity of the oppression of the poor is metaphorically expressed as trampling on their heads, showing the utter disregard for their rights.

At first, it is not clear whether the verb *šō'āpīm* comes from the root *šwp* “to tread”, “to trample” or “to crush” or from the root *š'p* “to pant after”. Depending on the root, two varying interpretations are possible:

i. If *šō'āpīm* is derived from the root *šwp* as LXX translates it, with τὰ πατοῦντα from the verb πατέω meaning “to trample”, the meaning in this context could be to ignore the rights of the poor or to deliberately withhold what is legitimately their due,⁹⁶ but if the root is derived

⁹¹ Arguing with R. Meynet / P. Bovati, *Il libro del profeta Amos*, p. 84.

⁹² Arguing with H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 2*, p. 201.

⁹³ My translation from “zutagetretende Erbarmungslosigkeit und Verachtung der Menschenwürde”. W. Rudolph, *Joel-Amos-Obadja-Jona*, KAT XIII/2, Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971, p. 141.

⁹⁴ The addition *'al-'āpār-'eres* was probably meant to enhance the gravity of the accusation and to give the impression that the oppression is so severe that the poor are thoroughly crushed.

⁹⁵ Wolff has also pointed out that *bēt* preposition can mean “ein feindliches “gegen” (a hostile “against”) when associated with a high object as in *bārō'sekā* in 1 Kgs 2,44.

⁹⁶ LXX has added an extra verb resembling *šūp* in meaning, ἐκονδύλιζον “they stroke” or “they smote”, and has translated the verse as τὰ πατοῦντα ἐπὶ τὸν χοῦν τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐκονδύλιζον εἰς κεφαλὰς πτωχῶν “those who trample on the dust of the earth, and smote upon the heads of the poor” (v. 7a). This is definitely an attempt to retain both the roots and it offers us little help to understand the MT. The difficulty of the LXX translator to comprehend this root is evident also from the fact that he uses an entirely different word, ἐκτρίβω, meaning “to utterly destroy” in the repetition of this phrase in Amos 8,4. Therefore, the solution is to be sought elsewhere.

from the root *šwp*, the participle might have read *šōpīm* and not *šō'āpīm*⁹⁷. The root *šwp* occurs in Gen 3,15 (2x): *yāšūp̄kā rō š wā'attā(h) tāšūpennū 'āqēb* “he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel...”

ii. If the participle form is derived from the root *š'p* the phrase would mean “They pant after the dust of the earth *which is* on the head of the poor” (NKJV). The “dust of the earth” may then metaphorically mean the little land that the poor possess. The reference then could be to the greed of the rich to take possession of the land of the poor and to oppress them.⁹⁸ BDB understood this rendering to be a “hyperbole for extreme avarice” accordingly.⁹⁹ We find this root used with the meaning “to pant after” also in Jer 2,24 and 14,6.

However the second possibility suggested above encounters another hurdle because *š'p* is used always with a direct object as we see in Jer 2,24; 14,6 et al.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, in a similar phrase in Amos 8,4, the meaning “to trample” suits the context well: *šim'û-zō'î haššō'āpīm 'ebyôn* “Hear this, you who trample on the needy”. The incongruity of the word being pointed as *šō'āpīm* and not *šōpīm* can be explained only as a scribal error. Here I would agree with Wolff who suggests that the Masoretes have probably wrongly pointed the archaic root *šwp* with the vowel points of the often used root *š'p*.¹⁰¹ This solution also explains the presence of the consonant *'ālep̄* in *haššō'āpīm*.

The victims are referred to as *dallīm* “poor”. *Dal* is the most commonly used word for “poor” in the biblical wisdom literature. The Hebrew root *dl* is found in most Semitic languages, the underlying meaning is to be poor, lowly, miserable etc.¹⁰² The word *dal* occurs 48x in the Hebrew Bible, predominantly in the poetic texts (39x).¹⁰³ The prophet Jeremiah uses the word *dallīm* with a negative connotation in which it represents people who refused to

⁹⁷ Wellhausen holds this view. Cf. J. Wellhausen, *Die kleinen Propheten*, p. 72. Here, however, if the root is *šūp̄*, then the presence of the letter *Aleph* in *šō'āpīm* needs to be explained. S.M. Paul explains this phenomenon: “The *š* in the verb does not represent a rare mater lectionis ... but preserves a variant writing of the participial form of *שׁוּפׁ* verbs. From this metaplastic forms, new verbs were created that preserved the *š*. Compare the roots *שׁוּפׁ*, Hos 10:14 alongside the common *שׁוּפׁ*; Here, then the *š* is not to be deleted and should be vocalized *שׁוּפִׁי*.” S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 79. Against Andersen and Freedman, who consider the LXX variant as an interpretation of the MT, though their argument is correct about the second part of the statement: “And they strike [with the fist] the heads of the poor.” Here LXX has an additional verb. Cf. F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, pp. 314-15.

⁹⁸ J.H. Hayes also interprets the text in this line and describes the “they” here as “the upper class citizens” or possibly even the “government officials”. J.H. Hayes, *Amos*, p. 110. Cf. also M.A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets I*, p. 215.

⁹⁹ BDB, p. 983.

¹⁰⁰ Arguing with H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 2*, p. 163.

¹⁰¹ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 2*, p. 163.

¹⁰² Hebrew: *dl, dll* = poor, needy; Akkadian: *dullu(m)* = trouble, toil, misery; Neo-Babylonian: *dullu* = work, duty; Ugaritic: *dl, dll* = poor, needy; Arabic: *dalla* = to be small, despised, to be humble. In Akkadian, this root has a very old history and it referred to “trouble, oppression which penetrates to the heart and causes grief”. Cf. H.J. Fabry, “*דל dal*”, pp. 208-11.

¹⁰³ The predominant occurrences are: 15x in Proverbs, 6x in Job, 5x in Psalms, 5x in Isaiah and 4x in Amos. Cf. H.J. Fabry, “*דל dal*”, p. 215.

take correction, who “made their faces hard” and did not repent (cf. Jer 5,1-4), but here too the prophet readily excuses their shortcomings because they did not have the opportunity to know the way (*derek*) and the justice (*mišpāt*) of the Lord (cf. v. 4), unlike the noble people (*haggādōlīm*), who do the same in spite of their knowing the way and justice of God (cf. v. 5).¹⁰⁴

The protection of the poor (*dal*) was a value in Israelite society and it is well attested in the wisdom literature. Here it is considered as a social responsibility (cf. Ps 41,2; 82,3,4; Prov 14,31; 21,13; 22,16,22 et al), above all, the privileged duty of the king (cf. Ps 72,13). The covenantal traditions lay down instructions not to be partial against the poor in a lawsuit (cf. Exod 23,3). The exhortation not to be partial against the poor is found again in Lev 19,15: *lō'-ta'āšû 'āwel bammišpāt lō'-tīśśā' pānê-dāl* “You shall do no injustice in court, You shall not be partial to the poor ...” (ESV) Amos observes the neglect of this value in his society and does not mince his words to condemn it.

1.2.2.4. Perverting the Way of the Afflicted (v. 7b)

The meaning of the phrase *wāderek' 'ānāwīm yaṭṭû* “and they pervert the way of the afflicted” in the fourth transgression is unclear and commentators have translated it imaginatively as “Den Weg beugen... sie zu Falle bringen oder ins Verderben stürzen”,¹⁰⁵ “rücksichtslos angerempelt und auf die Seite gedrängt”,¹⁰⁶ “...are driven out of the place of judgment, “the gate””¹⁰⁷ and so on.

The adjective/noun *'ānāw* “humble” or “afflicted” is often used in the Bible with the same meaning as *'ānî*.¹⁰⁸ However, in the MT, there is a definite preference to use the word *'ānāw* in the plural denomination (19x in plural against 1x in singular) while *'ānî* is preferred in the singular (57x in singular against 19x in plural).¹⁰⁹ Yet, this phenomenon is not to be overemphasized and Gerstenberger says that it could be a “possibly random scribal variation”¹¹⁰. Both the words are derived from the root *'nh* II which means to “oppress” or to “cause one to feel his dependency”¹¹¹. Gerstenberger has pointed out the well defined use of the *piel* form of this verb in juridical texts, and it throws light upon the context of the usage of

¹⁰⁴ That *dal* is probably not a person without any property is indicated by the fact that he is said to be a person who is able to offer a male lamb for a guilt offering (cf. Lev 14,21). For those who cannot offer more or cannot afford anything are offered “lower tariffs” in Lev 5,11 and 12,8. Cf. H.J. Farby, “דַּל; *dal*”, p. 219.

¹⁰⁵ C.F. Keil, / F. Delitzsch, *Biblischer Kommentar*, p. 181.

¹⁰⁶ W. Rudolph, *Joel-Amos*, p. 142.

¹⁰⁷ F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, p. 316: According to them, v. 7a is to be interpreted in the light of 5,12; Job 24,4; Isa 10,2 and 29,21 and the verb means “to push”.

¹⁰⁸ Their similarity in meaning is also evident from the fact that they can be used as a parallel to *'ebyôn* or *dal* (cf. Is 11,4; 29,19). Cf. E. Hammerschaimb, *The Book of Amos*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. E. Gerstenberger, “הַנָּה II *'ānā*” *TDOT* XI (1987-1988; English trans. 2001), p. 242.

¹¹⁰ E. Gerstenberger, “הַנָּה II *'ānā*”, p. 242.

¹¹¹ KB, p. 719.

the word in Amos. He translates the verb as “violate” in the sense of “civil defamation and its concomitant loss of status”¹¹². One of the uses of the *piel* forms in juridical texts is in the context of humiliating or “degrading” the underprivileged as seen in Exod 22,22-24, where the verb is used in a prohibition against mistreating a widow or a fatherless child. That is a crime certain to be punished by YHWH (cf. v. 24). The verb refers to “loss of strength” in Judg 16,5.6 in the Samson story and to the act of tormenting him as he loses his strength in v. 19.¹¹³

Just as in the case of the verb, the adjective, often used as noun, is also of special importance in the juridical sphere. Gerstenberger defines *’ānāwîm* as “Persons deprived of certain moral rights, who experience a perceptible diminution of their quality of life ...”¹¹⁴ *’ānî* is a person who requires to borrow money in Exod 22,24 and for whose sustenance the fallen grapes of the vineyard and the gleanings were to be left over (cf. Lev 19,10; 23,22). He is to be paid just wages “on the same day” because he lived probably from the day’s earnings (cf. Deut 24,14.15). Thus *’ānî* denoted the lower strata of the society, who were economically deprived. The term *’ānî* implies a situation of unbearable affliction or a situation of grave depravity as in Exod 3,7. According to Gunther Fleischer, among all the terms that are used to denote the poor and weak, *’ānāwîm* is the most telling about their miserable condition as it expresses not only their external condition but also their internal suffering at being in a miserable situation.¹¹⁵ That this class was vulnerable to exploitation is clear from the added care taken for them, as evident from the legislation in favor of them (cf. Exod 22,24; Deut 24,12) and from the exhortations to protect their interests (cf. Deut 15,11 et al).¹¹⁶ The prohibition not to exploit *’ānî* is also a part of the wisdom teachings (cf. Prov 22,22-23) and their protection is implored of a just person (cf. Job 29,12; Ps 82,3; Prov 31,9.20). Concern for the afflicted as a social norm expressed in the legal and wisdom traditions of Israel as shown above is reflected in Amos 2,7b, where the prophet takes up their cause.

But it is very difficult to understand what exactly is meant by *wəḏereḵ ’ānāwîm yaṭṭû* “and they bend the way of the humble”. In Amos 5,12 in a similar accusation: *wə’eb̄yônîm bašša’ar hiṭṭû* “and turn aside the needy in the gate”. The mention of “the gate” in this verse justifies attributing a juridical context as the gate was the traditional place of dispensing justice, but the attempts to provide the same context to the accusation in 2,7b, on account of

¹¹² cf. Gen 34,2 (outraging the modesty of a woman) Deut 21,14 (change of status through intercourse); Deut 22,24.29; Judg 19,24; 20,4 (molesting a betrothed woman or a virgin or a concubine). Cf. E. Gerstenberger, “הַנְּאִי II ‘ānā’”, p. 237.

¹¹³ Cf. E. Gerstenberger, “הַנְּאִי II ‘ānā’”, p. 237.

¹¹⁴ E. Gerstenberger, “הַנְּאִי II ‘ānā’”, p. 242.

¹¹⁵ Cf. G. Fleischer, *Die Bücher Joel und Amos*, p. 160.

¹¹⁶ Cf. G. Fleischer, *Die Bücher Joel und Amos*, p. 160.

the presence of the same verb may not be correct. It is to be noted that a phrase similar in Job 24,4a: *yattû 'ebyônîm middārek* “They push the needy off the roads” has in fact no judicial context.¹¹⁷ The objects in these phrases are different: while Amos 2,7b has *derek* as object, *'ebyônîm* is the object in the other two phrases. Now, the word *derek* is never used with a judicial sense in the Bible and the contexts in the above phrases seem to be poles apart.¹¹⁸ Likewise, though the verb *nātā(h)* is sometimes used to describe denying the course of justice (cf. Exod 23,6; Deut 16,19; 24,17), it is a commonly used verb in Hebrew and usually means “to extend”, “to bend down” “to spread out” and so on.

The word *derek* normally means “way”, “journey”, or “behaviour” etc. It can also mean “situation” or “condition” of life¹¹⁹ (cf. Isa 40,27). We come across a corresponding understanding of the term also in Jer 10,23: *lā'ādām darkô* here means “man determines his own destiny”¹²⁰. An understanding of the word along these lines may be appropriate in Amos 2,7b. Here the term *derek* is used to signify the hope for a better life on the part of the afflicted. This hope is being thwarted by denying them justice or by blocking their economic or social progress. The *'ānî* are dependent on the higher class of the society for their existence. But the persons on whom they rely on for their protection are said to be perverting or jeopardizing their destiny. They are “bullied and oppressed by the wealthy, who deprive and block them from obtaining the privileges and prerogatives to which they are naturally entitled”, as S.M Paul puts it.¹²¹

1.2.2.5. Fifth Transgression: A man and his Father Going to the Same Girl (v. 7c)

wə'îš wə'ābîw yēlkû 'el-hanna'ārā(h) ləma'an ḥallēl 'et-šēm qodšî “and a man and his father go to the same girl in order to defile my holy name”. If a sexual relationship is implied by the phrase “go to the same girl”, the verb used here for it is *hālak* and not the usual Hebrew verb *bô'*. Now, *hālak* is used nowhere else in the Bible to denote sexual intercourse. Nonetheless, the context here and the usage of this root in other Semitic languages, especially Akkadian, with the same meaning can justify the interpretation as referring to sexual intercourse.¹²² The noun with the article *hanna'ārā(h)* presumably indicates that it is the same

¹¹⁷ According to S.M. Paul, the closest literal parallel to Am 2,7b is Job 24,4a: *yattû 'ebyônîm middārek* “They push the needy off the roads”. And he finds no juridical context in this phrase. Cf. S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 81.

¹¹⁸ “The ways of justice” is talked about in Prov 17,23 and it is said that “The wicked accept a concealed bribe to pervert the ways of justice (*'orhôt mišpāt*)” (NRSV) cf. also Isa 40,14. But *'ōrah* is not a synonym of *derek* because they can stand in construct relationship to each other as in Isa 3,12: *wəderek 'ōrhōtēkā* “and the course of your paths” (NRSV). Cf. K. Koch / J. Bergman / H. Ringgren, *דֶּרֶךְ derekh*, *TDOT III* (1974; English trans. 1997), p. 281.

¹¹⁹ K. Koch / J. Bergman / H. Ringgren, “*דֶּרֶךְ derekh*”, p. 271.

¹²⁰ KB, p. 219.

¹²¹ S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 81.

¹²² Cf. S.M. Paul, “Two Cognate Semitic Terms for Mating and Copulation,” *VT 32* (1982), p. 493. According to S.M. Paul, the Akkadic expression *ana Xalāku*, the interdialectal semantic equivalent of Hebrew

girl with whom the man and his father have a sexual relationship.¹²³ A man and his father both exploiting the same girl sexually points to the “lack of shame and promiscuity involved”, as S.M. Paul puts it.¹²⁴

It is often thought that the reference here is to having sexual relations with a temple prostitute, under the influence of the religion of the Canaanites. It was a primitive belief that the performance of sexual acts in a shrine with a woman dedicated to the service of the Canaanite Goddess Astarte increased the fertility of the land. *hanna'ārā(h)* is then taken for “young women who devoted themselves to immorality in the temples”.¹²⁵ But this understanding is challenged by many¹²⁶ because nowhere else in the Bible is the term *na'ārā(h)* used to refer to a temple prostitute, for which another word *qadēšā(h)*, literally meaning “holy”, is used (cf. Gen 38,21ff.; Hos 4,14 et al). Some have argued that Amos hesitates to call these women “holy” because they did something immoral and prohibited by the Israelite religion,¹²⁷ but this argument is only inferential and lacks any textual support. The general meaning of *na'ārā(h)* in the Bible is “a marriageable girl” (cf. Gen 24,14.16; 34,3.12; Deut 22,23-29; Judg 21,12; 1 Sam 9,11; Ru 2,5 et al)¹²⁸ or “a maid servant” (cf. Gen 24,61; Exod 2,5; Ru 2,8.22-23; 3,2; 1Sam 25,42; Esth 2,9; 4,4.16; Prov 9,3; 27,27; 31,15 et al).

Like other accusations, here too the lack of mention of any context makes interpretation difficult. One may assume the following contexts based on the similar inner-biblical references:

- i. A violation of the law prescribed in Exod 21,9, where a father betroths to his son a female slave whom he himself had intended to marry.
- ii. An illegal affair of a man with the wife of his father, which is prohibited by Lev 18,8.
- iii. An illegal affair of a man with his daughter-in-law, which is prohibited in Lev 18,15.
- iv. Sexual exploitation of a maid servant¹²⁹, who is not a slave (*'āmā(h)*).¹³⁰

hālak 'el, has the identical idiomatic meaning, “to have sexual intercourse”. He also finds the same semantic development also attested in Aramaic, “in which the expression *לַע/לֵא, לֵא* (= Heb *לֵא לְלֵא*) is employed in Talmudic and Geonic literature for sexual intercourse”. Cf. S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 82. Against Andersen and Freedman, who attribute the meaning “religious pilgrimage” to the verb *hālak* here. F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, p. 318.

¹²³ Cf. J.H. Hayes, *Amos*, p. 111.

¹²⁴ S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 82.

¹²⁵ E. Hammerschaimb, *The Book of Amos*, p. 48; Cf. R.S. Cripps, *A Critical & Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos*, p. 142.

¹²⁶ Cf. W. Rudolph, *Joel-Amos*, 143. C.F. Keil / F. Delitzsch, *Bibel Kommentar*, p. 181; S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 81.

¹²⁷ Cf. E. Hammerschaimb, *The Book of Amos*, p. 49.

¹²⁸ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 2*, p. 202.

¹²⁹ It is to be noted that sexual intercourse with a woman who was neither a virgin, nor married was not offensive in Israel.

v. It can be just the promiscuity involved in a man and his son both courting the same young girl.

There is no apodictic law in the Bible which explicitly prohibits the promiscuous relationships mentioned in the last two cases, so this could be an instance where the prophet speaks for the dignity of a woman, even when there is no explicit Israelite law defending such a right. The prophets are moral teachers with different standards.

The noun *na'ārā(h)* “young woman” is used many times in the sense of “young female servant” in the Hebrew Bible as mentioned above. She could be a household servant, in which case she had legal status higher than a female slave in Israel.¹³¹ She is in fact a defenceless victim who “belongs to the same category as that of the דָּלִים [dallîm] and אֲנָוִים [’ānāwîm] previously mentioned – just one more member of the defenceless and exploited human beings...”¹³²

Even though one cannot be sure of the exact nature of the relationships that are discussed, it is certain that the accusation concerns decadence in the personal moral life of the Israelites, which has implications for their familial and social values. It results not only in deterioration of family values but also in the exploitation and humiliation of a weaker section in society, women. The irony is that such exploitation is carried out by the same persons who are supposed to protect them.

Amos goes a step further to condemn this practice as a defilement of the name of YHWH: *lāma'an ḥallēl'et-šēm qodšî* “in order to defile my holy name”. The conjunction *lāma'an* indicates the consequence of the action. The defilement or the profanation may not be intended but is an inevitable consequence. *ḥll* is a common Hebrew verb which means to profane something that is sacred. It is “a technical term in the Old Testament used to denote transgression or trespass directed against the Deity”.¹³³ H.M. Barstad has pointed out that though the word *ḥll* is used not only in cultic/ritual contexts, the formula piel of *ḥll* + *šēm* +

¹³⁰ A man and his son both having sexual relationship with a female slave is not prohibited in the apodictic law. cf. Exod 21,7-11. H.M. Barstad has noted that “In fact, the only case where an Old Testament law mentions intercourse with a slave woman as something offensive is in the case where the woman belongs to someone else. The act is then regarded as an offence against the right of ownership. The punishment, accordingly, is not the penalty of death as in the case of adultery (Lev 20, 10). All the transgressor has to do is to bring Yahweh a minor sacrifice (Lev 19, 20-22).” H.M. Barstad, *The Religious Polemics of Amos*, VT Sup. 39, Leiden: E.J. Brill: 1984, p.19.

¹³¹ The law assured protection even of a slave girl in similar circumstances (cf. Exod 21,9). The sexual abuse of a female servant in the same circumstances would have been much graver and shows the extent of the exploitation. In the words of G.V. Smith, “The faithful household employee is misused and treated as if she had no rights. She was not a slave without legal status, but she was inhumanly treated by the powerful men within the society.” G.V. Smith, *Amos: A Commentary*, Library of Biblical Interpretation, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989, p. 85.

¹³² S.M. Paul, *Amos*, pp. 82-83.

¹³³ J.H. Hayes, *Amos*, p. 111.

reference to the deity Yahweh “almost exclusively appears in cultic contexts”.¹³⁴ Conversely, I do not think that the offence condemned in Amos has anything to do with the cultic context. On the other hand, it can be attributed to the innovativeness of the prophet, that he equates the moral and ethical decadence of his community and the exploitation of a weaker section of the community with a profanation of the name of his God.¹³⁵ The prophet wants thereby to emphasize the awfulness of the crime of exploiting a defenceless young woman.

Amos is not without support in the biblical traditions for his humanitarian stand: according to Lev 19,20-23, sexual intercourse with a “designated” female, even a slave, by a male other than the intended husband required a reparation offering as a penalty to the Deity. Sexual transgressions are prohibited also in Lev 19,29 and they are seen as profaning the name of YHWH also in Jer 34,16. G.V. Smith summarises the prophetic position in his own words:

The holy reputation of Yahweh is destroyed and his honour outraged because of Israel’s action. Although some may have considered these sins as acceptable practices, God, who defends the poor and the helpless, considers them an attack on himself and a repudiation of the holy traditions which the nation has inherited.¹³⁶

1.2.2.6. Cultic Activities on Distraigned Garments (v. 8a)

The sixth transgression refers to performing cultic activities on distraigned garments: *wə'al-bəḡādîm ḥāḥûlîm yaṭṭû 'ēsel kol-mizbēh* “And upon distraigned garments they stretch out beside every altar”. The preposition *'al* is used here with a local sense and it means “upon”. This preposition makes it clear that the subject here is “they” and not “the garments”. Only here in the Bible the root *ḥbl* is used in the *qal* passive participle form (*ḥāḥûlîm*) with the function of an adjective. Here it is an attribute to the noun *bəḡādîm* “garments”. In Exod 22,25, the *qal* imperfect of the verb is used and it refers to the action of taking the garment in pledge. It is clear that a person forced to pledge his or her cloak must be among the poorest in society.

Wolff understands that the right to pledge in Israel was limited according to the situation, time and person.¹³⁷ The legal tradition has laid down regulations to protect the weaker sections of society even when they are forced to pledge the basic amenities of their

¹³⁴ H.M. Barstad, *The Religious Polemics*, p. 21.

¹³⁵ Rudolph’s paraphrase of v. 7c makes my explanation clearer: “...alle Missachtung und Misshandlung der Schwachen und Wehrlosen ist letztlich eine Missachtung Jahwes selbst (vgl. Jer 34,16), weil die Missetäter genau wissen, dass sie damit dem Willen und den Geboten ihres Gottes zuwiderhandeln und so ihn selbst in den Schmutz ziehen.” W. Rudolph, *Joel-Amos*, p. 143.

¹³⁶ G.V. Smith, *Amos*, p. 86.

¹³⁷ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2*, p. 203.

life.¹³⁸ Deut 24,17 prevents taking a widow's garment in pledge. According to Exod 22,25 and Deut 24,13 a cloak taken in pledge from a neighbor is to be returned before sunset. As consequence of this common regulation in Israel, the accused in Amos 2,8a could be at fault because they failed to return the cloak taken in pledge before sunset to a person who probably had defaulted on a debt. They are further accused of using the illegally acquired cloak to perform cultic activities near every altar.

The root *hbl* has another meaning in its inner-biblical occurrences, which may throw more light upon the context of Amos' accusation. S.M. Paul notes that in Wisdom Literature, *hbl* refers to a distraint of persons as well as property, seized as security or indemnity, which normally takes place after default on repayment of a loan (cf. Prov 13,13; 27,13; Job 24,9).¹³⁹ Andersen and Freedman describe the pretext for the seizure as "the security for a loan or foreclosure on an unpayable debt" and call such an act a "robbery with violence".¹⁴⁰

One of the common meanings of the verb *nāṭā(h)*, as we have seen above, is "to extend" or "to stretch". The repetition of this root creates a verbal link to the preceding verse.¹⁴¹ The use of the imperfect form shows also that this immoral action was pretty usual during this time. The phrase *'ēšel kol- mizbē^āh* "beside every altar" also shows that it was a practice that was widespread in Israel. In the cultic context as suggested by the above phrase "beside every altar" it can mean a gesture of prayer by doing the night vigil or reclining at a cultic feast. By mentioning that such an abhorrent action is taking place in the precincts of the holy altar, the insensitivity of the rich to the ethical principles of their religion and God is highlighted. S.M Paul adds: "Even if their actions were within the letter of the law, as long as the poor are made to suffer, the practice is denounced as being totally reprehensible."¹⁴²

To stretch themselves out at night in a cult place on garments taken illegitimately makes the gesture of the prayer vigil into a farce, for it is against the human norm of sanctity. Amos opposes in this way the injustice in the pretext of offering an acceptable form of

¹³⁸ Deut 24,6 prevents pledging millstones as that will deprive one of the basic amenities of life. Vv. 10-13 lay down further restrictions while accepting and keeping pledges.

¹³⁹ Cf. S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 83. Paul argues that the seizure of the children as referred to in Job 24,9, can hardly take place at the time of a loan but only as a distraint for non-payment (cf. p. 84). Sir 8,13 reinstates this argument: "if the payment is not received, from the debtor, if the loan is defaulted, his property is confiscated (חבל) ..." (p. 84).

¹⁴⁰ F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, p. 316. They quote Job 22,6 to support their view. The incident of forcefully and unjustly taking away the garment in the Yavneh-Yam letter emerging from 8th to 6th century BCE in Judah could throw light upon the event mentioned here. Cf. J. Naveh, "A Hebrew Letter from the Seventh Century B.C.", *IEJ* 10 (1960), pp. 129-39. The letter narrates the complaint of an impoverished farmer, whose garment is taken away forcefully because he could not satisfy the owner of the land with the due share of the product.

¹⁴¹ Cf. S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 86.

¹⁴² S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 86.

worship.¹⁴³ Here Amos takes up the case against people who do not care about the rights of the poor, who are forced to pledge basic amenities of life. He defends them even when they have broken the precepts of the law in their desperate attempt to survive. W.H. Wolff notes the originality of the prophet in doing so and comments that there are no instances that can be pointed out, either for the individual formulations or for the thematic sequence of Amos anywhere else in the Bible.¹⁴⁴

1.2.2.7. Drinking Wine Taken as Fines in the House of God (v. 8b)

The seventh transgression connects once again social injustice and the realm of cult: *wāyēn 'ānūšīm yištū bêt 'ēlōhēhem* “and the wine taken as fines they drink in the house of their God”. The verb *'nš* means “to have to pay a penalty” and refers to monetary fines or indemnity (cf. Exod 21,22; Deut 22,19; 2 Chr 36,3; Prov 17,26; 22,3; 27,12). In 2 Kgs 23,33 and in 2 Chr. 36,3 the word refers to the tribute or indemnity imposed on land. The passive participle of the verb is used as an adjective in Amos – “fined wine”, meaning wine bought with fines. The fine being paid in terms of wine is mentioned only here in the Bible. The LXX translates *wāyēn 'ānūšīm* as καὶ οἶνον ἐκ συκοφαντιῶν i.e. “wine gained by extortion”. The LXX translation here is definitely interpretative as in the first part of the verse.¹⁴⁵ However the translation helps us to understand the context of the accusation better. S.M. Paul has paraphrased it accordingly: “wine obtained by mulcting”, i.e., by way of fines or “wine bought with money received from the poor”.¹⁴⁶ Gunther Fleischer also sees disregard for ethical norms in these fines which are not used as payment for damages or reparation, but to acquire alcohol.¹⁴⁷ The wine “as a primary agricultural commodity” might have been used to pay fines in the ancient Israelite community.¹⁴⁸ Here too the prophet goes beyond the letter of the law to condemn an unethical act.

The phrase *bêt 'ēlōhēhem* can mean literally “the house of their God” or “the house of their gods”. The same phrase occurring in Judg 9,27 and 1 Chr 10,10 has the latter meaning.

¹⁴³ Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, p. 54.

¹⁴⁴ Wolff comments: “Weder für die Einzelformulierung noch für die Themenfolge in 6b-8 ist ein bestimmtes Vorbild aufzuweisen. Nur sinngemäß finden sich für die Einzelanklagen Entsprechungen in der älteren Rechtsüberlieferung; auch der Typ einer Viererreihe lässt sich nur mit ungefähr verwandter Thematik etwa Lv 19,13-14a belegen”. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten* 2, p. 204.

¹⁴⁵ LXX translates v. 8a *wā'al-bāgādīm ḥābūlīm yaṭtū 'ēšel kol- mizbē'ah* as καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν δεσμεύοντες σχοινίοις παραπετάσματα ἐποίουν ἐχόμενα τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου “And binding their clothes with cords they have made them curtains near the altar”. This translation varies greatly from the MT rendering.

¹⁴⁶ S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 86. W. Rudolph has also pointed out that the meaning of *'ānūšīm* is not the usual one: “G und L haben sicher auch darin recht, dass sie das Wort hier nicht von ordnungsgemäß verhängten Geldstrafen verstehen – das ist die normale Bedeutung von *šny* -, sondern, wie es der Zusammenhang verlangt, von irgendwelchen Übergriffen (vgl. *šny* 2 Reg 23,33 Kontribution).” W. Rudolph, *Joel-Amos*, p. 139, n 8b.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. G. Fleischer, *Die Bücher Joel und Amos*, p. 162.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. M.A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets I*, p. 216.

They refer to the house of pagan gods.¹⁴⁹ However, Amos in general is not concerned about the Canaanite religious practices¹⁵⁰ and the usage here should be understood “house of their God”.¹⁵¹ Their utter disregard for ethical norms is evident from the fact that they indulge in such unethical acts in the very temple of their God.

It must have been a common custom in ancient Israel to gather in the sanctuaries to offer sacrifices and to feast together. We have references to such eating and drinking in 1 Sam 1,18; 9,22 too.¹⁵² It is possible that such feasting degenerated due to the ethical transgressions of the participants, like using the wine acquired as fines for feasting. In an unjust judicial and social system, as indicated by the previous verses, where the judicial process is subverted by the greedy judges and the powerful, there is little hope that the fines are justly imposed. Even if the fine is obtained through legal means, to use it on feasting and merry making is an immoral act. It highlights “the lack of concern for YHWH’s holiness or justice”¹⁵³. Amos makes it clear: The worship that involves feasting at the expense of the poor is a sham and a disgrace to his God.

1.2.3. YHWH’s Benevolent Actions and the Ingratitude of Israel (vv. 9-12)

After mentioning the seven transgressions committed by Israel in vv. 6-8, an attempt is made to understand the underlying ingratitude of Israel within a theological framework. An emphatic personal pronoun *'ānōkī* representing YHWH in v. 9a contrasts Israel’s transgressions with his benevolent actions in history and *wə'ānōkī hišmadtī* here could be paraphrased “And it was I who destroyed”. The repetition of the pronoun again at the beginning of v. 10a gives added weight to the actions of YHWH.¹⁵⁴ The contrast is drawn specifically in the context of Israel exploiting and depriving the weaker sections of its own community like the poor, needy, afflicted, and women. YHWH on his part, on the other hand, came to the rescue of Israel, who was the weakest in the spectrum of nations as she came into being and was not able to defend herself against her powerful opponents. Israel, being the beneficiary of YHWH’s preferential option for the weak, cannot afford to disregard the weaker sections in its own community, as this is equivalent to showing ingratitude to their God. The historical recollection has also the literary function of preparing for the

¹⁴⁹ Cf. F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, p. 321.

¹⁵⁰ R.S. Cripps, *A Critical & Exegetical Commentary*, p. 143. It is the prophet Hosea who mentions Israelites worshipping on “high places” (cf. Hos 10,8) and in Gilgal (cf. Hos 12,11) outside the official sanctuary in Bethel. Therefore some see here an influence of “the theology of Hosea” on the book of Amos. Cf. G. Fleischer, *Die Bücher Joel und Amos*, p. 162.

¹⁵¹ The reference of Amos can also be to the Israelite temples at Dan and Bethel as well as the many “high places” where they worshipped.

¹⁵² Cf. E. Hammerschaimb, *The Book of Amos*, p. 50.

¹⁵³ M.A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets I*, p. 216.

¹⁵⁴ C.F. Keil / F. Delitzsch, *Biblischer Kommentar*, p. 182.

pronouncement of judgment against Israel that follows in vv. 13-16 by recalling the utter destruction of the Amorites (v. 9) and the theological function of demonstrating why the punishment is a necessity.

The redaction critical studies have brought out the tensions apparent in the composition of this text. It is argued that Amos 2,9-12 differs vastly from the previous oracles against nations and has a different style and content compared to the accusations in vv. 6-8. Many consider it an editorial addition, stemming from the post exilic times, for the following reasons:

- i. vv. 9-12 has a different content, viz., the description of the saving deeds, which was uncharacteristic in the preceding oracles against nations.
- ii. A change of style from preaching to reporting.
- iii. These verses reveal dtr characteristics.¹⁵⁵
- iv. The phrase *piryô mimma 'al wəšorāšāyiw mittāḥat* “his fruit above and his roots below” (v. 9c) is found only in post exilic texts (cf. Isa 37,31 = 2 Kgs 19,30). Similarly, the *relecture* of forty years of wandering in the desert as a cipher for the Babylonian exile¹⁵⁶ is also a post exilic phenomenon.
- v. The absence of socio-critical content in the accusations in v. 12 differentiates them from the previous accusations.

The change from third person in v. 9 to second person in v. 10 makes it difficult to judge if both the verses belonged to the same level of the text. The chronological sequence of the exodus from Egypt followed by the desert wandering and conquest is not followed in vv. 9-10. The inconsistencies mentioned above in the text point towards editorial interventions. It is probable that the vv. 9-12 might have been added by the redactors at the time when the text was received in Jerusalem.

¹⁵⁵ Rottzoll has pointed out the following dtr. characteristics in vv. 9-12:

(i). The word *šamad* “to destroy” (v. 9) predominantly belongs to the dtr authors (47/90 occurrences in dtr). Rottzoll adds that *šmd* in combination with *mippənēhem* occurs only in dtr cf. Deut 2,12.21.22; 1 Chr 5,25 and with *mippənēhem* in Josh 9,24; 24,8 et al.

(ii) The use of the term *'emōri* for the whole pre Israelite dwellers of Palestine in vv. 9a.10c (cf. Josh 7,7) is also attributed to the dtr authors.

(iii) The use of the sentence structure, verb *'ālā* (*hiphil*) (+ object) + *min* + place name (v. 10a) also occurs predominantly in dtr terminology (cf. Gen 50,24; Exod 3,8.17; 32,1.4.7ff.23; 33,1; Lev 11,45; Num 20,5; Deut 20,1; Josh 24,17 et al.)

Cf. D.U. Rottzoll, *Studien zur Redaktion und Komposition des Amosbuches*, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996, pp. 51-58.

¹⁵⁶ This is justified by the fact that another passage attributed to redactors in Amos 5,25 also considers forty years as a period without sacrifices. Cf. D.U. Rottzoll, *Studien zur Redaktion*, pp. 57-58.

1.2.3.1. Annihilation of Amorites (v. 9)

The first among the benevolent actions is the routing of the Amorites as the Israelites took possession of the Promised Land. The land of the Amorites is part of the Land promised to Abraham for his descendants. (cf. Gen 15,18-21). Simian-Yofre has pointed out that in Mesopotamian documents the title “Amorites” is used not only ethnically but also geographically and it represents the people who lived northwest of Babylon.¹⁵⁷ The title Amorites also sometimes stands for the original inhabitants of the land of Palestine in the Bible as we see in Gen 48,22; Josh 24,15; Judg 6,10 and 2 Sam 21,2.¹⁵⁸ Consequently, the reference in Amos 2,9 could imply the hand of God in defeating and dispossessing the inhabitants of the land.

The Amorites are said to be lofty like cedar and strong like oak.¹⁵⁹ The original inhabitants of Canaan are said to be gigantic in the Bible (cf. Num 13,28; Deut 1,28; 2,10.21; 9,2; Josh 14,12).¹⁶⁰ In spite of their might, YHWH annihilated them completely. The utter destruction of Amorites in the hands of YHWH is underlined by a merism common in the Bible to describe totality, *piryô mimma'al wəšorāšāyw mittāḥat* “the fruit above and roots below” (cf. 2 Kgs 19,30; Isa 14,29; 37,31; Ezek 17,9; Hos 9,16; Job 18,16).¹⁶¹

1.2.3.2. Bringing out of the Land of Egypt and Wandering in the Desert (v. 10)

The second benevolent action of YHWH on behalf of Israel cited in this oracle is bringing them out of the land of Egypt. Israel is addressed here directly in the second person. The expression of YHWH’s benevolence towards Israel is described in its classical form: the liberation from Egypt; guiding through the desert for forty years; and possession of the Land, though not in this order. Because of the presence of the phrase *lārešet ’et (hā) ’eres* typical to the dtr tradition, many argue for a later origin of this verse.¹⁶² Wolff has pointed out that the reference to the tradition of forty years of wandering in the desert also has its origin with the dtr authors or redactors.¹⁶³ It should also be noted that the desert tradition is not to be seen anywhere else in the prophetic literature other than in Amos 2,10 and 5,7. Above all, the phrasing of the Amos 2,10b is exactly the same as Deut 29,4a except for the placement of the words. However, scholars have also pointed out that the events mentioned here were so much

¹⁵⁷ Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, p. 55.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 86.

¹⁵⁹ The prophetic use of the imagery of trees to depict the downfall of the enemy kings is also found in Isa 10,18-19.33-34 and Ezek 31,3ff.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. M.A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets I*, p. 217.

¹⁶¹ The verb *šmd* itself denotes total annihilation in the sacred ban associated with the holy wars (cf. Josh 7,12; 11,20; 1 Kgs 13,34). Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 2*, p. 204.

¹⁶² *lārešet ’et (hā) ’eres* is a typical dtn-dtr sermon phrase. Cf. Deut 2,31; 9,4; 11,31; Josh 1,11; 18,3; Judg 2,6 et al.

¹⁶³ The forty years tradition is later on richly attested in the dtr literature. Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 2*, p. 206. Some of the examples for it are: Deut 1,3; 2,7; 8,4; Josh 5,6 et al.

part of the common tradition (*Gemeingut der Tradition*) that an effort to attribute the terminologies to a particular tradition or redactor does not carry much weight.¹⁶⁴

The *hiphil* of the root *hlk*, normally translated “to lead”, can sometimes mean “leading and guiding with care”¹⁶⁵ thus indicating a more intensive accompanying and involvement in the life of Israel on the part of YHWH. The forty years of wandering in the desert are not seen here as a punishment for their sins as in Num 20,24 and in Deut 1,34ff.; rather, it follows the tradition which sees this phase as a time of grace (cf. Jer 2,6; Hos 13,4ff.). The number forty is a favorite round number in both Old and New Testaments (cf. Gen 7,17; 1 Kgs 19,8; Mt 4,2; Acts 1,3; Acts 7,23)¹⁶⁶ and the mention of it in the historical recollection jogs the memory of the people regarding the grace and protection they received from YHWH at the emerging phase of their historical existence. It consequently strikes a chord with the people that they owe their existence to the actions of YHWH. The ultimate purpose of the above reminiscence is that being beneficiaries of the saving care of YHWH, the people of Israel are expected to be responsible in their conduct towards the weaker sections in their own community.

1.2.3.3. Appointing of Nazirites and Prophets (v. 11)

The third in the sequence of the benevolent actions is the sending of the prophets and Nazirites. The appointing of prophets and Nazirites is considered here as another sign of YHWH’s care and concern for the people. *qūm hipnil* meaning “to raise up” can be used to refer to the appointment of a person to an office or position and with YHWH as subject is used many times in the Bible when referring to his making “men appear with a special task for the good of the people”¹⁶⁷ (cf. Deut 18,15; Judg 2,16.18; 3,9.15; 1 Sam 2,35; Jer 6,17; 23,4.5; 30,9). By pointing out that it is YHWH who sends the prophets and the Nazirites it is shown that YHWH himself has adopted measures so that people do not forget his actions in history. Furthermore, the Nazirites and the prophets in Israel had the unique function of reminding the people of the actions and plans of God from time to time and warning them that they will have to face the consequences of their conduct, as the analysis below demonstrates.

A Nazirite is described in the Bible as a man or a woman who takes a special vow to consecrate himself or herself to God, to abstain from intoxicating drinks including wine, to

¹⁶⁴ Arguing with W. Rudolph, *Joel-Amos*, p. 146 and with S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 91. The use of traditional material is undeniable, but as is often the case with biblical texts, it is difficult to distinguish the traditional material and the redactor’s contribution in this passage. Moreover, the dtr prefer the word *yāšā’* to refer to the coming out of Egypt rather than the more traditional word *’ālā*. The dtn-dtr literature uses the former 20 times, but the latter only once (20,1).

¹⁶⁵ S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 91. He quotes Deut 8,2.15; 29,4; Josh 24,3; Isa 42,16 et al as examples for such a usage of *hlk*.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. E. Hammerschaimb, *The Book of Amos*, p. 52.

¹⁶⁷ E. Hammerschaimb, *The Book of Amos*, p. 52.

leave his hair undressed and not to go near a corpse (cf. Num 6,2-6).¹⁶⁸ From the mention of two great biblical personalities, Joseph (Gen 49,26) and Samson (Judg 13,7) as Nazirites, it may be inferred that Nazirites had an important role to play in the community on behalf of YHWH in carrying out his saving plans. Though there were prophets in the ancient Near East like Phoenicia, Egypt or Assyria, the prophets in Israel were very different from them as they had a profound spiritual and moral impact, especially from the time of prophet Amos.¹⁶⁹ Israel understood a prophet as a mediator between God and his people. Here in Amos 2,9-12, their appointment is seen as yet another link in the chain of the saving deeds of YHWH, effected on behalf of the people as the prophets had the duty to remind the people of the saving works of YHWH.

1.2.3.4. Two More Transgressions (v. 12)

Continuing the tirade of accusations in vv. 6-8, Amos adds two more transgressions: making the Nazirites drink wine; and commanding the prophets not to prophesy. The abstention of Nazirites was sign of their fidelity to the mission entrusted to them by YHWH.¹⁷⁰ Making them drink wine amounts to obstructing their mission, a crime similar to the second accusation – forcing the prophets not to prophecy. Through these accusations the prophet condemns the rejection of the saving works of YHWH by his people.¹⁷¹ The deliberate perversion of the Nazirites and the Prophets finally exhausts YHWH's patience and he is now certain to take measures to teach the errant people of Israel a lesson. The stage is thus well set for the declaration of the judgment.

1.2.4. The Punishment: Defeat and the End of Normal Life (vv. 13-16)

The third *'ānōkī* leads to the climax and dramatically proclaims the punishment of Israel. In the first two occurrences in the previous verses (cf. vv. 9.10), it was the benevolent actions of YHWH which were narrated. The third *'ānōkī* shifts the focus to the punishment, which is again effected by YHWH himself. He does not need any agents as he himself will carry it out. The announcement of punishment begins with the particle *hinnē(h)* "behold/see",

¹⁶⁸ In Numbers 6,1-21 we have a detailed description of Nazirite observances: Their consecration was only for a specific period of time and not for the whole of life (cf. v. 5) and it would be ceremoniously removed as he or she completed the days of consecration (cf. v. 18). However, Samson was destined to be a Nazirite "from womb to the day of his death" (Judg 13,7).

¹⁶⁹ Cf. R.S. Cripps, *A Critical & Exegetical Commentary*, p. 145.

¹⁷⁰ Jeremia makes special reference to Rechabites who abstained from drinking wine in his day following the order of their ancestor Jonadab (cf. Jer 35,8). He projects them as a contrast to the Judahites, who persistently disobeyed YHWH (cf. Jer 35,13ff.) and thereby invited punishment on themselves (cf. Jer 36,7).

¹⁷¹ Amos personally experienced the prohibition to prophesy from Amaziah, the priest at Bethel in 7,10-13 for having uttered the words of YHWH, which was displeasing in the ears of the king. Prophet Jeremiah too was prohibited to speak in the name of YHWH by the people of Anathoth and his life was threatened if he dared to do so (cf. Jer 11,21f). However, the prohibition of the prophet by the people does not deter YHWH from implementing his proposed punishment for their disobedience (cf. Amos 7,17; Jer 11,22-23).

which often serves to signal punitive actions in the Bible: cf. 1 Sam 2,31; 2 Sam 12,11; 1 Kgs 21,21; 2 Kgs 21,12; Isa 3,1; 8,7; 10,33; Jer 5,14; 6,19.21; Ezek 7,5.6.10; Amos 4,2; 6,11; 8,11; 9,8; Mic 1,3 et al).¹⁷² The particle gives the force of a ‘condition’: “if the above facts are established ...” as in Deut 13,5, and connects the punishment to the verified accusations. The adverb *hinnē(h)* + personal pronoun + participle in v. 13 is used as a *futurum instans* which means that the event announced is certain to take place (cf. GKC §116p).

1.2.4.1. Life shall Come to a Halt (v. 13)

“See, I will make it press down under you, just like a cart is pressed down, full of cut-grains” (v. 13). Since the twice occurring root *ūq* “to press down” in v. 13 has no other occurrences in the Bible it is difficult to ascertain the meaning of the verb. From the context here, where the special mention of the heavily loaded cart is mentioned, the word has the sense of “being pressed down” under the weight and getting stuck. This calls to mind the image of a heavily loaded cart cracking the ground underneath and getting stuck in the ground. The idea could be that the people of Israel will get stuck, that their future is impaired, and that they will not be able to escape the punishment. The substantive *āmîr* “cut grains” occurs exclusively in prophetic corpus (Jer 9,21; Amos 2,13; Mic 4,12; Zech 12,6) and it is to be noted that in all these occurrences, the punishment is mentioned, though in Micah and Zechariah the other nations gathered like *āmîr* are at the receiving end of the chastisement. In Jeremiah and Amos the word occurs in the context of the punishment to be meted out to Israel. The punishment is presented here as God’s speech and therefore God is the subject of the action of pressing down. The image of the punishment of God is in contrast to the imagery of the saving God in vv. 9-10: God who “brought out” Israel from slavery in Egypt himself will bring it down or “press it down” because of its transgressions.¹⁷³ The cart full of cut grain suggests the prosperity of the land and pressing it down suggests the end of this prosperity. The prophet thereby implies that Israel is not going to enjoy the apparent prosperity of his times in the long run. The oppressive and self-serving structure of his society that denies the right to a meaningful existence to the weaker sections, and shows contempt for the will of YHWH, however strong and secure it may appear, will come to a grinding halt.

¹⁷² Cf. P. Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSS 105, M.J. Smith (trans.), Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994, pp. 86-87.

¹⁷³ Cf. R. Meynet / P. Bovati, *Il libro del profeta Amos*, p. 91. He cites the occurrence of “from below” in v. 9 and v. 13 to support this association.

1.2.4.2. Military Defeat (vv. 14-16)

Vv. 14-16 explains further, how the punishment of YHWH will paralyze life in Israel.¹⁷⁴ Using imagery from the military and warfare, Amos paints a telling picture of the military defeat which is awaiting Israel. Each of the instances shows that the punishment consists of the lack of expected results in a given situation.¹⁷⁵ First, the mighty army will lose its swiftness and its power, both of which are very important to win the war, and it will be impossible for them to save their lives (cf. v. 14).¹⁷⁶ The imminent military collapse is evident in all three departments. The first to be mentioned are the archers. The phrase *tōpēš haqqešet* occurs only here in the Bible and refers to those who are skilled in handling the bow. It is said that they will not be able to hold ground in the battle (cf. v. 15a). Added to that, “those who are swift of foot” (v. 15b), viz., the infantry, and “the rider of the horse” (v. 15c), viz., the cavalry¹⁷⁷ shall also be unable to save themselves. The picture here is of an army confronted by the superior strength of its opponents. “The stout-hearted” (v. 16) refers to the people strong at heart and therefore, the courageous men among the warriors. These could stand for all three categories mentioned above. They will flee naked (cf. v. 16) means that the army would give up fighting and flee shamelessly in the face of defeat.

“On that day” (*bayyôm-hahû*) in v. 16 refers to the day of misfortune and military defeat, and it could mean the day on which Israel is taken into captivity (cf. 5,27).¹⁷⁸ This is the day of retribution on which YHWH personally administers the punishment due to each one. The prophet’s conviction in this regard shows in the words of Cripps: “though Amos cared for Israel he cared for principles still more”¹⁷⁹. The life with all its prosperity, without caring for the ethical norms, has to come to an end. The defeat of the military is the defeat of the rich and powerful who perpetrated injustice, and in the picture of the former fleeing naked, one can see the undoing of the latter, who were protected by them.

¹⁷⁴ S.M. Paul has pointed out seven examples of immobility in the punishment described in vv. 14-16 viz., “Flight shall perish from all” (14a); “The strong shall not retain his strength” (14b); “and the mighty shall not save his life” (14c); “The bearer of the bow shall not resist” (15a); “Those who are swift of foot shall not be saved” (15b); “The rider of the horse shall not save his life” (15c); and “The stout-hearted among the warriors shall flee naked” (16). Cf. S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 95.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, p. 58.

¹⁷⁶ Jer 46,6a, *'al-yānūs haqqal wā'al-yimmālēt haggibbôr* “The swift cannot flee away, nor can the warrior escape”, which has similarity to Amos 2,14, also refers specifically to the failure of Israelite army to defend itself.

¹⁷⁷ It is doubtful whether cavalry formed part of the Israelite army until the Persian period, but we have mention of horsemen also in Amos 6,12. Simian-Yofre is of the opinion that, the mention here may not be to a cavalry unit in the army but to a few who rode on horses during the war. Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, p. 59.

¹⁷⁸ The expression *bayyôm-hahû* occurs 208 times in the Hebrew Bible. In the book of Amos it refers to an announcement of punishment (cf. Amos 2,16; 8,3,9,13) or to the final salvation (cf. Amos 9,11). Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, p. 60.

¹⁷⁹ R.S. Cripps, *Critical & Exegetical Commentary*, p. 147.

Thus the Israel oracle ends on a note of warning that the life of prosperity disregarding the norms of social justice and the will of YHWH, whose actions were pivotal in bringing them into existence in history, will not go on. The punishment of YHWH engulfs everyone without exception, unlike the oracles against foreign nations, where only the rulers and the politically responsible were the victims (cf. 1,4-5.10.12.14-15). The reason for the all pervasive reach of the punishment is probably the communal nature of the transgressions, for which many in society are culpable.

1.3. Accusations against the Upper Class Women of Samaria (4,1-3)

1.3.1. The Addressees: “the Cows of Bashan”

Amos 4,1-3 is directed against the rich women of Mount Samaria, who are figuratively referred to as *pārôṭ habbāšān* “the cows of Bashan”. Though no specification is made about the composition of this group, the context suggests that the women belonged to a class of people who lived in idle prosperity in Samaria, the capital city of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.¹⁸⁰ Bashan is a territory in Transjordan on both sides of the river Yarmuk, noted for its fertile terrain. The concept “cows of Bashan” is not found elsewhere in the Bible, although its counterpart the strong “bulls of Bashan” (*’abbîrê bāšān*) finds its mention in Ps 22,12. In Deut 32,14 special mention is made of “the rams of the breeds of Bashan” among the choice gifts bestowed upon “his portion”, Jacob (cf. 32,10).

In order to explain this thereomorphic metaphor the following possibilities can be suggested:

- i. The use of thereomorphic metaphors to signify people is not altogether unusual in the Bible because the people of Israel in exile in Babylon are depicted as “scattered sheep” and when brought back by YHWH are to be fed in Carmel and in Bashan in Jer 50,17-19.
- ii. In Ps 22,13, the expression “bulls of Bashan” refers to strength and power. Coggins has suggested the phrase “cows of Bashan” can be similarly understood as a “partly admiring reference to the well-formed bodies of the women.”¹⁸¹ Normally such refined women belonged to affluent sections of the society and therefore the reference here could be to the women belonging to the upper class of the society.

¹⁸⁰J.H. Hayes describes the destination of this oracle: “The wording of the verse seems to imply that they were women closely associated with the royal court and monarchical administration. ... The “cows of Bashan” are probably to be understood as the women associated with the royal court in Samaria. These would have included the daughters, wives, and concubines of the king and his sons and perhaps their social circle including women of some government officials who may not have been the king’s kin.” J.H. Hayes, *Amos*, p. 138.

¹⁸¹R.J. Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, p. 116.

iii. Barstad proposes that the term ‘cows’ is here used in the prophetic diatribe “as a determinative for the apostate people”.¹⁸² Whether the phrase “cows of Bashan” denotes the whole people of Israel as Barstad claims, or only an affluent group of women of Samaria is difficult to deduce, though the latter fits the context better.¹⁸³ However, apostasy, understood as the failure on the part of these women to understand the ways of God and their consequent disregard for the social norms concerning justice to the poor, could be the reasons probably why they are referred to as “cows” in the prophetic rhetoric. Nevertheless, we can say with certainty that this expression gives vent very effectively to the disdain the prophet has for the affluent women of Samaria.

The cows of Bashan, or the comfortable women of the society who are accused by the prophet, are said to be living on Mount Samaria. In 3,9 Amos has invited the neighboring nations to witness the great turmoil (*māhûmōt rabbôt*) and the oppression (*’āšûqîm*) within Samaria. The people who lived securely in Mount Samaria (*habbōṭḥîm bəhar šōmrôn*) are warned of the sad fate also in 6,1. Those who swear by the Ashimah of Samaria (*nišbā’im bə’āšmaṭ šōmrôn*) are sure to be punished according to 8,14. Hence, Samaria, or the capital city of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, is seen in Amos as a seat of oppression and transgressions.

1.3.2. The Accusations: Partakers in Exploitation (v. 1bc)

1.3.2.1. Oppression of the Poor (v. 1b)

The first in the short series of accusation directed against the wealthy women of Samaria is the oppression of the poor. The verb *’āšaq* “to oppress” is an important term used in the Bible in contexts of exploitation and it occurs 60x. In the Torah, it means denying wages to a daily wage earner, sometimes amounting to fraud or exploitation of the person. The word is used in the explicit commandment not to exploit in Lev 19,13 and in Deut 24,14. Here it refers to the exploitation of the weak at the hand of human agents, especially in the context of taking advantage of the workers (cf. also Mal 3,5).¹⁸⁴ Though the semantic nuance of this word is wider, Gerstenberger claims that it always refers to some “negatively construed

¹⁸² Barstad has suggested that the expression *pārôt habbāšān* “the cows of Bashan” is a paraphrase for the whole people of Israel used in a “metaphorical/poetical” sense. The reasons being: the proper noun ‘Bashan’ is used in prophetic literature in association with the whole people of Israel; the term ‘cows’ “may be considered as a prophetic invective, used as a determinative for the “apostate” people”; the doom oracle beginning with this verse and continuing through the whole chapter in fact concerns the whole people. H.M. Barstad, *The Religious Polemics*, pp. 39-43.

¹⁸³ Amos pinpoints the targets of his diatribe as the greedy merchants in 8,4ff. It may be possible that in 4,1 too he has a particular group, viz., the affluent women of Samaria, in view.

¹⁸⁴ *’āšaq* also refers to extracting things from a neighbour (cf. Lev 5,23; Ezek 22,12), robbery (cf. Deut 28,29), or exploitation (cf. Deut 28,33). This word is often found in combination with words used to denote the poor or the needy sections of society: with *’ānî*: Deut 24,14; Ps 72,4; with *’ebvôn*: Ezek 22,29; with *dal*: Prov 14,31; 22,16; 28,3; Am 4,1; with *rwš*: Ecc 5,7.

actions and states”¹⁸⁵, chiefly with the meaning of fraud or cheating (cf., Lev 19,13; Deut 24,14; 1 Sam 12,3.4; Ps 62,11; 73,8).

In the prophetic literature too the root *ʿšq* is related to the contexts of social injustice (cf. Isa 30,12; Jer 7,6; Amos 4,1; Mic 2,2; Zech 7,10). The word refers to injustice done against individuals in the economic sphere in Ezek 22,29; Jer 21,12; 22,3 and in Mic 2,2.¹⁸⁶ The word is used in exhortations expressing concern for the weaker sections of society by prohibiting oppression of widows, orphans, strangers and the poor (cf. Jer 7,6; Zech 7,10). Gerstenberger identifies the subject of this verb, or in other words, the exploiters of the weak referred to where the word *ʿāšaq* is used, as the well-to-do Israelites based on his analysis of Prov 28,3; Mic 2,1-10 and Ezek 22,23-29.¹⁸⁷ Oppression of the weaker classes was forbidden in Israelite society and the prophets were the main advocates of this prohibition. Their innovativeness consists also in understanding the practice of oppression as a reason for punishment of Israel and Judah.¹⁸⁸

1.3.2.2. Trampling on the Needy (v. 1b)

The second accusation levelled against the rich women of Mount Samaria is that they “trample on the needy”. The root used is *ršš* and the meaning of this word is very similar to *ʿšq*. Ringgren proposes “maltreat”¹⁸⁹ for a translation. The word means “crushing” of the hope of establishing justice upon the earth in Isa 42,4.¹⁹⁰ NKJV translates the word as “to oppress” in 1 Sam 12,3; 2 Chr 16,10 and in Job 20,19. In Job 20,19 this word is used with the direct object *dallîm* “poor” and the concrete instance of this oppression is elaborated in the latter part of the same verse: “they have seized a house that they did not build”. The cruelties inflicted on the people by the apostate king Asa is described through the word *ršš* (cf. 2 Chr 16,10). The crime of the women of Samaria is not specified, but the word *ršš* suggests that they were culpable of grave misbehaviour towards the needy in their society. In their avarice they deprived the needy even of what little they possessed and made their existence miserable.

1.3.2.3. Collusion in the Exploitative Deeds of their Husbands (v. 1d)

After having accused the women on two familiar grounds in line with his accusations against Israel in the Israel oracle, the prophet now brings up a third allegation against them,

¹⁸⁵ E. Gerstenberger, “קִשְׁוּ *ʿāšaq*”, *TDOT XI* (1987-1988; English trans. 2001), p. 413.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Also 1 Sam 12,3.4 and Ps 62,11. The economic nuance is supported by the book of Proverbs too (cf. Prov 22,16; 28,3). According to Gerstenberger, in a context of exploitation “*ʿšq* refers to the various economic mechanisms and circumstances, as well as the corresponding attitudes of the economically powerful, that threaten the lives lived by the poor.” E. Gerstenberger, “קִשְׁוּ *ʿāšaq*”, p. 416.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. E. Gerstenberger, “קִשְׁוּ *ʿāšaq*”, p. 414. The active participles in Jer 21,12; Amos 4,1; Mal 3,5; Ps 72,4; 119,121; Prov 14,31; 22,16 and Eccl 4,1 have helped him to identify the subjects.

¹⁸⁸ Isa 52,4 and Jer 50,33 refer to oppression in the hands of foreign powers. During the time of military extortion by foreign powers and exile the effects of oppression might have been severely felt by the community.

¹⁸⁹ H. Ringgren, “רָשַׁשׁ *rāšas*”, *TDOT XIII* (1990-1992; English trans. 2004), p. 641.

¹⁹⁰ It refers to “breaking down into pieces” in 2 Kgs 23,12.

which is unique in prophetic literature. They are accused of asking “their husbands” (*la’āḏōnēhem*) “bring us that we may drink”.¹⁹¹ The term *’āḏōn* is the commonly used name for the divine. When used of human beings, it is more of an indication of authority, meaning ‘master’ rather than husband (cf. Gen 42,30; 2 Kgs 10,2.3.6; Jer 27,4). The normal word for husband in the Bible is *’iš* (cf. Gen 3,6.16; 16,3 et al) or *ba’al* (cf. Exod 21,22; Lev 21,4; Esth 1,17.20 et al). Nevertheless, the occurrence of *’āḏōn* for husband in so popular a passage as Gen 18,12 means that it may not have been so uncommon to call a husband *’āḏōn*. It could have been a title used by women to address their husbands with respect and love and not merely as a term denoting their domination or authority. The allegation in 4,1 means that the women of Samaria collude with their husbands by demanding that their extravagant needs be met from their ill-gotten gains. They enjoy the fruits of the exploitation and oppression carried out by their husbands, and as a result, have themselves become oppressors of the poor and needy.

1.3.3. Swearing by YHWH (v. 2)

Because of their avarice and inhuman treatment of the poor and needy, the affluent women of Samaria invite the punishment of God on themselves. The announcement of the punishment is introduced by a swearing formula: *nišba’ ’āḏōnāy yhwḥ bəqoḏšô* “The Lord YHWH has sworn in his holiness ...” Similar swearing formulas are used also in 6,8 and 8,7¹⁹² and they introduce a special formula of judgment, through which YHWH himself takes the initiative and becomes responsible for punishing the errant Israel. However, the introduction of the judgment with a swearing formula in Amos instead of a normal messenger formula is surprising. Wolff proposes that when the swearing formula replaces the messenger formula, it indicates the irrevocability of what is announced.¹⁹³ YHWH swearing in his holiness implies his own personal intervention on behalf of the oppressed, which stands in direct contrast to all the human faithlessness and weakness. In Amos 4,2, the swearing formula thus signifies that the social transgressions of the women of Samaria have provoked YHWH to direct intervention and that his judgment of the guilty is irrevocable.

¹⁹¹ This accusation suits well the addressee in the verse “the cows of Bashan” and the proposed emending of the text with third person singular suffix is not called for.

¹⁹² Wolff remarks that this strange formula is not found anywhere else in the older prophecy. The reference to the swearing of God is used to affirm God’s promise of land a few times in the dtl literature (cf. Deut. 6,10.18.23) and it is found also in the threats against the foreign nations in Isaiah and Jeremiah (cf. Isa 14,24; Jer 49,13; 51,14). Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 2*, p. 242.

¹⁹³ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 2*, p. 244. The only parallel to the swearing of YHWH by his holiness is in Ps 89,36. Although here it has nothing to do with punishment, the formula affirms the certainty of the promises made to David.

The opening phrase *hinnē(h) yāmîm bā'îm* “behold, the days are coming” occurs 20x in the Hebrew Bible, out of that 14x it occurs in the book of Jeremiah.¹⁹⁴ The phrase *kî hinnē(h)* like *hinnē(h)* in 2,13 is used in the context of punishment in Ps 92,10; Isa 3,1; 26,21; 60,2; 66,15; Jer 25,29; 49,15; Amos 6,11 and in Zech 3,9. The conjunction *kî* usually translated as “for”, connects the punishment with the accusations, which are the reasons for the punishment that follows. The phrase “behold, the days are coming” in Amos 4,2 refers to a spectacular and decisive punitive intervention on the part of YHWH in many of its occurrences (11x). Israel or Judah is at the receiving end of the punishment in 2 Kgs 20,17; Isa 39,6; Jer 7,32; 9,24; and in Amos 4,2 and 8,11.¹⁹⁵ Amos uses the phrase 3 times (4,2; 8,11; 9,13): the first two occurrences in the context of punishment of Israel at the hands of YHWH; and the third in a reference to the deliverance of Israel from exile. In Amos 4,2, the phrase is clearly used in context of the exile of Israel as punishment for the transgressions of the affluent women of Samaria as we shall see below.

1.3.4. The Punishment: Exile (vv. 2b-3)

The nature of the punishment announced in v. 3 points towards exile, although the ‘technical word’ for going into exile, viz., *gālā(h)*, is not used here. Nevertheless, the word used here, viz., *yāšā'*, is not altogether strange in the context of exile as we see in Mic 1,11 and 2,13. A context of exile is obvious in Amos 4,3 also for the following reasons:

- i. The terms *šinnōt* and *šrōt dūgā(h)* both meaning “hook” indicate the exile (cf. v. 2b).
- ii. Phrases such as *pārāšîm tēše'nā(h)* “you shall come out through the breaches in the wall” and *'iššā(h) negdāh* “every woman straight before her” (v. 3a)¹⁹⁶ suggest deportation. The exit through the breaches may be because of the destruction of the wall and its regular gates.
- iii. “you will be hurled out (*šlk hiphil*) in the direction of Hermon” means that they will be treated as mere objects, thrown out into the direction most probably of Mount Hermon, the tall mountain ranges lying in the north, though far away from Samaria. It fits well with the imagery of “the cows of Bashan” as territorially Mount Hermon and Bashan are close to each other. The *hiphil* of *šlk* is used for sending into exile also in Isa 14,19; Jer 7,15 (2x); 22,19.28; and in Amos 8,3. Being “hurled out in the direction of Hermon” points therefore in all probability to the deportation in the direction of north.

¹⁹⁴ The Babylon exile and the destruction associated with it is one of the dominant reference points of this phrase (cf. 2 Kgs 20,17; Isa 39,6; Jer 7,32; 9,24 et al). The same phrase is also used in association with the Lord’s bringing back Israel from Babylon and the rebuilding of the nation (cf. Jer 16,14; 19,6; 23,7; 30,3; 31,27 et al).

¹⁹⁵ The phrase refers to the destruction of foreign nations in Jer 48,12 (the destruction of Moab); 48,12ff. and 49,2 (destruction of Ammonites); and 51,47.52 (punishment of Babylon).

¹⁹⁶ Translated after *'iš negdō* “every man straight before him” cf. Josh 6,5.20. Here it means literally: one before/in front of the other.

The prophet speaks here with the charismatic influence in a context of social injustice. His conviction that his God will directly and definitely intervene to punish the people responsible for the oppression is reflected in this passage. The swearing formula means God's direct intervention and the irrevocability of his judgment. The prophet knows also what specific form the punishment of YHWH will take: it shall come in the form of military defeat and deportation.

1.4. The Socio-critical Sayings 5,7+10.11.12+16-17

Vv. 7+10.11.12+16-17 in the collection of sayings in Amos 5,1-17 belongs to an early collection of the words of Amos from Tekoa¹⁹⁷ and contains a critique of the prophet on those who abandon justice and righteousness to the disadvantage of the poor. The text of 5,1-17 is evidently disturbed and consists of many smaller rhetorical units. Vv. 1-3 is the proclamation of a death sentence and vv. 7.10-13 explains why Israel deserved it. The socio-critical sayings in this unit have the following elements of a judgment speech: vv. 7.10.11a.b.c.e.12: the accusations; and vv. 11d.f. 16-17: the announcement of punishment. V. 11 has the elements of accusation and punishment ordered in a casuistic way. The use of *lāḳēn* in v. 11a and v. 16a marks the introduction of the punishment.

1.4.1. The Addressees: “the House of Israel”

The addressee of the whole collection of sayings is mentioned in v. 1 and in v. 4 as “the house of Israel” (*bêṭ yiśrā’ēl*). From the descriptions that follow in vv. 7.10-12 we understand that with this title Amos addresses the cream of Israelite society, who enjoyed great wealth, though attained through dubious means. The title is used with a similar connotation also in Amos 6,1.14; 7,10; Isa 5,7; Mic 1,5; 3,1.9.¹⁹⁸ Undoubtedly the semantic range of this title is much wider than an exploiting upper class as it is a commonly used title for the whole people of Israel. However the above mentioned nuance predominates in Amos, Micah and Proto-Isaiah. In Amos 5,1-17, the addressees are further portrayed as: “those who turn (*hahōpēḳīm*) justice into wormwood” (v. 7); “hate (*śān’û*) the one who reproves at the gate” (v. 10a); “and abhor (*yāṭā’ēbû*) those who speak truth” (v. 10b).

¹⁹⁷ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten* 2, p. 271-73. According to Wolff, these verses and vv. 1-3 and vv. 4-5 belong to the early collection of the sayings of the prophet and vv. 6+8+9.13.14-15 are later interpretations, even though now well integrated into a theme. Wolff further points out that v. 10 is clearly related to v. 7 thematically and that the insertion of vv. 8-9 is probably a redactional error. These verses are the continuation of v. 6. They might have been first written on the margins and later inserted into the present position in the text.

¹⁹⁸ In all these instances, “the house of Israel” stands for a group of people whose socially illegitimate actions caused the punishment.

1.4.2. The Accusations: Ignoring Justice (vv. 7.10.11a.b.c.e.12)

V. 7 begins with a participle and poses a syntactical problem as it has no subject. This problem can be solved if we accept the possibility that it was originally a woe saying like 5,18 and 6,1, where *hōy* is followed by a participle. The omission of *hōy* before the participle in 5,7 is attributed to an error of *parablepsis* or an error in seeing.¹⁹⁹ The reason for the error might have been the double *hē* at the beginning of the following word *hahōp̄kîm*.²⁰⁰

1.4.2.1. Ignoring “Justice” and “Righteousness” (vv. 7.10)

V. 7 assumes the disregard for “justice” (*mišpāṭ*) and “righteousness” (*šəḏāqā(h)*) as the reason for the fall of Israel, mentioned in vv. 1-2. The word pair, appearing also in 5,24 and 6,12, is of central importance to the preaching of Amos.²⁰¹ It refers to the conduct of Israelites at two levels: First, by *mišpāṭ* Amos means an order which guarantees and watches over the freedom of rights and practices proper dispensation of justice at the gate or the place of judgment and *šəḏāqā(h)* stands for the conduct which this order calls for, which is the just trial of an innocent accused (cf. 2,6; 5,12).²⁰² Second, the deliberate disregard of *mišpāṭ* and *šəḏāqā(h)* is condemned in the woe saying in v.7. The Israelites are, in fact, accused of turning (*hpk*) justice into wormwood, a bitter herb. The metaphor of wormwood serves to refer to the corruption of the society and the bitterness that has crept in, especially in the life of the weaker sections, because justice as the way of life as intended by YHWH has been set aside. Justice was seen not just as an ideal to be attained in the Israelite society, but as a God given quality of life.²⁰³ The second part of the condemnation, viz., “the casting down of

¹⁹⁹ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton* 2, p. 269.

²⁰⁰ But it is surprising that the LXX translator, who makes many changes in the verse to render it comprehensible, does not translate it as a woe saying. The whole verse is differently translated in LXX: κύριος ὁ ποιῶν εἰς ὕψος κρίμα καὶ δικαιοσύνην εἰς γῆν ἔθηκεν “Lord, the one performing judgment on high, and has established justice on earth”. The Greek translator has probably read *ləla’ānā(h)* “into wormwood” for *ləma’əlā(h)* “on high” rendering the Greek εἰς ὕψος (cf. 1 Chr 14,2; 23,17; 29,3; 2 Chr 1,1; 17,12; 20,19; Is 7,11). Job 5,11 τὸν ποιοῦντα ταπεινοῦς εἰς ὕψος “he who is exalting the lowly” or literally, “he who is making the lowly high”, recalls the LXX rendering in Amos 5,7. S.M Paul also refuses to emend the text. Cf. S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 166. Simian-Yofre has proposed a different solution. He emends the text in 7a to *hpk ym* “changes the sea”. According to him the five participles – *hpk* (7a), *’šh* (8a), *hpk* (8b), *qr’* (8d), *blg* (9a) – are connected to the same subject “the Lord” (v. 8f) and are crucial in the formulation of the textual unit vv. 7-9. Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, p. 108. But the problem here is that this sequence is difficult to connect to the third person plural subject in v. 10a, if indeed there is any connection between v. 7 and v. 10. In the general framework of the text it is clear that the subjects of v. 7 and v. 10 are the same “house of Israel” against whom the charges are leveled against. Therefore, I would agree with the suggestion to emend the text as a woe saying.

²⁰¹ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton* 2, pp. 287-88. Wolff also remarks that this word pair is found nowhere in the legal collections of Pentateuch and seems to have its origin in the wisdom traditions (cf. Prov 1,3; 2,9; 8,20; 16,8; 21,3). The prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah have also bewailed the lack of these ideals in the society (cf. Isa 1,21; 5,7; Jer 22,13).

²⁰² Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton* 2, p. 288.

²⁰³ Cf. J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos*, ATD 24,2, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995, pp. 67-68.

righteousness to ground” indicates disregard for righteousness, to be understood as not allowing fellow human beings, especially the weaker ones, to enjoy their just rights.

The theme of disregard for justice and righteousness is taken up again in the second accusation in v. 10, which as suggested above, might have been joined originally to v. 7. The accused “hate the one who reproves (*šān’û ...môkī^aḥ*) at the gate, and loathe the one who speaks the truth (*tāmîm*)”. The transgressions mentioned here are against the values of the wisdom tradition of Israel, where a person who reproves is held in high esteem (cf. Prov 25,12) and one “who hates correction” (*šōnē’ tōkahaṭ*) is considered to be “stupid” (*bā’ar*) (cf. Prov 12,1).²⁰⁴ The word *tāmîm* refers to the blamelessness or to the moral integrity of a person, who has perfect knowledge about proper conduct in life in the wisdom traditions (cf. Job 12,4; Ps 15,2; 18,24.26.31.33; 37,18; 84,12; Prov 2,21; 11,5.20; 28,10). The success of those “who walk blamelessly” (*hōlēk tāmîm*) is assured in the wisdom literature (cf. Prov 28,18). The novelty in Amos is that he applies these wisdom teachings in a context of social injustice, particularly in order to defend the poor whose rights, he thinks, are being crushed underfoot (cf. v. 13).

The fact that the transgressions are taking place “in the gate” (*bašša’ār*) suggests the legal tone of the saying, as the gate is traditionally the place where hearings took place and sentences were delivered (cf. Ru 4,11; Job 31,21; Prov 22,22; 24,7, Isa 29,21; Amos 5,12.15). Also the *hiphil* participle *môkī^aḥ* “one who reproves” is derived from the root *ykh* which has a legal background. Sweeney has pointed out that *môkī^aḥ* is frequently used to refer to “one who brings charges or raises questions in court”.²⁰⁵ In spite of this, his role is not to be reduced to a purely juridical one and is to be understood more as “a *critic*”, who intervenes during the trial “in order to establish justice”.²⁰⁶

The accusation leveled against the house of Israel in v. 10 can be thus summed up at two levels: First, the dutiful persons, who rebuke the wrong doer at the court and try to establish justice, are hated. Second, the honest and law abiding citizens, who speak truth, are treated with derision in court.

1.4.2.2. Exploitation of the Poor (v. 11a)

Wolff points out that beginning with *lākēn ya’an* “therefore, because” v. 11 is a unity in itself with a fully developed judgment with conviction of crime and determination of

²⁰⁴“Rebuking” (*môkī^aḥ*) can be the function of an arbitrator as in Job 9,33. It can also imply persuading someone to a particular course of action (cf. Job 32,12) or speaking words with the intention of correction (cf. Prov 25,12; Ezek 3,26).

²⁰⁵ M.A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets I*, p. 236. He cites the following examples: Gen 31,37.42; 1 Chr 12,18; Isa 2,4; 11,3.4; Ps 94,10; Job 9,33; 16,21.

²⁰⁶ P. Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, p. 44. Bovati argues that the verb *ykh* has a nuance of intervention with the intention of establishing justice.

sentence.²⁰⁷ The unity of this verse with vv. 7 and 10 is questioned because the accusations here are in second person plural as against the third person plural in the previous verses. However, the change of person is to be attributed to the fact that it is a collection of sayings which the editor did not smoothen out while combining them, rather than to any specific prophetic style of preaching.²⁰⁸

The verse continues the accusation of immoral practices with the mention of it taking place in two more areas. The accusation in 11a “because you trample on the poor” has a thematic parallel in Amos 2,7a: “They trample (upon the dust of the earth) on the head of the poor”. However, there is some difficulty in understanding the wording of the accusation in 11a as the verb *bšs* is a *hapax legomenon*. A similar verb *bss/bws* is well attested in the Bible and means “to trample underfoot” (cf. Ps 44,6; 60,14; Prov 27,7; Isa 14,19.25 et al). According to many commentators the root *bšs* could be a conflation between the similarly pronounced verbs with second person masculine plural suffixes *bwskm* and *bwškm*. The origin of the latter is attributed to wrongly spelling *bws/bss* with the phonetically similar ‘š’.²⁰⁹ However, this suggestion is not fully satisfactory and scholars like H.W. Wolff and S.M. Paul think that the word is probably a derivative from the Akkadian verb *šabāšu* “to exact grain taxes”.²¹⁰ S.M. Paul has argued: “Thus Amos is inveighing against the unfair, if not illegal, taxation of the indigent classes. The underprivileged are made to finance the indulgence of the wealthy by paying taxes collected at harvest time.”²¹¹ However, Andersen and Freedman point out: “It is a very long shot to import into Hebrew a technical word from Akkadian, especially when that word itself has to be rearranged, by both metathesis and dissimilation.”²¹² The fact that the root *bws/bss* is well known in the Hebrew Bible as mentioned above, and that this phrase has a thematic parallel in Amos 2,7 though with an entirely different word *š’p/šwp*, but with the meaning “to trample” (the head of the poor...) makes the emendation of the word into *bws/bss* in 11a with the same meaning more reasonable.

How the poor are being “trampled upon” is elaborated in the following part of the verse, 11b: “and you take levies of grain from them”. Here again, the meaning of the word

²⁰⁷ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton* 2, p. 273. The combination of *lākēn* and *ya’an* occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible and it could have served originally as an oral connective.

²⁰⁸ Arguing against S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 171. Paul notes that this is the only instance in Amos when *lākēn* does not introduce a direct invocation of punishment by YHWH (cf. pp. 171-72). For the other occurrences of *lākēn*, see 3,11; 4,12; 5,13.16; 6,7 and 7,17).

²⁰⁹ Here however, the difficulty still remains to explain the change of ‘š’ to ‘š’ in *bôšasķem*.

²¹⁰ The fact that this proposal can retain two of the Hebrew consonants and the existence of *šibšu* as a well documented tax in Mesopotamia support their argument. Cf. S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 172-73. See also H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton* 2, p. 290.

²¹¹ S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 173.

²¹² F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, p. 500.

mas'at is not clear. LXX has translated it δῶρα (the accusative neuter plural from δῶρον) meaning “a gift” normally in terms of food. This meaning is attested also in 2 Sam 11,8 and in Jer 40,5. Therefore, we may reasonably assume that the reference in Amos 5,11b is to depriving the poor even of the meagre amount of grain they have, by way of a gift or a levy.

1.4.2.3. Luxurious Houses and Pleasant Vineyards (vv. 11c.e.12)

V. 11c states another transgression: “houses of hewn stone you have built”. “The hewn stones” or “the dressed stones” (*'abnê gāzîl*) were costly and were used to build the Jerusalem temple and the inner courts of Solomon’s palace (cf. 1 Kgs 5,31; 6,36; 7,9.11.12), but here the reference seems to be to the private homes that were built with expensive stones. V. 11e further describes a similar transgression: “you have planted pleasant vineyards”. Vineyards are signs of prosperity in a settled society and they represent luxurious life and merry making in the Bible (cf. Gen 9,20; Num 16,14). The social injustice in the above instances consists not only in possessing excessive wealth in a society where the vast majority struggle to make their ends meet, but also in the fact that this is done at the expense of the poorer sections (cf. 11a).

Amos continues his arraignment of the upper class in v. 12. The litany of the transgressions in 2,6-8 is once again partly recalled in 5,12 and they include: afflicting the righteous, taking a bribe, and manipulating justice at the expense of the needy.²¹³ The word *kōp̄er* means legitimate compensation or a reward for work done in Exod 21,30; 30,12; Num 35,31.32; and in 1 Sam 12,3, but here in Amos 5,12, it stands for an illegal payment or a ransom paid for an illegitimate work²¹⁴ more like in 1 Sam 12,3; Prov 6,35 and in Job 36,18.²¹⁵

The mention of *bašša'ār* “at the gate” here suggests the judicial background of the saying as we have seen above in v. 10. The public nature of the gate in a city could guarantee transparency and objectivity of the judicial procedure and prevent manipulation of justice.²¹⁶ But the opposite is what Amos observes in his society as he mentions practice of bribery and denial of justice to the righteous and needy.

²¹³ Note the repeating of the words *peša'*, *šāddiq*, *'ebyôn* and *nāṭā(h)* in 2,6-8 and in 5,12 and also the similarity in the meaning of the phrases *šōrārê šāddiq lōq̄hê kōp̄er* (5,12c) with *mīkrām bakkeseṗ šāddiq* (2,6c).

²¹⁴ Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, Amos, p. 110.

²¹⁵ Similar accusations of corruption are leveled against Judah in Isa 5,7.23 and in 10,2.

²¹⁶ Pietro Bovati describes the function of “the gate” in the judicial process in Israel: “The gate owes its role as a law court to the fact that it was an area given over to public events in all the (fortified) cities of Israel. The comings and goings of the population made judgment open to intervention by any passer-by, and allowed the involvement of the citizenry in the course of a juridical action. From this point of view, a trial ‘at the gate’ is the direct opposite of a secret procedure of an inquisitorial nature, or of private vendettas or summary executions perpetrated as the opportunity presented itself.” P. Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, p. 230.

1.4.3. YHWH Knows and Authorizes the Punishment (vv. 12a.16a.17)

The fact that “I (YHWH) know” (*yāda ’tî*) “your (Israel’s) transgressions” (*piš ’ēkem* cf. also 2,6) is affirmed and it acts as a key for the prophet in his theological understanding of the situation. God’s awareness of the iniquities committed against his people in Egypt (cf. Exod 2,25; 3,7) had prompted him to intervene actively on behalf of them. By sounding a warning to the Israelites that YHWH is aware of their iniquities, they are reminded that they will have to bear the consequences of their behaviour. At the same time the reminder of YHWH’s awareness of their situation acts as a consolation for the victims of injustice, then they know that the God who knows their sufferings will come to their protection.

The authorization by YHWH of the declaration is achieved through the use of messenger formulas at the beginning (v. 16a) and at the end (v. 17c). The hand of YHWH in the punishment is evident also from the phrase: *kî ’e ’ēbōr baqirbākā ’āmar yhw* “for I will pass through your midst, says the Lord” (v. 17b). The usage *’br b* here reminds one of the similar use of the word with the preposition in Exod 12,12, where the punitive intervention of YHWH against Egypt is referred to.²¹⁷ This is another instance of the prophet looking back into history, especially to the founding events of Israel, to make them realize their ingratitude in spite of the benevolent actions of YHWH. It is a paradox that their God is forced once again to “pass through”, but now not saving, but punishing Israel.

1.4.4. The Punishment: Futility, Mourning (vv. 11d.f. 16-17)

The adverb *lākēn* “therefore” in v. 11a begins the declaration of punishment. Though not a technical legal word, *lākēn* is used many times to announce a sanction “which indicates the (punitive) consequence of the charged crime” (cf. Judg 10,13; 1 Sam 2,30; 1 Kgs 14,10 et al).²¹⁸ It is often used to indicate the consequence of the accusations expressed in a prophetic judgment speech (cf. Isa 1,24; 5,13.14; Jer 7,20.32; 8,10; Ezek 5,8.10; Hos 2,8.16; Mic 2,3; 3,12 et al). Amos uses the adverb to announce judgments in 3,11; 4,12; 5,11.16; 6,7; and in 7,17.²¹⁹ In the prophetic judgment speeches *lākēn* has not only the function of connecting the judgment to the transgression, but it also assumes the nuance of a warning.

1.4.4.1. Futility of Construction and Agricultural Activities (vv. 11d.f)

The judgment speech in v. 11 is formulated in the form of a “futility curse” which can be described as curse which involves “the reversal of one’s expectations”²²⁰:

²¹⁷ Another use of *’br b* refers to the harmful passing through of “the worthless” in Nah 2,1.

²¹⁸ P. Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, p. 86.

²¹⁹ The only use of the adverb in Amos for a purpose other than the announcement of judgment is in 5,13, which is considered a later text. Here the adverb serves to state the expected behaviour as the punishment takes place.

²²⁰ Cf. S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 173.

“you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them;
you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine.” (v. 11c-f)

Here the form has a protasis, which describes an activity, and an apodosis, which begins with *wəlō* “but ... not” and explains the futility of the activity.²²¹ The first apodosis says that the Israelites shall not live in the houses they built (v. 11d). The allusion here could be to the devastation caused by a war which destroys houses or to the exile which forces the people to abandon their houses. YHWH’s punishment includes the destruction of ‘luxurious houses’, built by exploiting the poor also in 3,15: “I will tear down the winter house as well as the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end, says the LORD.” In the opinion of the prophet, the wealthy have no right to continue to live in the opulent houses they have built and thus enjoy the wealth they accumulated by trampling upon the poor.

The second apodosis declares a punishment in the similar tone: they shall not drink wine from the pleasant vineyards that they have planted (cf. 11f). The people who have gained their wealth through unlawful means, through extortion (cf. 11a), and have used that money to plant vineyards in order to make their lives more splendid are not going to enjoy the fruit of their labour. The deprivation of wine is part of the punishment announced also in Isa 24,9; Mic 6,15; and in a near duplication of Amos 5,11 in Zeph 1,13. This punishment foresees the futility of the agricultural activity, which would have hit life very hard in an agricultural community like Israel.

1.4.4.2. All Pervasive Mourning (vv. 16-17)

A second use of the adverb *lākēn* in v. 16a follows further announcement of punishments in the form of a lamentation (cf. vv. 16-17). The announcement is a continuation of v. 11 and it takes up the previously mentioned accusations. The judgment is characterized by the use of the word *mispēd* “mourning” which occurs 3x (16c.f.17a). The mourning is all pervasive as it takes place everywhere including the public places viz., in *rəhōbōt* “town squares” (16c), in *hūšōt* “streets” (16d), and in *kəramīm* “vineyards” (17a). The fact that mourning takes place also in the vineyards, the normal place of rejoicing in the Bible (cf. Judg 9,27; 21,20-21; Jer 48,33),²²² points to the reversal of the destiny of the people of Israel. This verse also resembles Isa 16,10: “Joy and gladness are taken away from the fruitful field; and in the vineyards no songs are sung, no shouts are raised; no treader treads out wine in the

²²¹ D.R. Hillers, *Treaty-curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964, p. 28. The wording and style reflects Deut 28,30c-f. Deut 28,30-31.38-40 are typical example of curses of the above type. This type of futility curse is also found in Hos 4,10; 5,6; 8,7; 9,12.16. (cf. p. 29). Other examples in Amos are 4,8 and 8,12 with parallels in Micah 3,4 and 6,14-15.

²²² Cf. S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 180.

presses; the vintage-shout is hushed.” (NRSV) The phrase *wəqār’û ’ikkār ’el-’ēbel* “they have called the serf to mourning” (16e) shows that the farmers too are part of those who mourn, thus making the effects once again visible in the agricultural field.²²³

1.5. Affluent People Living in False Security (6,1-14)

Amos 6,1-14 has two clearly defined units: vv.1-7 is a woe oracle or a lamentation and has the elements of a prophetic judgment speech with accusations and announcement of punishment; the second unit vv. 8-14 begins with a swearing formula and an extended prophetic messenger formula in v. 8 and ends with the same messenger formula used as concluding epithet in v. 14a.

1.5.1. The Addressees: “the House of Israel”

The lamentation is addressed to *bêt yisrā’el* “the house of Israel”, indirectly in v.1b and explicitly in v. 14. V. 1 gives further details of the addressees as *hašša ’ānannîm bašiyyôn* “those who are at ease in Zion” and as *habbōṭḥîm bahar šōmrôn* “those who feel secure on Mount Samaria”. It is surprising if “those who are at ease in Zion” refers to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, as the ministry of Amos is supposed to have taken place in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The phrase is often attributed to an editorial intervention by a southern redactor.²²⁴ However, it is not absolutely necessary to treat it as such and therefore as secondary. As Simian-Yofre suggests, the title Zion here represents the political organization, economic power and religious security in Zion in Judah and Samaria in Israel and thus fits very well as the destination of the oracle of Amos.²²⁵

1.5.2. The Accusations: Disregard for the Will of YHWH (6,1-6.12-13)

1.5.2.1. Futility of False Security (vv. 1-3)

The false sense of security and the arrogant self confidence of the elites of the capital are condemned in v. 1. *ša’ānān* “be at ease” can have a negative nuance and verge on arrogance as in 2 Kgs 19,28 and Isa 37,29, when the sense of security leads the people to take a stand against YHWH. In the same way, the verb “to trust” / “to feel secure” (*bāṭah*) in 1b has also both positive and negative meanings in the Bible. Used positively it is a condition of peace and security promised for those who faithfully observe the statutes and ordinances of YHWH (cf. Lev 25,18-19), which includes material prosperity and military security protected

²²³ Though it is a subjective interpretation, Deissler says that the serfs are called to mourn for their masters as their last service to them, which means also their liberty from serfdom. Cf. A. Deissler, *Zwölf Propheten. Hosea. Joel. Amos*, Die Neue Echter Bibel AT, Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1981, p. 115.

²²⁴ The suggestion of Wolff that the whole phrase is secondary, in fact, destroys the parallelism. Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2*, pp. 314-16. J. Jeremias’ suggestion that a Judean redactor corrected the name of another city to Zion in order to make the oracle applicable to Judah is probable, but we do not have convincing evidence for this suggestion. Cf. J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos*, p. 83, n. 1.

²²⁵ Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, Amos, pp. 127-28.

by him (cf. Deut 12,10; 33,12; 33,28; Isa 36,7 et al). Negatively it can mean just military security (cf. Deut 28,52; Judg 18,7.10.27; Isa 31,1; 36,4.5.6.9; Jer 5,17), or security felt by relying on false images (cf. Isa 42,17; 59,4; Hab 2,18) or on themselves (cf. Isa 47,8.10; Zeph 2,15).²²⁶ In Amos 6,1 the sense of security felt by the people is without relying on YHWH and his will and hence it is a false or unreliable security.

V. 1c poses problems for translation: *nəqūbê rē'sîṭ haggôyîm ûbā'û lāhem bêt yisrā'el*. The first part of this phrase is usually translated: “The notables of the foremost of the nations”. The syntax of the second part is difficult and a literal translation of it would be something like: “and the House of Israel went to them”. It makes sense to translate it with Simian-Yofre: “*dietro alle quali è andata la casa d'Israele*” (behind whom the house of Israel went)²²⁷. He has also pointed out that the term “the foremost” is applied to Babylon in the genealogy in Gen 10,10. The reference in Amos could be also to a powerful nation from the north like Babylon, and in the circumstances here, the reference could be to Assyria. It is also known that Jeroboam II followed a pro-Assyrian policy and refused to join the western coalition.²²⁸ It is possible that the prophet is referring to the futility of alliances, like the one forged by Jeroboam II, ignoring the will of YHWH to protect Israel from the disaster.

In v. 2 they are invited “to cross over”, “to go” and “to come down” (imperative forms used) and observe some of their powerful neighboring countries like Calne, Hamath and Gath, and realize that their own situation is not better, but worse.²²⁹ The verse functions as a rhetorical question: if the kingdoms as great and powerful as Calne, Hamath and Gath were punished by the Lord, will the destiny of Israel and Judah, who are relatively small states compared to them, be anything different from these powerful nations? The answer is clear to the listener: if those powerful countries were not immune to attack and devastation, then nor are Israel and Judah.

²²⁶ Some other examples for the reference to false security in the Bible are the following: Isa 30,12; 32,9.11.

²²⁷ ו pre-positioned to ל functions as a relative pronoun. Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, pp. 125.128.

²²⁸ Cf. J.H. Hayes, *Amos*, p. 183.

²²⁹ The three cities mentioned are Calne, the city where Nimrod began his ambitious empire building according to the traditions of Israel (cf. Gen 10,10). Calneh is mentioned only here in the Hebrew Bible. Andersen and Freedman identify it as the city conquered by Tiglath-pileasar about 738. Cf. F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, p. 559. Hamath too fell to him a short time later according to the authors. Hamath, a kingdom frequently mentioned in history as well as in the traditions of Israel, is also mentioned many times in the Bible. In Amos it is supposed to be at the border of Israel positioned opposite Wadi-Arabah (cf. Am 6,14). Later on, it is cited as the place of imprisonment of the son of Jehoahaz, the son and successor of king Josiah (cf. 2 Kgs 23,33). It is here that the sentence of Zedekiah, the execution of his sons and the trial of his nobles took place (cf. Jer 39,5-7; 52,9; Jer 52,27). Hamath seems to have belonged at some time in its history to the kingdom of Israel, specifically during the reign of Jeroboam son of Joash (cf. 2 Kgs 14,28). Gath belonged to the group of traditional enemies of Israel, the Philistines. It was one of the cities to which the captured ark of the covenant was taken, and it was consequently punished with tumors on the people (cf. 1 Sam 5,8-9). Andersen and Freedman propose that since the questions that follow refer to kingdoms and territories, “it seems best to take Gath as representing the entire Philistine domain.” F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, p. 561.

V. 3 has another description of the ‘no one can touch us’ attitude of the Israelite elites as those who “put far away the day of doom (*yôm rā’*), and bring near the reign of violence”. In their false security, the Israelites have lost sight of the day of evil and persist in their arrogant and insolent behavior.²³⁰ In Amos 8,10 a “bitter day” (*yôm mār*) is predicted when YHWH will turn their “feast into mourning”, “songs into lamentation” and so on. The rich live as though nothing is going to happen to them and this attitude is clearly described also in 9,10: “the evil shall not be brought up or overtake us”. However, in the opinion of the prophet, the arrogant attitude that the day of doom will not affect them will have a contrary effect and will usher in “a reign of violence”.²³¹ The accusation leveled here could be formulated in the words of S.M. Paul: “The leaders of the north are directly responsible for precipitating and accelerating the very misfortune that they claim will never overtake them.”²³²

1.5.2.2. Leading Indulgent Life Unconcerned about the Plight of the Poor (vv. 4-6)

The false security without caring for the will of YHWH, a crime in its own right, also leads to further transgressions with devastating effects on the social life of the people. The resultant dissolute and self-indulgent behaviour of the elite is described through a series of participial phrases: “lying (*šōkəḥîm*) on the beds of ivory”, “lounging (*səruḥîm*) on the couches”, “eating (*’ōkəlîm*) lambs from the flocks” (v. 4); “singing idly” or “groaning” (*pōrəṭîm*) (v. 5); “drinking (*šōṭîm*) wine in bowls” (v. 6). All these actions suggest a feast in the nature of an orgy or a misuse of a cultic feast of mourning called Marzē 𐤎, which is condemned in v. 7.

Lying on “the beds of ivory” and “lounging on couches” (v. 4) are indications of the luxurious life of the rich.²³³ The lavishness of their lifestyle is also indicated by the rich menu and the extravagance of the feast. A sumptuous meal with so many dishes would have been unimaginable for the ordinary people. Eating all the rich food such as “lambs from the folk, and calves from the stall” (v. 4c: NRSV)²³⁴ they remain insensitive to the poor who hunger and thereby ignore the precepts of social justice (cf. v. 12), demanded by the will of YHWH.

²³⁰ *yôm rā’* “the day of evil” is used only here. *yôm mār* is found more often in the Bible (cf. Ps 27,5; Ps 41,2; Prov 16,4; Jer 17,17.18; 51,2).

²³¹ The expression *šebet ḥāmās* is difficult. Interpreting *šebet* as a substantive from the root *yšb*, the expression is understood as “a seat of violence” or “a throne of violence” implying the violence perpetrated by a king or a kingdom.

²³² S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 205.

²³³ Having couches with ivory frames would have cost a fortune as ivory is a very costly material, a luxury good imported from abroad (cf. 1 Kgs 10,22; Ezek 27,15). King Solomon had made a throne of ivory (cf. 1 Kgs 10,18); and king Ahab built a house of ivory (cf. 1 Kgs 22,39). Amos also warns the people that the houses of ivory will collapse (cf. 3,15).

²³⁴ Simian-Yofre says that the reference here is to “fatted calves” (*’ēḡel-marbēq*) citing the occurrence of the term in 1 Sam 28,24; Jer 46,21 and Mic 3,20. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, p. 131. Jeremias

Their sumptuous meal is accompanied by some musical activity (cf. v. 5) – they are “dining to the lilt of musical airs”²³⁵, as S.M. Paul puts it. The participle *p̄ōrāṭîm*²³⁶ “singing idly” refers not just to playing music or singing melodiously but to screaming or making a din under the influence of wine (cf. Lev 19,10).²³⁷ Being drunk they are howling rather than singing and they “improvise” new songs, if Wolff’s suggestion for the meaning of the verb *p̄āraṭ* is correct. They also “invent for themselves music instruments like David” (5b: NKJV), a phrase used ironically here, which could mean that the drunkards used cutlery and plates like music instruments²³⁸ to accompany their drunken discourses and considered themselves as great as David at playing music. Andersen and Freedman describe the reason behind the prophetic criticism of their crazy music:

No doubt the musicians of temple and court belonged to the elite of Israelite society along with members of other professions and guilds, such as scribes, wise men, artisans, and the like. So they, along with their lords sacred and secular and the other managers and manipulators of society, are targets of prophetic attack and denunciation.²³⁹

The prophet condemns “those who are drinking” (*haššōṭîm*) wine in bowls²⁴⁰ and anoint themselves with finest oils. Wine and oil are luxury goods used at parties and they represent other pleasures of life, along with the luxurious houses and sumptuous dishes. The concern of the prophet here is, once again, the luxurious and over indulgent life of the Israelites. In spite of them enjoying all the riches and pleasures of life, they remain completely blind to the miserable condition of the “house of Joseph”. There is a subtle difference between the two epithets: house of Israel and house of Joseph. While house of Israel in this judgment oracle refers to the house of Samaria or the nobles of the capital city (cf. 6,1.14), house of Joseph implies the whole people who lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (cf. 1 Kgs 11,28; Zech 10,6).²⁴¹ This latter epithet, used also in 5,6 and its variant “the remnant of Joseph” (5,15), is a clear contrast to “the House of Israel” or the accused in the oracle and signifies the people who have no access to the luxuries mentioned above²⁴² and who instead

interprets it, bringing out the rich quality of the meat spoken about: “Gegessen wird nur edelstes Fleisch: sei es von ausgesucht zarten Lämmern; sei es von Kälbern, die im Stall angebunden wurden, um ohne Bewegungsfreiheit mehr Fett anzusetzen.” J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos*, pp. 87-88.

²³⁵ S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 206.

²³⁶ The meaning of the verb *p̄āraṭ* is not clear. It can either mean to howl or to extemporize music. cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten* 2, p. 320.

²³⁷ The noun *peret* refers to “fallen grapes” in Lev 19,10. Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, p. 131.

²³⁸ Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, p. 131.

²³⁹ F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, p. 564.

²⁴⁰ The term *mizrāq* refers to a vessel used for cultic activity elsewhere: cf. 2 Chr 4,8.11.22; Jer 52,18.19. However there is less possibility of a cultic meaning here, since cultic themes are absent in this passage.

²⁴¹ The ‘house of Joseph’ refers to the whole people who lived in the northern part of the undivided kingdom in Josh 18,5; Judg 1,22 et al.

²⁴² Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, *Amos*, p. 132.

have to pay for the self-indulgent life of the rich. The lack of concern on the part of the house of Israel about the plight of the poor, here referred to as house of Joseph, is the reason for the imminent punitive intervention of YHWH and for the devastation of their country. YHWH, on the other hand, is said to be gracious to “the remnant of Joseph” (cf. 5,15), which means that he will not be totally indifferent to their suffering.

The merry making referred to in the accusations above is often associated with a feast called *Marzēḥ* as also indicated by the occurrence of the word *mirzah* “revelry” in v. 7b.²⁴³ There has been much discussion in recent times about the nature of this feast, which may have been associated with funerals in Canaanite society. The term is associated with mourning in its only other biblical occurrence in Jer 16,5.²⁴⁴ The phrase *bêt marzēaḥ* “house of mourning” here is a place where some ritual related to the funeral is taking place. However, extra-biblical attestations show that the participants of this feast belonged to the higher class of society and the programme included a cult meal and wine drinking.²⁴⁵ If the description of Amos of the self indulgence and epicurean eating and drinking which he condemns is associated with this feast, then it indicates that the nature of the celebration of this ritual had deteriorated considerably during his times and Andersen and Freedman say, “Their behavior would have been all the more frivolous and reprehensible if they were carrying on in a *marzēaḥ* instead of using that institution for its intended purpose.”²⁴⁶

1.5.2.3. Disregard for Justice, Righteousness and Actions of YHWH (vv. 12-13)

The two further accusations in this unit expressed in the form of rhetorical questions in vv. 12-13 deal with issues very different from the otherwise closed content of this chapter dealing with specific aspects of life in the capital city. First two questions, viz., “Do horses run on rocks? Does one plough the sea with oxen?” (v. 12ab NRSV), express the absurd manner in which the people of Israel are behaving. It is obvious that their modes of actions are self destructive. The self-destructive actions are described in the statement that follows, which closely reflect the phrasing of Amos 5,7, and it reads: “you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood” (v. 12c NRSV). The purpose of justice and righteousness is to create a situation which enhances life for all in Israelite society, but the accused have distorted these values in such a way that they become “poison”, meaning a threat to the life of common people, or “wormwood”, rendering their life bitter.

²⁴³ *Marzēḥ* is an institution well attested in the ancient Near East from 14 to 6 century BCE, though most of the attestations are younger than Amos. See the excursus in J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos*, pp. 85-86.

²⁴⁴ As a sign of YHWH preventing the people from mourning, Jeremiah is asked not to enter “the house of mourning” (*bêt marzēaḥ*).

²⁴⁵ Cf. J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos*, p. 86.

²⁴⁶ F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, p. 567.

The theme of the accusations in v. 13 is very different, although the verse is syntactically well connected to v. 12. Here there is another rhetorical question: “you who rejoice in Lo-debar (*lō’ dābār*), who say, “Have we not by our own strength taken Karnaim (*qarnāyim*) for ourselves?” (NRSV) Both the usages Lo-debar and Karnaim may have been used as puns: *lō’ dābār* as a place name (2 Sam 9,4,5;17,27) as well as with a literal meaning “a useless thing”; and *qarnāyim* as a place name (cf. Ashtoreth Karnaim in Gen 14,5) as well as with the meaning “two horns” symbolizing a military victory in which Israel took pride.²⁴⁷ Through this wordplay, the Israelites who boast about their recent military victories as proof of their own achievements without giving credit to YHWH are ridiculed, challenged, and warned that their arrogance will lead to their inevitable fall. S.M Paul effectively describes the folly in their behaviour: “their panegyric preening pride pompously precedes their precipitous fall”²⁴⁸.

1.5.3. YHWH Abhors “the Pride of Jacob” (v. 8a-c)

The section (vv. 8-11) has no terminological connection with v.7 and has a distinct style as it is presented as a speech from YHWH. Beginning with a formula of swearing (8a) implying “the implacable and irreversible nature of the impending punishment”²⁴⁹ and an extended prophetic messenger formula (8b), it provides us with some details about the devastated city (vv. 8c-11), and as such can be considered a thematic continuation of the punishment announced in v.7. The shorter form of the swearing formula, *nišba’ yhwh* “YHWH has sworn” (also Amos 8,7) occurs 21x in the Bible. The phrase is often associated with taking possession of the land and to the forty years wandering in the desert: Deut 1,8; 2,14; 6,18; 8,1; 9,5; 11,9,21; 26,3; 28,11; 30,20; 31,7; Josh 5,6 (2x); or with great promises made by YHWH in history (2 Sam 3,9-10; Ps 110,4; 132,11). In the context of Israel’s punishment it is used only in Jer 51,14 and in Amos 8,7 and in the context of the punishment

²⁴⁷ Though *lō’ dābār* as a place name is found in 2 Sam 9,4,5 and 17,29, a victory worth rejoicing is nowhere mentioned. So a literal translation “a useless thing” as suggested by Simian-Yofre makes sense (cf. H. Simian-Yofre, Amos, p. 135). Similar is the case with Karnaim. A victory over Karnaim is nowhere mentioned though it is mentioned as a place name in Gen 14,5: Ashtoreth Karnaim, literally the city of ‘Ashtoreth with two horns’. The word *qarnāyim* can mean “two horns” as in Dan 8,3. The LXX has accordingly translated Amos 6,13b with κέρατα. See the LXX translation of the verse which reflects the above point of view: οἱ εὐφρανόμενοι ἐπ’ οὐδενὶ λόγῳ οἱ λέγοντες οὐκ ἐν τῇ ἰσχύι ἡμῶν ἔσχομεν κέρατα “you who rejoice at useless word, you who say, “have we not by our own authority possessed horns?” We can only say that the name Karnaim was chosen because of the meaning of the word “two horns”, which is a symbol of power or arrogance. The reference could be the recent military success of Jeroboam II mentioned in 2 Kgs 14,23-29. Rejoicing in these victories as their own achievement is a “*lō’ dābār*” i.e., nothing, vanity.

²⁴⁸ S.M. Paul, Amos, p. 220. Amos mentions the hands of YHWH behind taking possession of the land of the Amorites in 2,10. Taking credit for the military victory by the Israelites amounts to ingratitude. And this was precisely what the Israelites were warned not to do when they experience prosperity in the land they take possession of (cf. Deut 8,11-18): they were not to take pride in their own strength (v. 17) when they have abundance of food and live in beautiful houses (cf v. 12), and when they have material wealth in terms of herds and flocks, silver and gold (v. 13).

²⁴⁹ S.M. Paul, Amos, p. 213.

of other nations in Isa 14,24 and in 62,8. The expression resembles the often used phrase in the Bible “The land that YHWH swore to give...” The historical recollections of YHWH’s actions are alluded to here also as a prelude to the announcement of punishment.

The siege foretold in v. 8d would render useless “the pride of Jacob and his fortresses”, referring apparently to the military success and economic prosperity in which Israel trusted. “The pride of Jacob” is mentioned also in Ps 47,5 and here it stands for the inheritance of Israel, chosen and loved by YHWH. On the other hand, the arrogance or the pride of Jacob is abhorred by YHWH in Amos 6,8c and it is one of the reasons why he will deliver up the city and all in it (v. 8c). The listeners are familiar with the fact that Jacob acted for his own personal glory, without caring for the glory of YHWH. The recollection of this serves to call to their attention the fact that their behavior is no different from their arrogant and self-serving ancestor. Similarly, the pride and false security of the contemporaries of Amos is disliked by YHWH and they are going to be delivered up (*sgr hiphil*) for this reason: “I will hand over the city and her multitude”. YHWH’s hand in what is going to take place is made explicit.

1.5.4. The Punishment: Defeat, Destruction, Exile (vv. 7. 8d-11.14)

1.5.4.1. Exile and End of Revelry (v. 7)

The adverb *lākēn* “therefore” in v. 7, the formal element indicating the shift to punishment, is emphatic and has in its purview the whole tirade of accusations that are leveled against Israel in the preceding verses. The punishment pronounced is exile in unambiguous terms, as indicated by the terms *yiġlû* “shall go into exile” and *gōlîm* “exiles” (v. 7a). As they march into exile, the notables or the elite of society (cf. v. 1; implicitly understood as the subject of the verb here) are said to be the first ones to go, leading the herd from the front (*yiġlû bārō’š*). The exile marks the end of the revelry: “and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away” (v. 1b NRSV). The people who are responsible in society are misusing the authority and privileges bestowed on them, even abusing the cultic feasts for self-indulgence. They will face the consequences of their actions as Andersen and Freedman comment:

This charge sums up the case against all of the individuals and groups identified in the list: those who are at ease in Zion, those secure in Mount Samaria, those who flee from or go headlong toward the evil day, those who lie on the beds of ivory, those who eat lambs from the flock, those who strum on stringed instruments and drink wine from basins. ... The consequence is all too plain: for their sins, their self indulgence, neglect of duty, oppression of the poor, abandonment of Yahweh, they will go into exile at the head of the exiles.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Amos*, pp. 568-69.

1.5.4.2. Devastation of the City (vv. 8d-11)

The swearing of YHWH and the declaration of his hatred for the “pride of Jacob” are followed by the description of a pathetic city devastated by war. If ten people survived the onslaught of the war, they shall die, with the exception of the one who confirms the death of others (cf. v. 10), probably of famine.²⁵¹ Though the exact nature of the catastrophe is not specified, the impossibility of escape is stressed. The particle interjection, *hās* “hush”, “quiet”, indicate respect for the presence of God in what has taken place in Israel (cf. 8,3).²⁵² It also expresses shock at the massive death and utter destruction. The usage of this word in the Bible is associated with the presence of God cf. Hab 2,20; Zeph 1,7; Zec 2,17. In Amos the active involvement of YHWH in what is going to take place is once again brought into focus through the use of this particle. The punishment includes not only loss to life, but also destruction of houses large and small in v. 11 as in 3,15.

1.5.4.3. Oppression by a Nation Raised up by YHWH (v. 14)

The accusations in vv. 12-13 are followed up with further announcement of punishment in v. 14. It once again reaffirms the role of YHWH in effecting the punishment. The instrument of YHWH is specified as *gōy* “a nation” without naming it.²⁵³ However the human agent is insignificant because it is YHWH, the God of Sabbath, himself who will bring about the punishment. The word *lāḥaṣ* is used many times in the context of the oppression that Israel underwent in Egypt (Exod 3,9; Deut 26,7; Judg 6,9) and also to mean using military pressure or suffering under such pressure especially in the book of Judges (Judg 1,34; 2,18; 4,3; 10,12). The geographical references, Lebo-Hamath, the northern border of Israel and the Valley of Arabah, the southern border of Judah²⁵⁴ means that the destruction of the land will be vast, from north to its southern borders.

1.6. Greedy Merchants who Appropriate Wealth at the Expense of the Poor (8,4-14)

Amos 8,4-14 is a redactionally inserted series of oracles of warning after the fourth vision (8,1-3). J. Jeremias calls Amos 8,4-7 a commentary on 2,6-8²⁵⁵ and we cannot fail to notice the thematic and literary similarities. In 8,4 the invocation “hear this” follows a description of the people to whom the discourse is addressed: “you that trample on the needy,

²⁵¹ Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, Amos, p. 133.

²⁵² Referring to silence at the presence of dead bodies.

²⁵³ The specification of the instrument of punishment as “a nation” is unique to this verse in Amos.

²⁵⁴ Lebo-Hamath is mentioned as the northern border of Israel also in Josh 13,5; Judg 3,3; 1 Kgs 8,65; 2 Kgs 14,25; 1 Chr 13,5; Ezek 47,20 and 48,1. Valley of Arabah is mentioned only in this verse. It should be in the vicinity of “Sea of Arabah” (cf. Deut 3,17; 4,49; Josh 3,16; 12,3; 2 Kgs 14,25).

²⁵⁵ The commentary character of 8,4-7 is clear from the fact that the invitation “hear this” is not directed at what immediately follows in vv 4-6, but at what preceded, in v. 2: “the end of my people Israel” and on v. 3: “so many dead bodies”. Also the swearing of God in v.7 is not followed by an announcement of punishment, as in the other instances in Amos, but by an assurance that the deeds of the accused remain always present before God. Cf. J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos*, p. 115.

and *is out to* eliminate [translating the hiphil infinitive construct of *šbt* so with ELB] the afflicted of the land”. The oracle is a combination of originally separate literary units.²⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the consistent theme of impending punishment to be realized in the future justify considering the whole oracle as a unit.²⁵⁷

1.6.1. The Accusations: Oppression through Malpractices in Trade (vv. 4-6)

The description here has similarities with 2,6-8 as the victims of injustice include *dallîm*, *'ebyôn*, and *'ānî*. However, the intentions of the accusations are quite different: in 2,6-8 the prophet wanted to show, through transgressions touching upon different life situations, how much weightier were the sins of Israel compared to the neighbouring nations who themselves were acting badly; 8,4-6 is actually an explanation for the already proclaimed “end of Israel” (cf. v. 2).²⁵⁸

1.6.1.1. Oppressing the Needy and Afflicted (v. 4)

The root *šwp* in 8,4 means “to crush” or “to trample”. Here it is “the needy” who are trampled upon instead of “the heads of the poor” in 2,7. The LXX has an addition here: εἰς τὸ πρωῖ, rendering the meaning “they crush the poor early in the morning”. The Greek translation adds to the gravity of the crime as it is practiced “in the morning”, meaning that it could have been a usual practice by them and not an exceptional one. The second crime accused in this verse is: “to bring (*lašbîṭ*) the afflicted (*'ānāw/ 'ānî*) of the land to an end”. The new verb introduced here, the *hiphil* infinitive construct of *šbt* acts like an active participle being coordinated with the preceding participial phrase with a copula²⁵⁹ with the meaning “causing to eliminate” or causing to cease to exist”. Both these transgressions are without further details and we may have to read further down to vv. 5-6 to know the nature of the oppression of the needy and afflicted that is spoken about.

1.6.1.2. Malpractices in Trade to the Disadvantage of the Poor and Needy (vv. 5-6)

While in Amos 2,6-8, the accusations were in general nature or without mention of any contexts, in Amos 8,5-6 we have more specific details about the nature of the crimes committed. The accusations are implied in the attitude of the accused, expressed through their questions: “when will the New Moon be over, that we may sell grain? (v. 5ab); and the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, to make the ephah small and the shekel great, and

²⁵⁶ The first part consists of a series of accusations (vv. 4-6) and the second part is an announcement of punishment (vv. 7-14). The second part is, again, not a coherent unit: vv. 7-10 predicts the actions of YHWH; v. 11 is the announcement of “the approaching of the days” by YHWH; and vv. 12-14 is a comment by the prophet.

²⁵⁷ Arguing with M.A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets I*, p. 263.

²⁵⁸ Cf. J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos*, p. 116.

²⁵⁹ Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, Amos, p. 163. So it is not needed to emend the text by deleting ‘w’. Cf. also H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2*, p. 371; S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 256.

to practice deceit with false balances?” (v. 5c)²⁶⁰ From these questions it is clear that the crimes of which the needy and afflicted are victims take place in the mercantile world. The accused waited greedily for the Feast of New Moon and Sabbath to be over as these were obligatory rest days and no commerce was allowed on these days.²⁶¹ They apparently could not bear the fact that they have to lose a new moon day every four weeks and the seventh day of every week on account of these holy days. They consider these sacred days with disdain as days which reduce their returns. The scant regard of the greedy merchants for the religious and cultural traditions of society like New Moon and Sabbath shows how deep rooted was their profit motive and how materialistic they had turned out to be in their mind-sets. They “are infuriated because ‘religion’ ruins their business”²⁶², as Soggin describes it.

The second crime consists of cheating customers using false weights and measures (v. 5c). Tampering with weights and scales is prohibited in the Bible according to Lev 19,35 and in Deut 25,14.15. A false weight is said to be an abomination to God in Prov 11,1 and in 20,10.23. “Scant measures” and “wicked scales” in the 8th century BCE Palestine are indicated also by prophet Micah (cf. 6,10-11).

The malpractices in business are with a purpose: “that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sell the chaff of the grain.” (v. 6). The preposition *bêt* before *keseṗ* “money” is instrumental and it means that poor and needy are ruined through cheating in trade with the help of money.²⁶³ They are bought or are made dependent on the greedy merchants. Through the repeating of the phrase, also used in 2,6, “to sell the poor for a pair of sandals” in 2,6c (see 1.2.2.2 above), changing the verb to “to buy”, some malpractice in trade is indicated, through which the needy are made dependent on the merchants or become bonded labourers.

At the third level, the malpractices also enable the greedy merchants “even to sell the refuse of the grain” (*ûmappal bar našbîr*). Unfortunately we have no further clues to understand precisely what this accusation means.²⁶⁴ It could either refer to selling even the chaff of the grain for a price or selling poor quality grain as good. It could also allude to

²⁶⁰ Hos 12,8ff. and Mic 6,10ff. also make accusations regarding the malpractices involving false weights and measures, which was probably widespread in ancient societies.

²⁶¹ Cf. A. Deissler, *Zwölf Propheten*, p. 128. The new moon day as a special day is mentioned in 1 Sam 20,5.20; 2 Kgs 4,23; Hos 2,13; Isa 1,13.14 et al, but it is not clear from the biblical texts whether it was forbidden to work on that day as on the day of Sabbath. From the mention of new moon day in Amos together with Sabbath, we may assume that it was a holy day similar to Sabbath or “at least [a] day on which it was unlawful to sell things”. J.A. Soggin, *The Prophet Amos*, p. 136. All business was forbidden on Sabbath as evident from Neh 13,15-21.

²⁶² J.A. Soggin, *The Prophet Amos*, p. 135.

²⁶³ Cf. J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos*, p. 117.

²⁶⁴ The noun *בשר* occurs also in Job 41,15 with the meaning “flesh”, but has no similarity to the context in Amos.

selling the grain fallen in the field, which was supposed to be left for the poor according to the Torah (cf. Lev 19,9-10; 23,22; Deut 24,19-21).²⁶⁵ I find the following explanation of Simundson very plausible: “The “sweepings of the wheat” are what is picked up from the floor, containing some wheat, but also dirt, chaff, or whatever other trash had fallen there. Then perhaps mixed with some clean grain, it is sold not as “sweepings from the floor” but as genuine product, pure grain.”²⁶⁶ The oppression and exploitation of the poor and needy has made them so dependent on the merchants that they are forced to buy even the chaff or poor quality grain for a price in order to make ends meet. It could be also that exploitation has reduced their purchasing power to such an extent that they can afford to buy only low quality food.

1.6.2. YHWH Swears by “the Pride of Jacob” and does not “Forget” (v.7)

The concept that “YHWH has sworn by the pride of Jacob”²⁶⁷ (8,7a) serves, though indirectly, as a further link to the past history of Israel, striking a chord with the fulfilled promise of land to their ancestor and the arrogant and self-serving nature of Jacob, as we have seen in our analysis of Amos 6,7. One may recall here the recollection of the salvation history in the context of Israel’s infidelity and God’s punishment in Amos 2,9-10. Following this line of thought, the swearing in 8,7 threatens the Israelites with punishment for the sin of arrogance, deep rooted in their history, and epitomized in Jacob traditions, and continued in their days through the manifold transgressions narrated by the prophet. He is afraid that the pride of Jacob is seen again in his days in the persons who oppress the poor and take away their rights. Just as perverting the Nazirites and forbidding prophesy are extra reasons inviting punishment in 2,11-16, here too, the pride of Jacob, symbolized in the arrogance and disregard for the will of God, is an extra reason why Israel has to fall.

The presence of the verb *šāḳah* “to forget” (cf. v. 7b) has the background of the people forgetting YHWH and his laws in the context of the salvation history. The correspondence between the people forgetting YHWH and he in turn deciding to forget his people is evident in the book of Hosea.²⁶⁸ Amos has used this verb to warn people that YHWH remembers not only his own actions in history, but also the iniquities of Israel, which they are continuing to

²⁶⁵ Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, Amos, p. 165.

²⁶⁶ D.J. Simundson, *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005, p. 228.

²⁶⁷ It is difficult to explain the fact that YHWH swears here by the name of another person because otherwise YHWH has sworn always by himself (6,8) or by his holiness (4,2) in the book of Amos. The fact that the concept “pride of Jacob” nowhere in the Bible refers to an epithet for YHWH calls for a different interpretation for this phrase.

²⁶⁸ Cf. H. Simian-Yofre, Amos, p. 165. The habit of the Israelites to forget YHWH is vividly described by the prophet Hosea: 2,15; 8,14;13,6. He further mentions that YHWH also forgets his people, who lack knowledge and who have forgotten his laws in 4,6.

commit in their daily lives (cf. 8.7b).²⁶⁹ The following punishment is a consequence of the fact that YHWH keeps good count of the misdeeds of Israel.

1.6.3. The Punishment: Natural Catastrophe, Abandonment, and Fall (vv. 8-14)

The nature of the punishment is described in vv. 8-14. The punishment here includes the trembling of the earth (v. 8), the transformation of light into darkness (9b) and feasts into lamentation (v. 10a), bitter mourning as at the death of an only son (v. 10c.), the absence of the guiding word of God (vv.11-12), and the fall of the young people and the apostates (vv. 13-14).

1.6.3.1. Terrestrial and Celestial Catastrophe and Resultant Mourning (vv. 8-10)

V. 8 narrates natural events as YHWH's means of bringing punishment upon the people for their immoral behavior²⁷⁰: the quaking of the land (v. 8a) or an earthquake is a sign of YHWH's displeasure (cf. Hab 3,6-7; Zech 14,4). An earthquake is mentioned also in the introductory note of the redactor in Amos 1,1. The tossing up / flooding and sinking of the River of Egypt (v. 8c)²⁷¹ is expected to add to the terrestrial destruction.

V. 9, beginning with a phrase *bayyôm-hahû* '“on that day” used always in the book of Amos except in the concluding vision (9,11) to express the day of punishment (cf. Amos 2,16; 8,3.13), focuses on the convulsions in the celestial world. The solar eclipse (v. 9) causing transformation of light into darkness is probably an allusion to the solar eclipse of 784, which would have been still vivid in the minds of the listeners.²⁷² The solar eclipse stands for the end of Israel predicted in v. 2, as also evident from Joel 3,4 and 4,15.²⁷³

The catastrophe caused by the terrestrial and celestial elements will turn their feasts into mourning (cf. v. 10a). Mourning in the prophetic literature is often due to the trouble that has come upon the people (cf. Isa 22,12; Jer 9,17; 16,5; Lam 2,5; 5,15; Amos 5,16; Mic 1,8; Zech 12,11). Shaven heads (v. 10b) is also a sign of punishment as we see in Isa 3,24; 15,2; 22,12; Jer 47,5 and Ezek 7,18. The intensity of the mourning is indicated by the fact it is “like the mourning for an only son” (v. 10c).

1.6.3.2. Abandonment by YHWH (vv. 11-12)

Another aspect of the punishment is going to be abandonment by YHWH and hunger for the words of God (cf. vv.11-12). The word of God announced by the prophet is seen here

²⁶⁹ YHWH does not forget the wicked deeds of his people (cf. v. 7b) in the context of using scant measures and deceitful measures as is also mentioned in Mic 6,10-11.

²⁷⁰ YHWH using natural phenomena in the plague narratives of Exodus (cf. Exod 10,21-29) might have been familiar to the listeners of Amos.

²⁷¹ The qere *wənišqā'ā(h)* “to be sunk” is the correct reading here because the ketib *wənišqā(h)* “to be drunk” does not make sense (cf. W. Rudolph, *Joel-Amos*, p. 262.). The leaving out of *š* could be an aural error (cf. S.M. Paul, *Amos*, p. 261 n 50.).

²⁷² Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten* 2, p. 378.

²⁷³ Cf. W. Rudolph, *Joel-Amos*, p. 265.

as indispensable to the people as food and water.²⁷⁴ Amos has mentioned the refusal of the people to hear the word of God (cf. 2,11ff.) and their persistence in it (cf. 7,16). As a consequence, the word will be taken away from them and the prophet predicts about the days that are coming²⁷⁵ when God's word will not be found at all (cf. 8,11-12). The absence of the word of God is supposed to cause a deep desire in the people like the longing of a hungry person for bread or like the yearning of a thirsty person for water (cf. v. 11b). Now, they shall go from sea to sea, from north to east searching for the word, but without success (cf. v. 12). Wolff has rightly pointed out that this multi-intentional collection of the sayings of the prophet serves to bring about the realization among the Israelites that with the loss of the word, they stand to lose not only their lives, but also the "Word" itself.²⁷⁶ The word symbolizes the guiding and inspiring presence of YHWH in the community. Israel's ignoring him and indulging in unjust practices nullify the effect of this presence and, in the opinion of the prophet, this absence will affect the community in a very significant way.

1.6.3.3. The Fall of Young Men and Women (vv. 13-14)

Vv. 13-14 marks the climax of the punishment. The defeat and fall here is not only of *habbaḥûrîm* "the young men" but also of *habbatûlôt hayyāpôt* "the beautiful young girls". The verb used here for the powerlessness to which they are subjected is the *hithpa'el* imperfect of 'lp meaning literally "to wrap oneself" (cf. Gen 38,14). Here it means metaphorically that they are overwhelmed by faintness due to excessive heat and acute thirst (cf. also Isa 51,20; Jonah 4,8).

And "they shall fall and never rise again", concludes the oracle in v. 14. It means that life shall come to a standstill and that death is certain. The verb *nāpal* "to fall" is a key word that describes the collective destiny of Israel in the book of Amos. In 3,5, a bird falling into a snare indicates metaphorically the fate of Israel. In 3,14, the horns of the altar to foreign gods are supposed to fall to the ground on the punishment day. It is the young woman of Israel who falls to the ground with no one to lift her up in 5,2. In 7,17 Amos warns Amaziah who forbade him to prophesy, saying that his sons and daughters shall fall by the sword. And finally in 8,14 Amos reaffirms that those who swear by the Ashima of Samaria "shall fall and never rise again". It is not surprising, then, that this same word is used to describe the new destiny of Israel in the vision of consolation. Here it is assured that "not a single pebble shall fall to earth" (9,9) from Israel in spite of being "shaken" by YHWH.

²⁷⁴ Cf. J.A. Soggin, *The Prophet Amos*, p. 139.

²⁷⁵ The phrase *hinnē(h) yāmîm bā'im* "Behold the days are coming" is a favorite expression of prophet Jeremiah occurring 15x in the book and often expresses the coming of evil upon the people.

²⁷⁶ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2*, p. 383.

1.7. Concluding Summary

The study of the above oracles and sayings was undertaken separately for each textual unit. The following synoptic table shows us the common structural and thematic elements in the different textual units and helps us to draw conclusions regarding the nature and content of the prophetic social critique:

Summary Table

| | 2,6-16 | 4,1-3 | 5,7+10.11.12+16-17 | 6,1-14 | 8,4-14 |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Addressees/the accused | Israel (v. 6b) | “the cows of Bashan” (v. 1a) or the affluent women of Samaria. | “the house of Israel” (<i>bêṭ yiśrā’ēl</i> v. 4), specified as the cream of society in vv. 7.10-12. | “the house of Israel” (<i>bêṭ yiśrā’ēl</i> v. 14), specified as “those who are at ease in Zion” (<i>hašša’ānannîm bašiyyôn</i>) and as “those who feel secure on Mount Samaria” (<i>habbōṭṭîm bahar šōmrôn</i>) (v. 1). | Those who trample on the needy, and eliminate the afflicted of the land (v. 4); the greedy business people (vv. 5-6). |
| Victims | “righteous” (<i>šāddîq</i> v. 6c); “needy” or “destitute” (<i>’ebyôn</i> v. 6c); “poor” (<i>dallîm</i> v. 7a); “afflicted” (<i>’ānāwîm</i> v. 7b); “a girl” (<i>na’ārā(h)</i> v. 7c); the poor debtor who is forced to mortgage his garment (v. 8b) | “poor” (<i>dallîm</i>) and “needy” (<i>’ebyônîm</i>) (v. 1b) | whom “justice” (<i>mišpāṭ</i>) and “righteousness” (<i>šəḏāqā(h)</i>) are denied (v.7); “poor” (<i>dal</i> v. 11a); “righteous” (<i>šāddîq</i> v.12b); and “needy” (<i>’ebyônîm</i> v.12c) | “the remnant of Joseph” (<i>šēber yôsēp</i> v. 6), who could be understood as people who have no access to luxuries and have to pay for the indulgent life of the rich | “needy” (<i>’ebyôn</i> vv. 4.6a); “afflicted” (<i>’ānî/’ānāw</i> v. 4); “poor” (<i>dallîm</i> v. 6a) |
| Accusations | “to sell” (<i>mkr</i>) the | “to oppress” (<i>’šq</i>) | Disregard for | False sense of security and | Trampling (<i>šwp</i>) on the |

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|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | <p>righteous and needy (v. 6d); “to trample” (<i>š’p</i>) on the head of the poor (v. 7a), “to pervert” (<i>nṯh</i>) the way of the afflicted (v. 7b),”to go” (<i>hlk</i>) referring to the sexual exploitation of a girl (v. 7c), “to stretch” (<i>נָטַח</i>) on distraised garments (v. 8a), “to drink” (<i>šth</i>) wine taken as fines in the house of God (v. 8b), and obstructing the work of Nazirites and the prophets (v. 12)</p> | <p>the poor (v. 1b); “to trample” (<i>ršš</i>) on the needy (v. 1b); colluding with their husbands in exploitation (cf. v. 1c)</p> | <p>justice and righteousness (v.7); Hating (<i>śn’</i>) the one who reproves, and loathing (<i>t’b</i>) the one who speaks truth (v. 10); trampling (<i>bws/bss</i>) on the poor by levying grains (v. 11a); building houses of dressed stones (v. 11c), afflicting (<i>šrr</i>) the righteous, taking a bribe, and perverting the justice due to the needy at the gate (v. 12).</p> | <p>alliances against the will of YHWH (v. 1); overconfidence that the day of evil (<i>yôm rā’</i>) will not overtake them (v. 3); leading indulgent life by “lying (<i>šōkəḥîm</i>) on the beds of ivory”, “lounging (<i>sərūḥîm</i>) on the couches”, “eating (<i>’ōkəlîm</i>) lambs from the flocks” (v. 4); “singing idly” or “groaning” (<i>pōrəṯîm</i>) (v. 5); “drinking (<i>šōlîm</i>) wine in bowls” (v. 6); and misuse of the cultic feast Marzēḥ for eating and drinking (cf. v. 7); perverting justice and righteousness (v. 12b); boasting about recent military victories (v. 13).</p> | <p>needy (v. 4); eliminating (<i>šbt hiphil</i>) the afflicted (v. 4); profit motive with scant regard for the holydays (v. 5a); falsifying weights and measures (v. 5b); buying (<i>qnh</i>) the poor and needy through cheating in trade (cf. v. 6a); selling (<i>šbr</i>) the refuse of grain (v. 6b).</p> |
|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

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|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theological framework | Recollection of the benevolent actions of YHWH on behalf of Israel: destroying the Amorites (v. 9), bringing out of Egypt (v. 10), raising up Nazirites and prophets (v. 11) | The swearing formula indicating YHWH's own personal intervention and irrevocability (v. 2a). | The fact that the Lord is aware of their transgressions (v. 12a); the reminder that the Lord, who passed through their midst (<i>'br b</i>), saving them from Egyptians will do so again to punish them (v. 17b). | The theme of false security and its futility (vv.1-3); the swearing formula signifying involvement of YHWH, reminding them of the fulfilment of the promise of land to their ancestors (v. 8a); recollection of YHWH's hatred for the "pride of Jacob" (v. 8b); "hush" (<i>hās</i>) indicates the presence of God in punishment (v. 10); YHWH's hand in raising up a nation to punish Israel (v. 14). | The swearing formula and the mention of the pride of Jacob (v. 7 a) and the fact that YHWH does not forget their works (v. 7b). |
| Formal element of Judgment | "behold" (<i>hinnē(h)</i>) and the use of <i>futurum instans</i> (v. 13a) | "then, behold" (<i>kî hinnē(h)</i> v. 2b) | "therefore" (<i>lākēn</i>) in v. 11a) | "therefore" (<i>lākēn</i> v. 7) | |
| Punishment | "pressing it down" under Israel (v. 13a); | Exile as pointed by the following words | Not being able to enjoy the fruit of | Exile as suggested by the terms <i>yig'lu</i> "shall go into | The quaking of the land (v. 8a); tossing up and sinking |

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|--|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | <p>the military defeat (vv. 14-16)</p> | <p>and images: <i>šinnôṭ</i> and <i>šîrôṭ dūgā(h)</i> both meaning “hook” (v. 2b); “you shall come out through the breaches in the wall” (<i>pārāšîm tēše ’nāh</i> v. 3a); the expression “be hurled out” (<i>šlk hiphil</i> v. 3b).</p> | <p>their building and farming activities (v. 11bc); an all pervasive mourning (<i>mispēd</i>) on account of the punitive passing through by YHWH (vv. 16-17).</p> | <p>exile” and <i>gōlîm</i> “exiles” (v. 7a); complete destruction of the country from north to south through a nation raised up by YHWH (v. 14).</p> | <p>of Nile (v. 8b); turning day into darkness (v. 9); mourning (v. 10); the absence of the guiding word of God (vv. 11-12); defeat and fall of young men, girls, and those who swear by the Ashima of Samaria (vv. 13-14).</p> |
|--|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

As the table clearly shows, the review of the texts with socio-critical content in the rest of the book of Amos complements the analysis of the specimen text 2,6-16 and gives us a complete textual picture of the social critique of the prophet. The destination of the oracles, which was mentioned as “Israel” in 2,6, receives more elaboration, while continuing to give us the feeling that the addressees include elements in both kingdoms of Israel; this at least was intended in the final redaction of the text. The oracles are addressed to some specific groups of Israelites such as the affluent women of Samaria, the cream of the population referred to as “the house of Israel”, the people who live in false security without caring for the will of YHWH in the capital city, and the greedy traders who cheated the needy and the afflicted in society. This gives us an impression that the accusations are directed against certain categories of Israelites and not in general against all the Israelites.

The victims of unjust practices belong to various categories of people who are denied their rights: *ṣāddīq* “righteous”, *dallīm* “poor”, and *'ebyōnīm* “needy”, and *'ānī/ 'ānāw* “afflicted” and other weaker sections of the society like *na'ārā(h)*, “a girl” who is exploited. In general, we could say that the victims include all those who are denied “justice” and “righteousness”. The crimes committed against them include exploiting their precarious situation, especially their financial vulnerability, manipulating their destiny, harming their interests before the court of law, oppressing them and trampling them underfoot; taxing their grains, and threatening them with elimination by the rich. They find themselves at the wrong end of unjust trade practices and are at danger of being bought with money. Their economic and social progress is hindered by those who have the means to do it and the hope of the victims of getting justice in the court is thwarted through bribery. The courts are not able to protect their interests because those who speak for the upholding of the rule of law and truth are said to be derided or sidelined. The powerful in society come under severe attack by the prophet for their false sense of security or overconfidence, without relying on YHWH. They are unconcerned about the poor and needy, and guilty of building luxurious houses and leading self-indulgent lives with lavish eating, drinking, and music. Their moral and ethical decadence overlaps into cult, where even what was supposed to be a funeral ritual called *Marzē* † is misused for eating, drinking, and feasting.

The prophet appears on behalf of YHWH, who is directly involved in the lives of his people. Amos uses the recollections of the saving interventions of YHWH in the life of Israel as springboards for promoting justice in society and for taking responsibility for the weaker sections of the community. The swearing formulas used in the oracles reveal YHWH's awareness of social injustice and confirm his personal determination to intervene in order to

punish the perpetrators. The swearing by YHWH could also refer back to his fulfilment of the promise of land, which he had sworn to their ancestors. The prophet mentioning “the pride of Jacob”, once within the formula of swearing itself, is a powerful reminder to the people of their self-seeking attitude, which has its origin in their ancestor Jacob. The prophet asserts that this pride is hated by YHWH. The reference of YHWH’s passing through their midst helps to jog their memory of the punitive passing through of YHWH amidst the Egyptians, which had freed them from the shackles of slavery.

The general pattern of the judgment speech such as the accusations, historical recollection, announcement of punishment, etc. are visible in all the oracles. The punishment announced is exile, as is clear from direct references and from allusions made. The destruction of the country, the fall of their young men and women, and deportation would mark their end. The futility of their construction and agricultural activities without caring for the poor and the folly of their arrogant self-confidence will be laid bare for all to see. The punishment is to be effected directly by YHWH. Only once is it mentioned that the punishment will be mediated through a nation, which remains nameless, which will be raised up by YHWH. All the more intimidating is the fact that YHWH can also make use of terrestrial and celestial forces such as earthquake and solar eclipse to punish his people. The association of the practice of injustice in society to a future filled with anxieties, and to celestial and terrestrial catastrophes is characteristic of prophetic critique.

To conclude, we can say that the social critique of Amos condemn injustice in his community. The violations of the rights of his fellow human beings to have meaningful existence are seen by the prophet as totally against the will of his God, who brought this community into existence through his mighty acts of liberation. Israel, as a community liberated by YHWH, must become an instrument of liberation for others and not an oppressor. It must promote, not deny, the freedom and dignity of each individual. Israel as God’s liberated people can continue to have a dignified existence only if it promotes justice in the community. From the fact that the devastation was expansive it is understood that the punishment encompassed all in the community. The question why the just are punished with the unjust is not answered by Amos. One should understand that his primary concern was to address the social crisis that existed in society, which he tried to explain in relation to the historical realities of the day. What exactly could have been this crisis is the subject matter of the following chapter. The text itself is silent about the crisis and therefore we have to look to historical and archaeological surveys to reconstruct the crisis.

Chapter 2: The Social Crisis in the Light of Archaeological and Sociological Research

Historical knowledge supported by archaeological finds and sociological research, however small and deficient they may be, are very significant for the study of the Bible. This is because the Bible, the word of God, took flesh in a certain environment, composed by human beings, whose perceptions, to a great extent, had been influenced by the socio-political and economic realities around them. It is this importance of the historical situations that makes archaeology important for biblical studies.¹ Joseph Blenkinsopp has stressed the importance of understanding the historical and sociological background in understanding the biblical text:

The only way to avoid the worst excesses arising from presuppositions of a theological or philosophical character is to keep on returning to the historical phenomenon of prophecy in Israel, which implies the attempt to make sense of its development throughout a long history, parts of which are very poorly documented.²

In the analysis of the socio-critical sayings in the book of Amos, I remarked that it is difficult to ascribe a definite context to the accusations. The ambivalence in this regard has confused scholars and has discouraged them from interpreting it in the light of a historical or social context. However, to interpret the texts dealing with social issues without reference to the context diminishes the value of the text in its historical context as well as in its hermeneutical context today. One way to find out the elusive context of the text in our post modern times is to take recourse to the archaeological and sociological researches.

Archaeological research has made great progress in the Near East in recent times. However, the archaeological finds, being mute witnesses of the past, have to be interpreted and evaluated in a professional and objective manner.³ Much to the dismay of the scholarly world, this has not been the case with archaeological finds in the Near East today. Though archaeologists like Yigael Yadin make claims like “As an archaeologist, I would like to call a spade a spade, and not only use it manually”⁴, their interpretations sometimes are affected by

¹ Cf. J.K. de Geus, “Die Gesellschaftskritik der Propheten und die Archäologie”, *ZDPV* 98 (1982), p. 51.

² J. Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983, p. 13.

³ Not all sites are so revealing and as dramatic as Dever narrates about David Ussishkins’ discoveries in Level III at Lachish regarding Sennacherib’s invasion in 701 BCE: “Everything is here, much of it now visible even to the casual tourist, in the current reconstruction of the site: the breached and burnt lower and upper city walls and gateway; the Assyrian siege ramp; and the pathetic, last-minute counterramp thrown up inside the city. Even the intrepid archaeologist, unsentimental as always, stands atop the mound at this point and shudders, identifying with the doomed defenders of the city on the eve of its destruction.” W.G. Dever, “Archaeology, Material Culture and the Early Monarchical Period in Israel”, in D.V. Edelman (ed.), *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact and Israel’s Past*, JSOTSS 127, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991, p. 106.

⁴ Y. Yadin, “Biblical Archaeology Today: The Archaeological Aspect”, in J. Amitai (ed.), *Biblical Archaeology Today: Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem, April 1984*, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1985, p. 21.

ideological preconceptions and political compulsions. This is so much more in the case with Biblical Archaeology,⁵ because here emotional issues sometimes take precedence over objective criteria. Therefore, the legitimacy of the method in using the findings of archaeology to interpret or support biblical passages has to be evaluated under the methodological premises given below.

The true goal of archaeology is said to be “the understanding of human mental activity in the past as crystallised in material remains and in its proper chronological sequence”⁶ If that is so, then we have already here a problem with the concept of Biblical Archaeology. The events in the Bible are most of the time written as flashbacks from later times. One cannot try to take every word from the Bible and attach it to a particular social or economic development, because most of the texts in the Bible have a long compositional history and many of them are addressed to the people of later times. These texts sometimes reflect the economic and historical situation of later periods. I do not, however, argue that we should do away with the socio-historical investigations because of these complexities involved in the text composition. At the same time, one needs to be aware of these complexities and be reticent in one’s conclusions when attributing a particular socio-historical background to a text. In the light of this argument, one must accept the relative nature of archaeological evidence when used in reconstructing the background to a biblical text.

Another methodological consideration to be kept in mind is that while analyzing the artifacts one cannot use biblical text as the point of departure. We need to let the artifacts speak for themselves, however ‘mute’ they may appear, rather than imposing forced associations with biblical texts. This has been pointed out also by the renowned biblical historian, Gösta W. Ahlström:

Methodologically a historian cannot interpret the archaeological material by first asking what the biblical text says. The character of these two types of source is different. The data are different and so are their composition/construction. The biblical literary material is the product of a particular indoctrination and can be characterized as an ideological presentation that has used or even misused some of the facts. Only rarely was it intended to serve as the *legend* for explaining the origin or meaning of artifacts and building remains. In practice then, it will often be impossible to harmonize the archeological sources with the biblical ones, as has frequently been done. ... The results may be historically misleading.⁷

⁵ Biblical Archaeology is a branch of archaeology that pursues the illustration of Bible with the help of the results of the archaeological research. Cf. J.K. de Geus, “Die Gesellschaftskritik der Propheten”, p. 51

⁶ Y. Yadin, “Biblical Archaeology Today”, p. 22.

⁷ G.W. Ahlström, “The Role of Archaeological and Literary Remains in Reconstructing Israel’s History” in D.V. Edelman (ed.), *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact and Israel’s Past*, JSOTSS 127, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991, pp. 118-19.

It is, therefore, necessary to evaluate both these sources, namely, the archaeological materials and biblical text, independently.

The reasons for the social crisis in Israel are various, as Erich Zenger rightly states in his introduction to the Old Testament.⁸ Even though the Bible does not elaborate on the causes for the social crisis in Israel in the Iron Age period, it could be assumed that the normal factors that played a role in the emergence of monarchical states over the world must have been present in Israel too. Sudarsan Seneviratne's remark regarding the establishment of the Mauryan state in ancient India in 4th century BCE could offer us a clue about the common factors that were active in the development of early states around the world:

An increase in the cultivation with the use of the plow made for a widening of the agricultural basis. This implied that by this time agriculture constituted the chief means of subsistence, the fertile areas in the Indus and Ganges River systems and in parts the peninsula becoming the natural foci of agricultural production. This considerable growth and form of specialization, in combination with the ability to manufacture iron, resulted in a greater surplus production. It is this development of the agrarian-based economy which became the major factor in state formation. It made possible the support of a large standing army necessary for expanding the state frontiers as well as, to some extent, for maintaining law and order. The resultant surplus also encouraged the formation of a well-paid bureaucracy, which is indispensable to any imperial system. The gradual spread of iron technology which encouraged the intensification of agriculture also made possible the necessary surplus for the production of commodities for exchange and the emergence of social groups possessing the opportunity to enjoy the luxuries of an exchange economy. The concentration of the population in urban centers gathered momentum when the necessary conditions for a money economy came into existence.⁹

Importing any model from anywhere in the world to explain the developments in Ancient Israel may not be legitimate. However, from the above remarks of Seneviratne it is obvious that there are many factors involved in the development of early states: there is a change in the mode of agricultural production and in the appropriation and utilization of surplus. New sections emerge in the society, who monopolize and enjoy the surplus. The gradual development of a monarchical state with a centralized administration, a king, and his standing army is the most significant change that took place around this period. The new developments necessitated the construction of transport facilities for trade and commerce. An attempt to understand the social crisis in the Old Testament prophets has to take into consideration these factors, which were part of the development of societies around the world. But unfortunately most of the attempts to reconstruct the social crisis in Israel so far have not

⁸ Cf. E. Zenger, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 6th ed., Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004, pp. 541-42.

⁹ S. Seneviratne, "The Mauryan State", in H.J.M. Claessen / P. Skalnik (eds.), *The Early State*, The Hague / Paris / New York: Mouton Publishers, 1978, p. 382.

been so comprehensive and have concentrated on single factors like change of value systems, emergence of early capitalism and so on, as the following evaluation of some of the models shows.

2.1. Two Models to Understand the Crisis

I would like to begin by evaluating two major attempts to understand the crisis that could have been the background for the book of Amos.¹⁰ These models try to understand the particular social and historical developments that provoked the prophetic intervention.

2.1.1. Model of Canaanite Officers

The first major attempt is that of Albrecht Alt and Herbert Donner, who attributed the social transformation during 8th century BCE to the influence of Canaanite values on the Israelite bureaucracy. They thought that the adoption of Canaanite value systems by the bureaucracy attached to the monarchy in Israel was against the traditional value system of Israel that promoted a “*kleinbäuerliche Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsform*”¹¹ (small farmer society and economic system). According to this system, every family could possess enough land to support itself. Adoption of the Canaanite way of possessing land was postulated as the reason for the change of this value system. This changed the Israelite tradition in two ways: (i) The king himself acquired a large amount of land by laying hand on the land that had fallen “*herrenlos*” (ownerless), due to the death of the owner (cf. the land of Naboth in 1 Kgs 21,8ff.)¹² (ii) With the introduction of a monarchy in Israel, there emerged a group of officers and traders who had a monopoly of trade and tax collection. They formed a higher class in the society of “*Königsdienstleute*” (royal servants) especially the “*königliche Beamten*” (royal officers).¹³ Many of these officers, especially in the region of Canaan, may have been Canaanites by origin.¹⁴ These officers, following a Canaanite custom, separated themselves from their family in order to make themselves totally available to the crown. They were rewarded with plots of land for the services that they rendered to the king. This resulted in

¹⁰ I have selected these two based on the influence they have had on the scholars during the recent decades. There are also other models proposed involving class society and population growth which will be evaluated under my survey of factors responsible for the social crisis.

¹¹ A. Alt, “Der Anteil des Königtums an der sozialen Entwicklung in den Reichen Israel und Juda”, *KS III*, München: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1959, p. 349. Wolff too toes this line when he says, “Das altisraelitische Bodenrecht wird von der kanaanäischen Praxis überflügelt”. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2*, p. 106.

¹² Cf. A. Alt, “Der Anteil des Königtums”, p. 365.

¹³ A. Alt, “Der Anteil des Königtums”, p. 369.

¹⁴ Cf. H. Donner, “Die soziale Botschaft der Propheten im Lichte der Gesellschaftsordnung in Israel”, in P.H.A. Neumann (ed.), *Das Prophetenverständnis in der deutschsprachigen Forschung seit Heinrich Ewald*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1979, pp. 497-98. The kings in Israel, on the other hand, had their mandate from YHWH and the officers in traditional Israel, had the secondary mandate also from YHWH and did their services without expecting reward.

these people acquiring large plots of land at the expense of the native population¹⁵ and they acquired a special status in society¹⁶ with power and resources to extend their hegemony over the native small scale farmers. The emergence of this new group proved to be detrimental to the small farmers of Israel. The landless local people becoming “*Gläubiger*” (debtor) and “*Schuldsknecht*” (debt-slave) were the necessary consequences of this system.¹⁷ In times of prosperity, these officers had more means at their disposal to exploit the poor. In the words of Donner, “and the greater the wealth grew, the stronger became the pressure on economically weak.”¹⁸

This model has been considered purely hypothetical by scholars today. There is very little textual support for the existence of such a system. The conflict between the Canaanite and Israelite ideals cannot be identified in Amos or elsewhere in the Bible. So the reduction of the problem to an ethnic issue does not help.¹⁹ Moreover, there is no direct textual evidence to show that the monarchy was the object of prophetic criticism. However, the factors resulting from the functioning of the monarchy, especially the establishment of a bureaucracy with a centralised administrative and military apparatus involving heavy taxation and burden to the people might have been one of the factors behind the social crisis. The class distinctions which this model also refers to might have emerged or widened under the monarchy, with its direct or indirect blessings.

2.1.2. Model of Rent Capitalism

Hans Bobek conceived the model of rent capitalism in 1948 based on his studies carried out in Iran. Bobek attributes the particular phenomenon in the 8th century that called for condemnation by the prophets to the emergence of a system called rent capitalism. In essence this model presupposed that in the ancient cultures there existed capitalism even hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, whose perpetrators procured a part of the product of the land as rent. By “rent” is understood here “the general share of the product of the farmers and traders contained under various titles.”²⁰ The perpetrators of this kind of

¹⁵ Cf. A. Alt, “Der Anteil des Königtums”, p. 370.

¹⁶ Cf. H. Donner, “Die soziale Botschaft”, pp. 500-01.

¹⁷ A. Alt, “Der Anteil des Königtums”, p. 370. Alt is certain that there was a landless working group in the service of the new masters who could be transferred to others (cf. p. 371).

¹⁸ My translation from: “...und je größer die Vermögen wurden, desto stärker musste der Druck auf den wirtschaftlich Schwächeren lasten.” H. Donner, “Die soziale Botschaft”, p. 501.

¹⁹ Cf. G. Fleischer, *Von Menschenverkäufern, Baschankühen und Rechtsverkehrern: Die Sozialkritik des Amosbuches in historisch-kritischer, sozialgeschichtlicher und archäologischer Perspektive*, BBB, 74; Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1989, pp. 384-85.

²⁰ My translation from: “ganz allgemein sämtliche, auf verschiedensten Titeln beruhenden regelmäßigen Anteile am Produkt der Bauern und Gewerbetreibenden.” H. Bobek, *Iran. Probleme eines unterentwickelten Landes alter Kultur*, Frankfurt a.M.: 1962, 8 (as quoted in R. Bohlen, “Zur Sozialkritik des Propheten Amos”, *TrThZ* 95 (1986), p. 295. O. Lorez describes this system as follows: “Der Rentenskapitalismus ist der

capitalism settled themselves predominantly in towns. This caused an increase in population in the towns, and also an observable “*Hebung des materiellen und kulturellen Standes*”²¹ (increase in the material and cultural status) in towns. According to Klaus Koch, the anger of the prophets is because of the treatment meted out to a particular group of people called the “poor”.²² Koch understood this group as a group of marginal farmers who did not have any land.²³ This system was tailor-made to ensure the dependency of the marginal farmers upon the landowning aristocracy, and their perpetual misery.

Lang has tried to bring out the elements of this system in the book of Amos. He finds traces of this social and economic system in the book of Amos: (i) In Amos quite often the rich are townspeople, who indulge in drinking and lead a life of shameless luxury;²⁴ (ii) Landed property is often cultivated by small tenants liable to tax who are ruthlessly exploited by their landlords;²⁵ (iii) Peasants overburdened with debts have to sell themselves into bondage to work off their liabilities. The bondsmen become serfs due to heavy taxation, or they are even sold and thus become real and permanent slaves;²⁶ (iv) Along with rent and interest, the corn trade is another important source of income for the upper classes and strengthens their position in the economy. The trading activity in corn is yet another area of fraud and exploitation in Amos.²⁷

Though the model looks very appealing, we need to be cautious in accepting these claims at face value. Nowhere is it mentioned in the book of Amos that the prophet is reacting to a particular social or economic system. The social critique of Amos need not be directly connected to factors related to the establishment of a monarchy either. Fleischer has pointed

eigentümliche Wirtschaftsstil der orientalischen, wesentlich von den Städten getragenen Zivilisation. Er wurde für fast das gesamte ältere Städtewesen in hohem Grade bezeichnend und hat damit weltgeschichtliche Bedeutung erlangt. Der Rentenkapitalismus entstand durch die Kommerzialisierung und die in völlig erwerbswirtschaftlichem Geist vorgenommene Ausformung der ursprünglich herrschaftlichen Rentenansprüche an die bäuerliche und gewerbliche Unterschicht.” O. Lorez, “Die prophetische Kritik des Rentenkapitalismus: Grundlagen-Probleme der Prophetenforschung”, *UF* 7 (1975), p. 275.

²¹ R. Bohlen, “Sozialkritik”, p. 295.

²² Cf. K. Koch, “Die Entstehung der sozialen Kritik bei den Propheten”, in H.W. Wolff (ed.), *Probleme biblischer Theologie*, München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971, pp. 242-3. He points out that Amos does not speak about an individual, but always about a group. Only in the Amaziah episode does he counter an individual.

²³ Cf. K. Koch, “Die Entstehung”, p. 243. That the absolutely landless do not come under the purview of Amos is clear from the fact that he never mentions sojourners, widows and orphans.

²⁴ Cf. B. Lang, *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority: An Essay in Biblical History and Sociology*, Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983, pp. 121-123.

²⁵ Cf. B. Lang, *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority*, p. 124. Lang cites here the examples of Amos 2,8 which refers to “blankets seized in pledge”, and “wine got by exaction”.

²⁶ Amos 2,6 and 8,6 has reference to some kind of transaction in poor. Lang translates 8,6 as “Let us buy the poor because of silver (i.e., debts of money), the needy because of a pair of sandals” B. Lang, *Monotheism*, p.125.

²⁷ Lang names “giving short measures in the bushel”, “taking overweight in the silver”, “tilting the scales fraudulently”, and “selling the dust of the wheat” (as per his translation of Am 8,5-6) as some of the fraudulent means practised in corn trade. B. Lang, *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority*, p. 127.

out that a model which seeks to consider the prophetic social critique merely as a reaction to a development that existed for centuries cannot be justified in the context of the social and political critique of the Bible.²⁸

This model, taken over from Iran, need not be wholly applicable in Israel. Whether such systems existed in Israel or not is, again, purely a hypothetical question. Though Lang has pointed out the textual allusions, some of his interpretations are farfetched and the proposals are not verifiable in the Bible itself. Lang himself has accepted this shortcoming when he says, “In saying all this I am well aware that I am going slightly beyond the information given in the biblical sources.”²⁹ Specific details such as how the farmers were forced to pay more tax, how the rich were not affected by the misfortunes and so on, are not explained.³⁰ Finally, there is very little evidence for the existence of such a system in archaeological or epigraphical sources of this period and it has to be accepted that the existence of such a system is impossible to verify archaeologically. Further, the phenomenon of rent capitalism is not specific for 8th century BCE as there are references to the existence of this system in the texts from Alalah VII, which are approximately 800 years older than Amos.³¹

2.2. Factors Responsible for Social Crisis in Ancient Israel

The new research in this field to understand the social crisis in the prophetic books has made significant progress. The traditional models were limited to hypothetical theories and were dependent on models from outside Israel. The following attempt to understand the crisis through various factors that contributed to it enjoys better support in the Bible – the major epigraphical source of knowledge about the history of ancient Israel during this period. I shall try to base the reconstructions on the archaeological finds and sociological research already done by many scholars. In my opinion, there are five major factors which are very important to understand the social crisis of the eighth to sixth century prophets, viz., urbanisation and population growth, increased construction activities and the burden of taxation, the breaking up of tribal solidarity, the emergence of a class society, and the debt system. These factors, by and large, are not mutually exclusive. There has already been substantial research into some of these factors, as the analysis below shows.

²⁸ He has said: “Ein Modell, das die prophetische Sozialkritik lediglich als Reaktion auf einen Vorgang versteht, der – wenn auch in graduell abgeschwächter Form – schon jahrhundertlang existiert, wird dem in der alttestamentlichen Gesellschaftskritik festzustellenden Wechsel von der Königs- zur Sozialkritik nicht gerecht.” G. Fleischer, *Von Menschenverkäufern*, p. 364.

²⁹ B. Lang, *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority*, p. 127.

³⁰ Cf. G. Fleischer, *Von Menschenverkäufern*, p. 370.

³¹ Cf. A. Schoors, *Die Königreiche Israel und Judah im 8. und 7. Jahrhundert v. Chr. Die assyrische Krise*, *Biblische Enzyklopädie* 5, Stuttgart / Berlin / Köln: Kohlhammer, 1998, p. 85.

2.2.1. Urbanisation and Population Growth

Social anthropologists like F.S. Frick, who study the change in Israelite society beginning with the establishment of monarchy, have in recent times tried to understand it also “in terms of forces internal to the society”³². Frick suggests:

Another aspect of recent archaeological work that has important implications for social structure is settlement hierarchy. Perhaps the most obvious place for the archaeologists to look for hierarchical organisation is in the size and distribution of archaeological sites, especially settlements. Spatial analysis is one of the best developed fields of archaeological theory and it is widely recognized that the more obvious archaeological indicators of ranked or stratified societies may be spatial ones.³³

2.2.1.1. Increase in Number of Settlements and Population in Archaeology

The period under our scrutiny here is the Iron Age II, beginning approximately with the beginning of United Monarchy (ca. 1000 BCE) and lasting up to 721 BCE. The survey conducted in two major regions of the Northern Kingdom, namely in Ephraim and Manasseh, has brought to light archaeological evidence for an increase in the population during the above mentioned period.³⁴ Adam Zertal, who surveyed this region, draws his conclusion on settlement patterns based on the ceramic remains that have been recovered from the archaeological sites of this area. The region of Ephraim constituted a significant part of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and therefore, the survey conducted in this region is crucial to understand the settlement patterns of this region. Several important biblical cities like Bethel, Beth Horon and Shiloh are located in this region. Israel Finkelstein, who conducted the survey, claims that the survey of the region of Ephraim is nearly completed as about 98 percent of the marked sites have been covered. A total of 552 settlement sites of all sizes have been surveyed and he is confident that the available data allow us “to give a representative and reliable picture of the settlement patterns of the land of Ephraim over the generations.”³⁵ Similar claims have been made about the territory of Manasseh by Adam Zertal, who says,

Manasseh survey has revealed so far more than 300 sites with Iron Age II pottery, 80 percent of which were previously unknown. Of these, only 262 have so far been entered into the computer and processed according to our method. The Iron Age II is one of the peaks of settlement density in all periods, with only the Byzantine period being more populous. The number of sites in the same territory was double that of the Iron Age I period (c. 1250-1000 BCE), the pottery of which

³² F.S. Frick, “Social Science Methods and Theories of Significance for the Study of the Israelite Monarchy: A Critical Review Essay”, *SEMEIA* 37 (1986), p. 13.

³³ F.S. Frick, “Social Science Methods”, p. 35.

³⁴ Though the Northern Kingdom is often called “the Kingdom of Ephraim”, indicating the superiority probably of the Ephraimites, the capital Samaria is situated in the Manassite territory.

³⁵ I. Finkelstein, “The Land of Ephraim Survey 1980-1987”, *TA* 15-16 (1988-1989), p. 120. He also notes that the surveyed area covers an area where according to the census of 1931 approximately 122,714 people lived. Cf. pp. 126-27.

was found at 135 sites. Iron Age II sites spread throughout almost all the territory, with only a few areas left unsettled.³⁶

The findings of surveys of both the regions have been published and they claim to have the following characteristics:

i. The Iron Age II period marked an increase in the number of settlements. Zertal claims that sixty-five percent of the 262 Iron Age sites analyzed in the region of Manasseh were of the Iron Age II period.³⁷ The phenomenon of a growing number of settlements is noticeable in Ephraim region too. 76 of the 104 sites established in Iron Age I grew in size and 100 new sites were established in the Iron Age II period.³⁸ Zertal attributes this settlement peak in the region to two factors: “the economic prosperity in the kingdom (mainly during the eighth century)”³⁹; and “the high rate of foundation of new sites in the desert fringes”. He further remarks: “This is indeed the first time that the 500 sq. km of the desert fringes and Jordan valley are almost entirely settled, mainly by family farms.”³⁹ Another reason for prosperity according to him is “the close relationship of Israel with Phoenicia, which developed international trade; and the stability and power of the Omri-Ahab dynasty and later, which were translated into population density, security and development.”⁴⁰

ii. A tremendous growth in population takes place in the Iron Age II period. Finkelstein claims that the region of Ephraim, where in modern times according to the 1931 census a population of 66,463⁴¹ live, had the following pattern of population growth⁴²:

| End of 12 th century BCE | End of 11 th century BCE | Middle of 8 th century BCE |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 3,800 | 9,400 | Ca. 31,000 |

Finkelstein understands the reasons for the growth as follows:

The accelerated demographic development in the western part of Ephraim was due to various factors: density of occupation in the cultivable areas of the central range, intensified forest clearance in the west, efficient solutions to other ecological obstacles, and also perhaps the establishment of links with the coastal

³⁶ A. Zertal, “The Heart of the Monarchy: Pattern of Settlement and Historical Considerations of the Israelite Kingdom of Samaria”, in A. Mazar (ed.), *Studies in the Archaeology of the Iron Age Israel and Jordan*, JSOTSS 331, Sheffield: Academic Press, 2001, p. 41. Zertal also makes an interesting observation: “Sixty-two percent (161 sites) of the Iron Age II are single-period, namely they were founded and ceased to exist between the ninth to the seventh centuries BCE, and existed mainly during the eighth century.” p. 43.

³⁷ Cf. A. Zertal, “The Heart of the Monarchy”, p. 42.

³⁸ Cf. I. Finkelstein, “The Land of Ephraim Survey 1980-1987”. See tables on pp. 149.151. He assumes that “activity in the land of Ephraim reached its peak in the mid-8th century BCE, prior to the fall of the kingdom of Israel.” p. 152.

³⁹ A. Zertal, “The Heart of the Monarchy”, p. 42.

⁴⁰ A. Zertal, “The Heart of the Monarchy”, p. 44.

⁴¹ Cf. I. Finkelstein, “The Land of Ephraim Survey 1980-1987”, p. 169.

⁴² I. Finkelstein, “The Land of Ephraim Survey 1980-1987”, 154.

plain. In addition there was the factor of the economic change, expressed in the increased importance of the horticulture areas.⁴³

This phenomenon can be true also of the whole state of Northern Israel as the study of Broshi and Finkelstein shows. They call eighth century BCE as “the apex of settlement of the period, after a long span of gradual demographic expansion and before the Assyrian campaigns.”⁴⁴ Given below is the statistics presented by them regarding the population of the major regions of northern Palestine in the Iron Age II period⁴⁵:

| Region | Number of Sites | Inhabited area | Population |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------|------------|
| Upper Galilee | 84 | 96 | 25,000 |
| Lower Galilee | 54 | 65 | 22,500 |
| Huleh Valley | 23 | 63 | 18,750 |
| Jordan Valley | 66 | 40 | 13,750 |
| Jezreel Valley | 55 | 95 | 27,500 |
| Samaria | 378 | 383 | 102,250 |
| Northern Coast | 22 | 73 | 22,000 |

They estimate that the total population of Northern Kingdom reached about 350,000 during the Iron Age II period, with a density of ca. 31 people per sq. km. The population of Judah in the same period reached ca. 110,000 with a density of ca. 22 people per sq. km.⁴⁶ Broshi and Finkelstein claim that they have relied purely on archaeological data to draw these figures, unlike their predecessors, who depended mostly on biblical data.⁴⁷

In a comparative study of population of the land of Ephraim and the whole country, Finkelstein put together scholarly estimates about the population of the entire country from Bronze Age to Iron Age II as follows⁴⁸:

⁴³ I. Finkelstein, “The Land of Ephraim Survey 1980-1987”, p. 153. He, however, claims no exceptional increase in the population during this period as the above figures match the natural growth rate of population of 10 percent per 25 years with an average family size of 4,2 persons, for pre-modern Palestine at the beginning of the 20th century C.E. Cf. p. 154.

⁴⁴ M. Broshi and I. Finkelstein, “The Population of Palestine in Iron Age II”, *BASOR* 287 (1992), p. 47.

⁴⁵ M. Broshi and I. Finkelstein, “The Population of Palestine”, p. 54.

⁴⁶ Cf. M. Broshi and I. Finkelstein, “The Population of Palestine”, p. 54. They remark: “The proportion of the inhabitants of the capital city is higher in Judah than in Israel: 6.8 percent of the citizens lived in Jerusalem, but only 4.3 percent in Samaria.”

⁴⁷ Cf. M. Broshi and I. Finkelstein, “The Population of Palestine in Iron Age II”, pp. 54-55. The figures presented by these archaeologists are much lower than the ones previously presented by Albright, Baron and so on. The latter scholars obviously relied on biblical data. Meanwhile Broshi and Finkelstein claim that “... the current study relies on comprehensive archaeological data, which were not available until the large-scale survey of recent years. ... It appears that until the end of the second millennium B.C.E., the sedentary population did not cross the 150,000 mark. Wars, famines and plagues limited any natural increase. Only with the establishment of a centralized state, which brought with it economic well-being and relative security, were the necessary conditions present for significant population increase.”

⁴⁸ I. Finkelstein, “The Land of Ephraim Survey 1980-1987”, p. 177.

| Early Bronze Age | Middle Bronze Age II | Late Bronze Age | Iron Age II |
|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 150,000 | 140,000 | 60-70,000 | 300-400,000 |

2.2.1.2. Impact of Demographic Factors on Israelite Society

The increase in the number of settlements and population in the Iron Age II period had their impact on the social and kinship structure of the society. First of all, the structure of settlements underwent changes. The existing settlements were expanded and new ones were established. One of the consequences of the population growth and urbanization could be the lack of sufficient resources and consequent pressure on the population, as Eckart Otto points out.⁴⁹ Territory rather than kinship determined relationships in the new environment, and people became more and more dependent on their neighborhood, rather than on their kin or relatives. This sort of a dependency was more liable to be exploited by unscrupulous elements than mutual dependency among kin.

In the sound archaeological background of the above findings, I agree with the presupposition of Gunther Fleischer that urbanisation and a sudden population growth were significant factors behind the crisis that form the background to the social critique of Amos.⁵⁰

Fleischer proposes the following phases of development in the social crisis:

Phase 1: The emergence of a monarchy caused a group of officers and military to be concentrated in the cities. It caused an increase in urbanisation. While the people of the city came together by reason of their offices and not out of any mutually binding genealogical or clan relationship, individual interests reigned in these urban communities.⁵¹

Phase 2: Gains from war and trade were concentrated in the hands of the city dwellers. They gradually became an upper class in society. The king supported this class as he needed revenue from their trading activities for his wars and construction activities.⁵²

Phase 3: The upper class people in the cities needed money to support their luxurious lifestyle. They extended their trade to make more money and the marginal farmers were

⁴⁹ E. Otto, "Gibt es Zusammenhänge zwischen Bevölkerungswachstum, Staatsbildung und Kulturentwicklung im eisenzeitlichen Israel?" in O. Kraus (ed.), *Regulation, Manipulation und Explosion der Bevölkerungsdichte. Vorträge gehalten auf der Tagung der Joachim Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften Hamburg am 15. und 16. November 1985*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986, pp. 84-85.

⁵⁰ Cf. G. Fleischer, *Von Menschenverkäufern*. Fleischer takes as starting point a case study by the French historian Le Roy Ladurie of the farmers in Languedoc during the end part of 15th century to the beginning of 18th century and proposes the distribution of land among many children as one of the causes of poverty (pp. 371-374). Another cause of unequal distribution of land in Israel may have been the privilege of the firstborn. The first born in Israel inherited two-thirds, while the rest had to be satisfied with the remaining one-third. So the system of inheritance distribution was defective, which could have made some people poor. Cf. p. 374.

⁵¹ Cf. G. Fleischer, *Von Menschenverkäufern*, pp. 377-380.

⁵² Cf. G. Fleischer, *Von Menschenverkäufern*, pp. 378-79.

exploited.⁵³ According to Fleischer, it is in this context that Amos speaks about unscrupulous exploitation, neglect of human rights and dignity, and lack of judicial objectivity and so on.⁵⁴

Phase 4: The fourth phase of this development may have taken place in the Southern Kingdom after the collapse of the North in 722 BCE. As the book of Amos has a long history of redaction, with some of the social critique resulting from the southern redaction, as we have seen in the stages of the composition of this book, it is possible that the situation in the South after the fall of the Northern Kingdom affected it.⁵⁵ Thus Fleischer concludes:

While for a time period the life of the upper class and the country population went on along parallel tracks where one side became stronger while the other group became weaker due to population growth and inheritance division, it reached a point in the 8th century where the upper class lived at the cost of the increasingly impoverished and helplessly dependent country population.⁵⁶

The sudden explosion of population with its economic and social consequences in central Judah at the end of 8th century BCE is also affirmed by other archaeological finds. Wolfgang Zwickel reinforces this fact on the following grounds:

- i. Due to the larger number of people who lived in Judea before the Babylonian exile and the influx of refugees, Hezekiah had to enlarge the city area of Jerusalem.⁵⁷
- ii. Many new settlements were founded in the east of Jordan and Negev during this period. The demand for more foodstuffs and the availability of cheap labour resulted in increased agricultural activities such as terrace making and large scale viniculture.⁵⁸
- iii. The surplus production of wine and oil made possible the purchase and import of goods, especially foodstuffs and even luxury goods.⁵⁹

⁵³ Cf. G. Fleischer, *Von Menschenverkäufern*, p. 381.

⁵⁴ Cf. G. Fleischer, *Von Menschenverkäufern*, p. 382.

⁵⁵ Cf. G. Fleischer, *Von Menschenverkäufern*, p. 383. This situation is characterised by the influx of refugees from the north, among them a great number of widows and orphans and undue burdens on the people due to the heavy tribute that had to be paid to the Assyrians. The people of the north experienced a similar burden in their final phase.

⁵⁶ My translation from "Während eine Zeitlang das Leben der Oberschicht und der Landbevölkerung in parallelen Bahnen verlief, wobei die eine erstarbte, während die andere zumindest teilweise durch fortschreitende Mikrofundienbildung aufgrund von Bevölkerungswachstum und Erbteilung immer schwächer wurde, ist im 8. Jh. der Punkt eingetreten, da die Oberschicht auf Kosten der nunmehr verarmten und ihr hilflos ausgelieferten Landbevölkerung lebt." G. Fleischer, *Von Menschenverkäufern*, p. 390.

⁵⁷ W. Zwickel, "Wirtschaftliche Grundlagen in Zentraljuda gegen Ende des 8. Jh.s aus archäologischer Sicht. Mit einem Ausblick auf die wirtschaftliche Situation im 7. Jh.," *UF* 26 (1994) p. 565.

⁵⁸ Cf. W. Zwickel, "Wirtschaftliche Grundlagen", p. 576-79. Weippert Helga had also noticed the phenomenon of increased cultivation of land during this period. "Auch wenn sich bei den angebauten Pflanzensorten kaum Veränderungen gegenüber früheren Zeiten abzeichnen, so hat man während der Eisen IIC-Zeit dennoch große Fortschritte bei der Gewinnung und Ausnutzung von Ackerboden sowie der Verarbeitung der Ernteerträge gemacht. Die vermutlich in der Eisen I-Zeit begonnene Terrassierung hügeliger Gelände wurde systematisiert und in so großem Umfang betrieben, daß jetzt landwirtschaftliche Terrassen ganze Bergabhänge überzogen." H. Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, Handbuch der Archäologie: Vorderasien II, vol. 1, München, C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1988, p. 635.

⁵⁹ Cf. W. Zwickel, "Wirtschaftliche Grundlagen", p. 579

iv. The population growth also caused the emergence of a group of professionals, who now took over traditional family trades like baking.⁶⁰

Zwickel proposes what could be another clue to understand the crisis addressed in the book of Amos. In the clan system, the weaker members and widows were taken care of. Now many families did not have enough land to support a large family after the fall of the Northern Kingdom. This gave rise to the phenomenon called “daily wage earners”.⁶¹

The demographic factors highlighted by Fleischer and supported by the findings of Zwickel look reasonable and enjoy some support from archaeological surveys. It brings into focus the important factor of demography, which has been influential in effecting social transformation and causing frictions over the world. However, the “fleeting nature” of the archaeological finds cautions one against drawing conclusions with certainty. The discovery of new data will make any theory outdated. In the words of M.D Carrol, “Efforts of reconstruction, therefore, not only are children of their time, but can very well be confused offspring of ignorance”.⁶² Here too we need to accept that the distance is too great in time and the evidence too meagre to confirm the confident claims made by these theories.⁶³

Again, it is accused that the Palestinian archeology has tried mostly to excavate only the ancient towns and royal residences. This has not helped to bring out aspects regarding the social life of the people, who lived in the villages. J. Blenkinsopp says:

The main interest of Palestinian and Near Eastern archeologists had been to uncover monumental architecture; and in so doing, much potential source material for the living conditions of the mass of the population has been neglected or destroyed. With respect to Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom, for example, only the royal enclave was excavated, with the result that we know nothing about how the 27,290 inhabitants, whom the Assyrians claim to have deported in 722 B.C.E., lived.⁶⁴

2.2.2. Increased Building Activities, Heavy Taxes and Forced Labour

Since the primary intention of the biblical authors was not history writing, one cannot expect to find in the Bible details about the dimensions of the buildings and the way in which funds were raised to finance them. The only exception is probably the construction of the

⁶⁰ Cf. W. Zwickel, “Wirtschaftliche Grundlagen”. P. 589

⁶¹ Cf. W. Zwickel, “Wirtschaftliche Grundlagen”, p. 590

⁶² M.D Carrol, *Contexts for Amos*, p. 33

⁶³ Cf. M.D Carrol, *Contexts for Amos*, p. 34. Moreover, though the estimates given by the archaeologists are based on modern tools of scientific research, the conclusions are drawn from meagre archaeological remains that have been unearthed. Added to this, a large part of the country is still under survey or the results of many surveys have not been published yet, as Finkelstein himself concedes. Cf. I. Finkelstein, “The Land of Ephraim Survey 1980-1987”, pp. 178-79. Accordingly, the figures could vary as new surveys are conducted and their findings are published.

⁶⁴ J. Blenkinsopp, “The Family in First Temple Israel”, in L.G. Perdue et al (eds.), *Families in Ancient Israel*, Louisville / Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997, pp. 48-49.

Solomonic temple (1 Kgs 6,1-38; 7,13-51) and royal palaces (1 Kgs 7,1-12), which are recorded in the first book of Kings, possibly because of their religious and national import. It is also said that Solomon built the Millo, the wall of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer (cf. 1 Kgs 9,15). 1 Kgs 9,16-19 gives us a record of the other cities he rebuilt. As far as these building activities of Solomon are concerned, though vividly described in the Bible, the archaeological evidence is lacking and it is difficult to affirm the contemporaneity of the biblical descriptions with Solomon.⁶⁵

The Bible is more or less silent about the construction activities of other kings. In the north it is just mentioned that Omri bought the hill Samaria from Shemer and fortified it (cf. 1 Kgs 16,24). The city of Jericho is attributed to the period of Ahab (1 Kgs 16,34b). The remains of the magnificent buildings in Samaria with the best examples of masonry of the time, especially the palace considered to have belonged to Jeroboam II, unearthed by the archaeologists, can justify the assumption that considerable construction works took place during the 8th century BCE.⁶⁶ The debris of the palaces of Omri and Ahab, excavated in Samaria, reveals ivory carvings, which according to the observation of Kenyon were made in the Phoenician style,⁶⁷ as a sign of the luxury and prosperous international trade of this period. The relatively large number of wine and oil installations is indicative of the large scale agricultural activity in the area.⁶⁸

The pottery discovered from Megiddo Stratum IV also points towards large scale building activities during the time of Ahab and Jeroboam II.⁶⁹ Like Megiddo, in Hazor, also in the northern part of the kingdom of Israel, evidence of large scale building activity has been unearthed from the 9th and 8th century BCE, beginning from the period of King Solomon.⁷⁰ Many of these buildings could have been used for public administration as the monarchy became established in Israel and a centralized administration was put into place.⁷¹ The buildings at Samaria and Megiddo from this period provide us with “some glimpse of royal

⁶⁵ Cf. M. Cogan, *1 Kings*, AB 10, New York / London / Toronto et al: Doubleday, 2001, pp. 252-257.

⁶⁶ G.A. Reisner et al, *Harvard Excavations at Samaria 1908-10*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924, pp. 117-19.

⁶⁷ Cf. K. Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1979, pp. 264-65.

⁶⁸ Cf. M. Cogan, *1 Kings*, pp. 416-17.

⁶⁹ Cf. K. Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land*, p. 266.

⁷⁰ Cf. K. Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land*, p. 270.

⁷¹ Kenyon comments on the findings: “In this recognition of the form and importance of public administration buildings, there is inherent important sociological evidence. The king of Israel had in a number of important town centers in which provision was made for buildings that included storage halls (or warehouses) in which the product of the taxes, collected in kind, could be stored. The ostraca, records written on potsherds, found at Samaria are probably to be interpreted as the documentary record, or receipts, of the tax-products received there, though recognizable storehouses have not survived there.” K. Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land*, pp. 272-73.

and official luxury” as there were ivory coatings and rich furnishing visible in these buildings.⁷²

It is reasonable to assume that the monumental building activities of Solomon and Omri, which had to be financed by the people, could have increased the burden of taxes on the people. Biblical texts themselves bear witness to the fact that forced labour was required during the time of Solomon for the temple construction and that there was even a system in place to monitor the enforcement of it (cf. 1 Kgs 5,27-30; 12,18). It is no surprise that the yoke of forced labour and taxes caused the revolt of the Northern tribes both during and after the reign of Solomon (cf. 1 Kgs 11,27-28; 12,4).⁷³ Along with the building activities, the luxuries enjoyed by people living in the royal courts and the large possessions of the kings and his officers, and the expenses of costly campaigns had to be borne by the ordinary people as the discussions around the institution of monarchy in the Bible point out (cf. 1 Sam 8,10-18; 1 Kgs 21,1-4). These texts reflect the change taking place with the emergence of monarchy in the traditional way of ownership.

With regard to the payment of officers, we have only limited information in the Bible. The recompense was to be collected from the people and paid to the servants (*'ābādīm*) in terms of landed property as can be inferred from 1Sam 8,14 and 22,7. But it is not clear how they were collected. Alt proposes that the land that had no legitimate heir could be taken over by the king.⁷⁴ The payment could be raised from tributes and gifts during the times when Israel had dominion over the neighboring territories. Solomon thus raised a part of his income through gifts from other kings and rewarded them with provisions in the form of wheat and oil, and territorially with cities and villages (cf. 1 Kgs 5,20.23.25; 9,10-21).

In 1 Kgs 5,20 Solomon employed workers from Hiram, king of Tyre, in return for a payment, which was paid in provisions for the court of Hiram (cf. v. 25).⁷⁵ Solomon also raised forced labour (*mas*) from all Israel (v. 27). According to R. North, “The term *mas* refers to “compulsory service”, a kind of labor to which a person is “forced” without it constituting “slavery” in the formal sense.”⁷⁶ This practice was also known under the term *sēbel* (1 Kgs 11,28; Exod 1,11; 2,11; 5,4.5; 6,6.7). That Solomon used *mas* for his construction activities is evident from 1 Kgs 9,15. He conscripted labour also from the non-

⁷² Cf. K. Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land*, p. 282.

⁷³ Cf. M. Cogan, *1 Kings*, p. 309.

⁷⁴ A. Alt, “Der Anteil des Königtums”, p. 364. He cites 1 Kgs 21,8ff. and 2 Kgs 8,1ff. as instances to support his claim.

⁷⁵ The quantity of provisions mentioned here is much more than Solomon’s annual receipt (cf. v. 2). Though the numbers here are suspect, it is clear that a large debt was accumulated and Solomon had to pay it by the transfer of land (cf. 9,11). Cf. M. Cogan, *1 Kings*, pp. 228-29.

⁷⁶ R. North, “*mas*; סֶבֶל *sēbel*”, *TDOT* VIII, (1983-84; English trans. 1997), p. 428.

Israelites who lived in the territory of Israel (2 Chr 8,8). Though this practice was opposed by Jeroboam in the Northern Kingdom, the practice might have continued to much later times as an example of compulsory service is attested even during the time of Asa in Judah (1 Kgs 15,22).⁷⁷

The kings were also offered gifts called *minḥā(h)*, which understood in general is a gift offered to God (Gen 4,3; Lev 2,1.4.5.6.15; 6,13 et al) or to other human beings (Gen 32,14.19 et al). But the term *minḥā(h)* is used to denote gifts offered to kings by people in 1 Sam 10,27. In other instances, the term refers to the tribute received by David from the defeated Moabites (2 Sam 8,2.6) or by Solomon from territories over which he had sovereignty (cf. 1 Kgs 5,1).⁷⁸

The new socio-economic situation caused by the emergence of monarchy, in which the king and his administrative and military machinery had to be paid for mostly by deliveries and rations from the people, had consequences for the manner of production. The determining factor was no longer the needs of the producers themselves, but the requirements of the monarchical state, its monumental construction activities, and other expenses. Janne Nurmi also points out:

We should understand the interest of the kings in acquisition of the land for the fulfillment of the duties of the state had significant consequences for the society. As a result we have a process here where the demand on income is linked to the build-up of the state, and thereby changing the social situation of the population.⁷⁹

Amos does not directly accuse the monarchy or say anywhere that the state played a role in the exploitation of the weaker sections. But his open ire against the wealthy who oppress the poor and against the residents of Samaria, the seat of the monarchy in the northern state, cannot be read without ascribing responsibility for the misery to the higher class people, who shared the upper echelons of power.

2.2.3. Break-up of Tribal Solidarity

To understand the social crisis in ancient Israel, it will be useful to get a picture of the transformation in the mutually supportive familial and clan system that took place at this juncture of history in Israel. The Israelite social system was organized primarily along kinship lines. The *bēt-’āb* or the “father’s house” was the basic unit, which included not only

⁷⁷ Cf. R. North, “מַסַּמַּס; סֵבֵל *sēbel*”, p. 430.

⁷⁸ The term refers mostly to tributes also in Judg 3,15 and 2 Kgs 17,3.4.

⁷⁹ My translation from “So müssen wir folgern, dass das Interesse des Königs an Grundeigentum zur Erfüllung der staatlichen Aufgaben erhebliche Konsequenzen für die Situation der Gesellschaft mit sich brachte. Daraus folgt, dass wir hier einen Prozess vor uns haben, bei dem der Bedarf an Einkünften mit dem Ausbau des Staates zusammenhängt, wobei dieser Prozess die sozialen Bedingungen der Bevölkerung verändert.” J.J. Nurmi, *Die Ethik unter dem Druck des Alltags. Die Impulse der gesellschaftlichen Änderungen und Situation zu der sozialkritischen Prophetie in Juda im 8. Jh. v. Chr.*, Åbo: Åbo Akademis Förlag, 2004, p. 132. This added to the complexities in state trade and affected the social behavior in Juda, according to Nurmi.

wife/wives, children, their spouses and their siblings, but also the servants. Many such families together formed a clan called *mišpāhā(h)* on the basis of blood relationship. They were primarily responsible for blood revenge and met together for ritual meals and common feasts (cf. 1 Sam 20,6.29; Esth 9,26-28). A group of clans together were called a tribe or *mišpāhōt*, commonly referred to in the Bible with the noun *šēbet* or *matte(h)*. The tribe stood at the head of the organization of the society and claimed its origin from a common ancestor.⁸⁰

The ownership of the land remained with the kinship group in tribal Israel and the mode of production could be termed as a “Communitarian Mode of Production” with “equality among households”, which “provided its practitioners with a more materially, socially, and ideologically satisfying life than they observed among the tribute-burdened producers in their environment”⁸¹, as Gottwald points out. A concept of solidarity, affirming the duty of every member to protect the weak and vulnerable in the group, characterized the family and clan organization of the above type. De Vaux attributes this concept to the institution of *gə’ullā(h)*, which was a hallmark of the tribal life of this period.⁸² The verb *gā’al* expresses the idea of “setting free, liberating”, or more secularly understood “to restore”, or “to repair”⁸³. According to the post exilic jubilee prescriptions of Lev 25,47ff., every Israelite who was impoverished and sold into debt slavery enjoyed the privilege of being redeemed by his clansmen. The Leviticus prescription begins with phrase *kî-yāmûk’āhîkā ûmākar mē’āhuzzātô* “if your clansman becomes so poor and sell his property”, the nearest kinsman had to buy him back his property as an expression of solidarity being his clansman (cf. Lev 25,25).⁸⁴

The institution of *gə’ullā(h)* followed from the theological understanding that YHWH is the *gō’ēl* “redeemer” of Israel (Ps 74,2; 77,16; 78,35; 107,2; Isa 43,1; 44,22.23; 63,9; Lam 3,58). This idea has its origin probably in the exodus event, where Israel experienced the redemptive action of YHWH in all its uniqueness (Exod 6,6; 15,13). The saga of this redemptive action is remembered through the phrase that “the Lord has redeemed Jacob” (Isa 43,1; 44,23; 48,20; Jer 31,11 et al) and through similar such assertions in the prophetic books. It is the firm conviction of Israel that YHWH, “their redeemer is strong” (*gō’ālām ḥāzāq*) and

⁸⁰ However a tribe could also sometimes amalgamate persons and families to its fold from outside as the provision that a liberated slave could remain with the master with his wife and children in Exod 21,5-6 shows.

⁸¹ N.K. Gottwald, “Social Class as an Analytic and Hermeneutical Category in Biblical Studies”, *JBL* 112/1 (1993), p. 7.

⁸² Cf. R. de Vaux, *Das Alte Testament und seine Lebensordnungen*, vol. 1, Freiburg / Basel / Wien: Herder, 1964, p. 48.

⁸³ H. Ringgren, “גָּאֵל *gā’al*”, *TDOT* II (1972-73; English trans. 1975), p. 351.

⁸⁴ Lev 25,35-38 is a response to the later situations of poverty and it will be analyzed in the following chapter.

pleads the causes of widows and orphans (cf. Prov 23,11; Jer 50,34). He stands on the side of the distressed and pleads their lawsuit (cf. Job 19,25; Ps 119,154; Jer 50,34; Lam 3,58). This term is used to refer to the redemption that would be worked by YHWH in Babylon for daughter Zion in Isa 35,9 and in Mic 4,10. The trust in YHWH was so firm that the prophet Hosea could say that by the redemptive power of YHWH even death loses its thorn and Sheol its sting (cf. Hos 13,14).

The institution of *gə'ullā(h)*, translated into the routine life of the Israelites, obliged them to redeem a kin who is impoverished and has sold himself to a stranger (cf. Lev 25,47-55). The duty of redemption here had to be performed by a close relative, a kinsman, or the indebted person himself, if he has acquired meanwhile sufficient resources to redeem himself (cf. vv. 48-49), calculating from the time of his selling into slavery to the Year of Jubilee (cf. vv. 50-52). The Year of Jubilee announced a general redemption for those who had no means to pay for their relief (cf. v. 54).

The book of Ruth provides us with an instance to show how the institution of *gə'ullā(h)* was practiced in ancient Israel. In the case of the widow Naomi, she could not keep the inheritance because she had no surviving sons. That meant that her daughter-in-law, Ruth, was also left without a means of survival. We do not know ancient laws regarding the inheritance in such a situation. From the narratives in this book we know the following: Naomi, who is looking for a *manō^ah* “a resting place” or some kind of security (Ru 3,1) for her daughter-in-law, Ruth, advises her to establish a rapport with Boaz and remind him that he is her *gō'ēl* “kin” (cf. Ru 3,9⁸⁵), although, the nearest kin to fulfill that responsibility is someone else (cf. vv. 12-13). The duty of a male relative to marry the widow of a deceased relative and raise progeny for him, as practiced through the custom of levirate marriage, seems to be the issue here (cf. Ru 4,10). If so, this custom too is an expression of the notion of solidarity. According to Campbell, the gesture means much more than a levirate marriage: “The practice is not simply concerned with producing a male child, nor even with producing an heir to the dead man’s property; it is concerned every bit as much with the care of the widow.”⁸⁶

According to many authors, this institution was part of living according to *hesed* “fidelity” in Israel. Ruth is appreciated for her family loyalty (*hesed*) by Boaz in 3,10. That is

⁸⁵ Ruth’s request, “spread the edge of your cloak over your servant” (v. 9) is a request to marry her, according to R.L. Hubbard, as the phrase has such a connotation in Ezek 16,8; Deut 23,1 and in 27,20. R.L. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, p. 212.

⁸⁶ E.F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth*, AB 7, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975, p. 136. The author sees the care of the widows as the main motive of Naomi’s speculations in chapter 1 about the prospects of levirate marriage (cf. vv. 11-13).

the same reason why Boaz pledges to do everything to come to her aid and fulfill his duty of being her redeemer (cf. v. 11). Campbell affirms the role of God, who has been faithful (*hesed*) in his dealings with Israel and after whom the faithful living of Israel is modelled. God controls the turn of events in Ru 3,18 and it is indicated from the words of Naomi: “how the matter will fall out”.⁸⁷

As the story proceeds in Ru 4, redeeming Ruth (v. 10) is preceded by Boaz redeeming the property of the Elimelech (cf. Ru 4,3-9). Redeeming the property and marrying Ruth here seem to be “intrinsically related” as there would have been no son to inherit the redeemed property without Ruth marrying again, as both the widows had no surviving sons.⁸⁸ The duty to redeem was not restricted only to persons, but also to the property as indicated by Jer 32. Jeremiah buys back the mortgaged field belonging to his cousin Hanamel (cf. Jer 32,6-14), who was impoverished and was forced to sell his property. This action, as the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar is about to lay siege to the land and conquer it, is supposed to be a sign that YHWH will redeem Israel from Babylon (cf. 32,14-15).⁸⁹ At the same time, it shows also how the duty of redemption was faithfully observed in Israel.⁹⁰ The basic economic function of this institution is well summed up by J.M. Sasson:

It would not be an overstatement to say that the redemption of a kinsman’s property, when its sale was forced by economic reasons, was designed to protect the poorer landowning classes from either sinking into unwelcome tenancy or losing their independent livelihood. In effect, the institution of *ge’ullāh* promoted permanent land-holdings, secured economic stability, discouraged mass movement of landless populations, and prevented the amassing of land in the hands of few.⁹¹

Another important responsibility attached to the institution of *ge’ullā(h)* was the duty of taking revenge for a slain relative, “redeemer of blood” (*gō’ēl haddām* cf. Num 35,19.21.24.25.27; Deut 19,6.12; Josh 20,5.9; 2 Sam 14,11).⁹² The murderer had to pay with his life, unless he managed to take refuge in a city of refuge, and thereby avail himself of time

⁸⁷ Cf. E.F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth*, p. 138.

⁸⁸ Cf. E.W. Davies, “Ruth IV 5 and the Duties of the *gō’ēl*,” *VT* 33 (1983), pp. 231-34. Actually no biblical law prescribes that a widow has to be married by the “kinsman redeemer”. For this translation of *gō’ēl* in Ru 3,12-13 see R.L. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, p. 208.

⁸⁹ Lundbom says that v. 15, “though spoken to a Judahite audience, nevertheless sends a strong message to exiles in Babylon that the stay there will be temporary and the day will come when the houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought by Judahites in Judah.” J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, AB 21B, New York / London / Toronto et al: Doubleday, 2004, p. 511.

⁹⁰ The redemption of land was not an obligation of the clansmen as McKenzie remarks, “unlike the obligation to avenge murder or injury, the purchase of land became an option rather than an obligation.” J.L. McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1974, p. 239. But there are instances in the Bible where this duty is faithfully fulfilled by the clansmen as the above instances in Ruth and Jeremiah show.

⁹¹ J.M. Sasson, “The Issue of *Ge’ullāh* in Ruth”, *JSOT* 5 (1978), pp. 59-60.

⁹² The avenger of blood could be the son of the dead man or his male relatives. Cf. H. Ringgren, “גֹּאֵל *gā’al*”, p. 352.

till the circumstances of crime are investigated. The blood of a relative had to be avenged by the blood of the one who committed the murder or by the blood of one of the members of his family (cf. Deut 19,1-13; 2 Sam 14,11 et al). The underlying thought was: “By vengeance the avenger of blood restores the equilibrium that has been disturbed and the wholeness that had been impaired...”⁹³ Without going into the historical background of this primitive tribal institution, I would make the point that this institution was another expression of the notion of solidarity in the tribal Israel. Thus the institution of *gə'ullā(h)* had the significant sociological and economic function of protecting the weaker members of the clan, especially those who were victims of debt, violence or any other forms of misery.

It is possible that the establishment of a monarchical state had very powerful impacts on the society and had bearings on its basic solidarity structure. In the beginning the monarchy promoted a social order with corporate control over land and elementary factors of production and assured a minimum means of survival to every member.⁹⁴ But later on it had to change over to what Gottwald calls a “tributary mode of production”, where “Surplus was extracted from producers by state taxation and corvée, by elites who exacted interest on debt and imposed rental fees, and by foreign powers whose demands for tribute and indemnity were passed on to the Israelite producers in the form of higher taxes.”⁹⁵ The payment of rent overburdened the people, and as the situation deteriorated with more and more people becoming landless and indebted, the institution of *gə'ullā(h)* became impracticable. Thus the structural changes that took place with the introduction of monarchy turned out to be detrimental to the concept of traditional tribal solidarity.

2.2.4. Emergence of a Class Society

Drawing conclusions from the study of 20 early states⁹⁶ around the world at a time when a centralized organization of power came into being, Henri J.M. Claessen argues that social stratification was a phenomenon that could be located almost everywhere in the world:

Even a superficial perusal of the chapters describing specific early states will make it clear that a division of the population into ‘... rather broad, more or less

⁹³ H. Ringgren, “גֵּא'וּלָהּ *gā'al*”, p. 352.

⁹⁴ Cf. H.G. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung im antiken Judäa. Eine religionssoziologische Studie zum Verhältnis von Tradition und gesellschaftlicher Entwicklung*, Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978, p. 19.

⁹⁵ N.K. Gottwald, “Social Class”, p. 8.

⁹⁶ Claessen and Skalnik provide a working definition of early state: “the early state is the organization for the regulation of social relations in a society that is divided into two emergent social classes, the rulers and the ruled.” H.J.M. Claessen / P. Skalnik, “The Early State: Theories and Hypotheses”, in their (eds.), *The Early State*, The Hague / Paris / New York: Mouton Publishers, 1978, p. 21.

stabilized categories showing a hierarchical order, and based on property, status and/or power' was found everywhere.⁹⁷

Claessen describes the division as the sovereign and his kin, an aristocracy, priests, military leaders, "ministeriales"⁹⁸ comprised of high officers, a gentry or people forming lower aristocracy, smallholders or people who work their own lands, tenants, traders, artisans, servants, and slaves.⁹⁹ Thus the emergence of a class society with upper, middle and lower strata is characteristic of many ancient societies as they went through this particular organizational phase. The society now becomes a complex organization with systemized inequality, which existed not only between the social categories, but sometimes also within the categories themselves.¹⁰⁰

Hans Kippenberg is to be credited with the systematic analysis of the emergence of class society in Israel. In his attempt to study theology with regard to its relation to the social process of life by applying the methods of ethnology and social anthropology to ancient Judaic literature, he stresses the phenomenon of the emergence of class society in ancient Judah.¹⁰¹ He understands the concept "ancient" as follows:

"Ancient" is characterized by the following social relationship in which a considerable proportion of the farmers lost their control over the means of production such as seed, cattle, implements and in some cases water, and an aristocracy which was interested in trade forced the development of new cultures.¹⁰²

The process of farmers losing control over the basic means of production and livestock emerged as a social phenomenon in the 8th century BCE. The transformation which took place as a result of this process is associated with the development of new cultures such as olive and wine, trade and handicrafts and was preceded by the introduction of coins and the fixing of values in terms of money.¹⁰³ An undesired consequence of this ancient development was the increasing accumulation of surplus leading to an increase of inequality in traditional social relationships with an increased dependence on the aristocracy.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ H.J.M. Claessen, "The Early State: a Structural Approach", in his and P. Skalník, (eds.), *The Early State*, The Hague / Paris / New York: Mouton Publishers, 1978, p. 546.

⁹⁸ The author borrows this term from ancient Europe. H.J.M. Claessen, "The Early State: a Structural Approach", p. 546.

⁹⁹ Cf. H.J.M. Claessen, "The Early State: a Structural Approach", p. 546.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. H.J.M. Claessen, "The Early State: a Structural Approach", p. 568.

¹⁰¹ Cf. H.G. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*, p. 12

¹⁰² My translation from "„Antike“ soll im folgenden gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse kennzeichnen, in denen ein nennenswerter Anteil der Bauernschaft die Kontrolle über die zur Produktion notwendigen Faktoren wie Saatgut, Vieh und Geräte, Land, eventuell Wasser verloren hat und eine am Handel interessierte Aristokratie den Anbau neuer Kulturen erzwingt." H.G. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*, p. 13.

¹⁰³ Cf. H.G. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. H.G. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*, p. 13.

The changes that took place, seen from the point of view of ethnology, are linked to the aspect of solidarity that characterized Israelite society, which like any other tribal society was originally a system or organization of relatives as we saw above. It was a system in which the notion of a 'relative' did not follow the normal understanding as members belonging to one family, but as members of different families bound together on the basis of blood relationship or a genealogically organized group.¹⁰⁵

Looking at the political anthropological aspects, Kippenberg sees the following developments taking place in the society¹⁰⁶: To begin with, the homogenous collective units of clans formed themselves as segments. The segments are characterized by a social organization which operates without a centralization of forces in the state institutions. They are characterized by the absence of sharp differences in rank, status and riches and they could still be considered as an egalitarian society. However, the problem with the segmentary society was that it was controlled by individual families, following their own petty self interests. This in some way made the intervention of a political mechanism necessary in order to regulate economic activity. The political organization was the result of an institutionalization of the system of appropriation of rent, rather than a pre-condition for increased production. The ruling class became the enforcer of all the duties and debts, whose responsibility it was now to protect the rights of the needy. They were responsible for the collection and redistribution of goods. The result of this development was a hierarchically organized society.

Kippenberg says that political anthropology distinguishes such a hierarchical society from an economically class-based society, where one group institutionalizes by force the inequality over the owning and operation of the elementary means of production.¹⁰⁷ Social relationships in this system are no longer decided by blood relationship but based on territory. The economic relationship is determined by the authoritative appropriation of surplus and means of production, and no longer by the principle of mutuality.¹⁰⁸ The privileged groups try

¹⁰⁵ Cf. H.G. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*, p. 16. They had corporate ownership of property. Sometimes they had to provide military service. They had a common place of residence or sometimes occupied different areas. The right of land was handed down through *mišpāhā*. The members had responsibility to one another. Cf. pp. 25-27.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. H.G. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*, p. 20-22.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. H.G. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. H.G. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*, p. 22. He describes this phenomenon as follows: "Die Interaktionssysteme, die in den hierarchischen und den Klassengesellschaften beherrschend werden, unterscheiden sich von den segmentären dadurch, dass die gesellschaftlichen Beziehungen der Mitglieder nicht mehr primär durch Deszendenz, sondern primär durch Territorialität vermittelt sind, und dass in ihnen Mechanismen der Sanktionierung gesetzter Normen entwickelt werden. Die ökonomischen Beziehungen in ihnen werden durch die herrschaftliche Aneignung von Surplus (hierarchische Gesellschaft) bzw. von Produktionsmitteln bestimmt, nicht mehr durch Gegenseitigkeit." p. 22.

to exploit the less privileged groups in the society and try to appropriate part of the surplus labour product of these groups. As a result, says Gottwald, “wealth and power accrue disproportionately to those who are able to claim and dispose what others produce. Those who have this power of economic disposal tend also to have political predominance and ideological hegemony.”¹⁰⁹

The final stage of this development takes place as the monarchy enters into an understanding or what Kessler calls “a covenant”¹¹⁰ with the higher class of the society. Such an understanding is part of the evolution of every human society. According to Kessler, this covenant makes the early state into a fully developed state, where the class differences are now clearly noticeable, not only between “the ruling” and “the ruled”, but also among the ruling classes themselves.¹¹¹ Gottwald explains the composition of the classes:

On the one hand, *the dominant tribute-imposing class* consisted of the political elite – native and/or foreign – and their administrative, religious, and small manufacturing elites who benefited from state power. ... This extraction of surplus was accomplished by a variety of mechanisms, including imperial tribute, domestic taxation, commercial imposts, corvée, slave labor, rent, or debt servicing. On the other hand, *the dominated tribute-bearing class* consisted of peasants, pastoralists, artisans, priests, slaves, and unskilled workers – all those who did not draw surplus from any other workers but who were structurally subject to their own surplus being taken by members of the dominant class, or who were themselves dependent wage laborers.¹¹²

This system struck hard at the root of the tribal system of self and mutually supporting small farmers. They were forced to borrow in times of familial needs and natural calamities. They lost their land when they were not able to repay loans. Thus many of them became landless daily labourers, and the danger of becoming debt slaves loomed large.

2.2.4.1. Formation of an Upper Class in Israel

A perusal of the scattered material in the dtr and chr history provides us with a few useful hints about the emergence of an aristocracy, mainly consisting of the royal family, leaders of the people, military leaders, priests and officers of the palace. There are two lists of officers in the Hebrew Bible from the period of king David: 2 Sam 8,15-18 // 1 Chr 18,14-17 // 2 Sam 20,23-26 and 1 Chr 27,25-34. The lists include commanders, recorders, priests, secretaries, governors, and ministers.¹¹³ 1 Kgs 4,1-9 provides us with a list of who’s who in

¹⁰⁹ N.K. Gottwald, “Social Class”, p. 4.

¹¹⁰ R. Kessler, *Sozialgeschichte des alten Israel. Eine Einführung*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006, s. 122.

¹¹¹ R. Kessler, *Sozialgeschichte des alten Israel*, p. 122.

¹¹² N.K. Gottwald, “Social Class”, p. 6.

¹¹³ Tomoo Ishida puts the size of the total entourage of David with the royal family, military men, civil administrators, clerics and their family members at a staggering 5,600 people during the time of David itself,

Solomon's administrative set up. The list adds the king's friend, the head of the palace staff, and the heads of the various departments in the palace to the above. According to 1 Kgs 9,23, there were 550 supervisors over the works of Solomon.¹¹⁴ Elsewhere in biblical history, the terms used to refer to the officers who appear to have higher ranks are *śar* "officer", *'ebed* "servant", *zāqēn* "elder", *kōhēn* "priest", *sārîs* "eunuchs", and *pāqîd* "appointed officers".

The official class in biblical history includes very often a group of royal officers and administrators, generally called *sārîm*, "officers" or "princes". They appear further as the co-workers and counsellors of the king (cf. 2 Sam 18,5; 19,7; 1 Chr 12,22.29), or as leaders of the people (cf. 1 Kgs 4,2; 2 Kgs 24,12; 2 Chr 24,10; Ezra 9,1.2; 10,8; Esth 1,16; 3,1). The noun *śar* occurs 421x in the OT¹¹⁵, mostly in the historical books, and it is evidence that officialdom became a very common feature under the monarchy. They may have replaced the traditional tribal self-administration based on the rule of *Pater Familias* and elders. A survey of the biblical books dealing with monarchy reveals the following:

- i. Generally the officers handled administrative matters under the monarchy and included the palace security officers (*śārē hārāšîm* 1 Kgs 14,27; 2 Chr 12,10); officers in charge of the forced labour (*śārē missîm* Exod 1,11); the chief supervisors of works (*śārē hannizzābîm* 1 Kgs 9,23; 2 Chr 8,10); the captains of the kings' chariots (*śārē hārekeb* 1 Kgs 22,31.32.33; 2 Kgs 8,21; 2 Chr 18,30.31.32; 21,9); and overseers of property (*śārē hārākûš* 1 Chr 27,31). There is some indication that heads of certain clans belonged to the aristocracy as they included the leading people in the political administration either of the people as a whole or in the provinces and cities such as leaders of the people (*śārē hā'ām* 1 Chr 21,2; 2 Chr 24,23; Neh 11,1); leaders of Israel (*śārē yiśrā'el* 1 Chr 22,17; 23,2; 28,1; 2 Chr 12,6); the leaders of the tribes of Israel (*śārē šibtē yiśrā'el* 1 Chr 27,22; 1 Chr 28,1; 29,6); the leaders of Judah (*śārē yəhūdā(h)* 2 Chr 22,8; 24,17; Neh 12,31.32); the leaders of the provinces (*śārē hamməḏînôt* 1 Kgs 20,14.15.17.19); and the leaders of the city (*śārē hā'ir* 2 Chr 29,20).
- ii. In the military organization, office holders were distinguished according to the following titles: commander of thousands (*śārē 'ālāpîm* 1 Sam 8,12; 22,7; 2 Sam 18,1; 1 Chr 13,1; 29,6; 2 Chr 17,14) and commander of hundreds (*śārē mē'ôṭ* 1 Sam 22,7; 2 Sam 18,1; 2 Kgs 11,4.9.15.19; 1 Chr 29,6; 2 Chr 23,1.14.20), commander of fifties (*śārē ḥāmiššîm* 1 Sam 8,12;

some of whom, of course, lived outside the city of Jerusalem. T. Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel*, Berlin / New York: De Gruyter, 1977. Cf. pp. 131-135.

¹¹⁴ The officers in these lists include palace administrators, civil, military and religious officials and are referred to as *kōhēn* "priest", *sōpēr* "scribe" (2 Sam 8,17.18), *mazkîr* "recorder" (1 Chr 18,15), and officers over *mas* or "forced labour" (2 Sam 20,24), over supplies (1 Chr 27,25), over agricultural works (1 Chr 27,26), *yō'ēš* "counsel" (1 Chr 27,32), tutor of kings sons (1 Chr 27,32), and commanders of the army (1 Chr 27,34).

¹¹⁵ This term is used under Saul to refer to his commander-in-chief, Abner (1 Sam 14,50; 26,5 et al) and to David (1 Sam 22,14). Cf. H. Niehr, "שָׂר; śar", *TDOT* XIV (1992-93; English trans. 2004), p. 196.

2 Kgs 1,14). These titles show that there were gradations in ranks in the military establishment. There were also officers with the titles commanders of troops (*šārê-ḡāḏūḏīm* 2 Sam 4,2), commanders of the army (*šārê hēhayil* 2 Sam 24,4; 2 Kgs 9,5; 25,23; 2 Chr 33,14), commanders of the armed forces of Israel (*šārê šib'ôt yiśrā'el* 1 Kgs 2,5; 1 Chr 27,3), and war commanders (*šārê milhāmôt* 2 Chr 32,6).¹¹⁶

iii. The noun, *'eḇed*, which usually means a slave or a servant, could also mean the officials of the palace. They are sometimes called “the servants of the king”.¹¹⁷ The title stands for a group with high social standing or the officials at the royal court. The word occurs above 350x in association with kings in the Bible.¹¹⁸ It is also sometimes used as a military title (cf. 1 Sam 22,17; 2 Sam 11,1.11; 20,6; 1 Kgs 1,33; 20,12) and therefore it is not possible to delimit their sphere of influence.¹¹⁹ They are qualified as “standing before the king” in 1 Kgs 10,8 with the parallel in 2 Chr 9,7, thereby emphasizing their close association with the kings.¹²⁰ They were part of the official circles of the palace¹²¹ and were sometimes supported by the king with land as indicated by 1 Sam 8,14.15; 22,7.

iv. To the higher classes belonged sometimes *zāqēn*, “elder”, who traditionally represented the tribal organization. Though the term *zāqēn* means “old”, barely a third of the biblical occurrences subscribe to this meaning.¹²² It is, in fact, a specialized usage signifying an “elder”, associated with cities, tribes, and nations.¹²³ The elders represented the local people and were responsible for local matters¹²⁴ and played a very significant role in the history of

¹¹⁶ There are instances when the military officers usurped the crown. For e.g., Zimri (*šar mahšūt hārākeḇ* “captain of the half of the chariots”) overthrows Elah, the son of Baasha, king of Israel (cf. 1 Kgs 16,8-10). Jehu, one of the *šārê haḥayil* “captains of the army”, did the same in assassinating king Joram, son of Ahab after being anointed king by the disciple of Elisha 2 Kgs 9,1ff.

¹¹⁷ H. Ringgren / U. Rüterwörden / H. Simian-Yofre, “עֲבָד *'āḇad*”, *TDOT X* (1986; English trans. 1999), p. 391.

¹¹⁸ Cf. U. Rüterwörden, *Die Beamten der israelitischen Königszeit. Eine Studie zur šr und vergleichbaren Begriffen*, Stuttgart / Berlin / Köln et al: Kohlhammer, 1981, p. 23.

¹¹⁹ Cf. U. Rüterwörden, *Die Beamten*, p. 32.

¹²⁰ Cf. U. Rüterwörden, *Die Beamten*, p. 39.

¹²¹ Difference between *'eḇed* and *šar* could be that while the latter is a “Statusbegriff”, the former is a “Relationsbegriff”. The *'eḇed* stays in close relationship to the king and belongs to his court; but *šar* is an office with authority and functions along with the king. Cf. U. Rüterwörden, *Die Beamten*, p. 137.

In the opinion of Niehr, *'eḇed* was a term used to refer to the officers to whom duties were transferred under monarchy and never transcended the sphere of royal staff. Cf. H. Niehr, “עֲבָד; *šar*”, p. 197. They were, in fact, the servants in the house of the king as we see in 1 Sam 22,6.9.14.17; 2 Sam 9,2; 15,14 et al.

'āḇādīm were, as members of the court, also members of the house of the king and in this capacity they fetched the bride for the king (cf. 1 Sam 25,39ff.) and buried the dead king Ahaziah (2 Kgs 9,28). Cf. H. Ringgren / U. Rüterwörden / H. Simian-Yofre, “עֲבָד *'āḇad*”, pp. 391-92.

¹²² Cf. J. Conrad / G.J. Botterweck, “זָקֵן *zāqēn*”, *TDOT IV* (1975-1977; English trans. 1980), p. 123.

¹²³ Cf. J. Conrad / G.J. Botterweck, “זָקֵן *zāqēn*”, p. 123. They describe the elder as follows: “The elder is thus a member of a special committee, representing a specific clearly defined social community; he must be thought of primarily as the holder of an office, not the representative of a particular age group.”

¹²⁴ Cf. H. Niehr, “עֲבָד *šar*”, p. 197.

Israel. Joshua was survived by the elders (cf. Josh 24,31; Judg 2,7).¹²⁵ Their presence is mentioned in the congregation before whom Saul repents (cf. 1 Sam 15,30) and David mourns (cf. 2 Sam 12,17). The system of elders had its origin in the tribal background¹²⁶ and it continued to exert influence in the capital and in the cities under the monarchy, though the tribal self-administration lost its importance with the establishment of a centralized government. They were now mentioned along with the officers, making them part of an upper class (cf. Josh 23,2; 24,1; 2 Kgs 10,1.5). Their presence was felt in both capital cities of Samaria and Jerusalem. Rehoboam consulted the elders who served his father (1 Kgs 12,6 // 2 Chr 10,6) and received wise counsel from them (1 Kgs 12,8 // 2 Chr 10,8). Their changed role under monarchy is clear in the words of Conrad:

They have thus been divested of their original autonomy; but their power has probably increased significantly, to the extent that in their new role they influence the entire body politic. Therefore, when members are generally mentioned as members of the upper class, we should primarily think in terms of elders of the appropriate capital (Isa 3,2; 9,14[15]; Ezek 7,26).¹²⁷

Conrad's observation is also supported by the fact that Isa 3,2 mentions the elder as part of group of upper class in the city of Jerusalem including hero, soldier, judge, prophet and diviner.

v. The title *kōhēn* "priest" appears among the officers in all the biblical lists and it represented a profession rather than a vocation. It was hereditary like many other professions in the ancient Near East,¹²⁸ the priests traditionally being the descendants of Aaron and the Levites. This was a tradition followed even during the monarchy (cf. 1 Chr 15,4ff.). Apparently they belonged to the higher class officials as the priests, Zadok and Ahimelech, are included in the officialdom who served under David (2 Sam 8,17). The existence of a structured organization among the priests themselves is indicated by the following titles: officers of the sanctuary (*šārē-qōdeš* 1 Chr 24,5); officers of God (*šārē hā'ēlōhīm* 1 Chr 24,5); the chiefs of the Levites (*šārē haləwiyyīm* 2 Chr 35,9); the chiefs of the priests (*šārē hakkōhānīm* 2 Chr 36,14).

vi. Another group that was an integral part of the upper class was *šōpētīm* "judges". Traditionally this term was used to refer to rulers in pre-monarchic Israel (cf. Judg 10,1-5; 12,7-15). According to Niehr, the office of *šōpēt* as a ruler also belonged to the organization

¹²⁵ They were leaders of the people, who induced Jephthah to fight for them in Judg 11,5.8.9.11; they were part of the sitting in which things were settled in Ru 4,9; they look for someone to take up the issue of threatened Jabesh Gilead 1 Sam 11,3; and they sat with the prophet Elisha in 2 Kgs 6,32.

¹²⁶ Cf. J. Conrad / G.J. Botterweck, "זָקֵן *zāqēn*", pp. 126-27.

¹²⁷ J. Conrad / G.J. Botterweck, "זָקֵן *zāqēn*", p. 127.

¹²⁸ D. Dommerhausen / J. Bergman / H. Ringgren, "קֹהֵן *kōhēn*", *TDOT* VII (1982-1984; English trans. 1995), p. 70.

of “tribal leadership that disappeared with the emergence of monarchy”.¹²⁹ Since this office is not mentioned in the officer-lists of the monarchy, Rütterswörden thinks that it originated in the post-Solomonite period.¹³⁰ Though this office is often mentioned in the prophets like Isaiah and Micah, it is seldom mentioned in the historical books. Probably the emergence of official judges to preside over legal matters took place only during the time of Josiah. The existence of an independent judiciary is affirmed by Deut 16,18; 17,12; 19,16-21; and 25,1-3.¹³¹ It means that gradually the dispensation of justice at the gate of every village community underwent changes. Instead of the traditional elders, now the judges were delegated by the king, with an organized justice system centred in Jerusalem.¹³² Those who judged belonged to the upper class of the society as they are so presented in Isa 1,23 and in other prophetic references. A separation between the administration and judicial apparatus is not plausible according to Frank Crüsemann¹³³ as these two functions were always combined in the ancient administration. This could have been the reason why we do not hear much about the judges in the historical books of the Bible. The strong hold of the kings over the elders and the powerful in manipulating the judicial procedure in their favour is evident in the Naboth story in 1 Kgs 21.¹³⁴

vii. There is reference to a few more officers, who might have been part of the upper class of the society, though we do not find any reference to them in the prophetic criticism. One such title used to refer to officers during the time of the monarchy was, *sārîs* understood as “eunuch” in Jer 38,7 and in the book of Esther written with the background of Persia in 5th or 4th century BCE¹³⁵ (cf. Esth 1,10.12.15; 2,10.15 et al). It might have been that the eunuchs were “suitable as overseers in harems and often became confidants of the ruler.”¹³⁶ But the officers who bore this title in Israel were generally not eunuchs and it may have simply meant officers, especially managers of the palace affairs (cf. 1 Sam 8,15; 1 Kgs 22,9; 2 Kgs 8,6; 18,17; 23,11; 25,19; 2 Chr 18,8). The officers with this title had also sometimes a military role as in 2 Kgs 25,19 // Jer 52,25.

¹²⁹ H. Niehr, “שָׂרִי *sar*”, p. 197.

¹³⁰ Cf. U. Rütterswörden, *Die Beamten*, p. 159.

¹³¹ Cf. H. Niehr, “שָׂפָט *šāpaṭ*”, *TDOT XV* (1994-1995; English trans. 2006), p. 425.

¹³² Cf. U. Rütterswörden, *Die Beamten*, pp. 16-17.

¹³³ Cf. F. Crüsemann, *Die Tora. Theologie und Sozialgeschichte des alttestamentlichen Gesetzes*, München: Chr. Kaiser, 1992, pp. 97.101-02.

¹³⁴ Cf. F. Crüsemann, *Die Tora*, p. 100.

¹³⁵ Cf. C.A. Moore, *Esther*, AB 7B, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1971, pp. 3-4.

¹³⁶ B. Kedar-Kopfstein, “סָרִיס *sārîs*”, *TDOT X* (1986; English trans. 1999), p. 347.

Two other titles, *pāqîd* “appointed officers” or “commissioners” (Esth 2,3; 2 Chr 31,13)¹³⁷ and *nāgîd* “chief” are sometimes used to designate officers in the king’s court (cf. 1 Chr 9,11; 26,24; 27,16; 2 Chr 28,7; 31,12.13)¹³⁸. In 2 Chr 31,13 the latter is an officer of greater rank than *pāqîd* and means “a chief overseer”. The officers with the title *šōṭēr* “supervisors” or “foremen” appear in the pre-monarchical as well as the monarchical period. In the pre-monarchical period the title is prefixed to *‘am* “people” or *bānê yiśrā’ēl* “sons of Israel” making him an officer associated with the people (Exod 5,14.15.19; Josh 1,10; 8,33). In church history these officers are associated more with the kings (cf. 1 Chr 23,4) and have military functions (cf. 1 Chr 27,1).

There were officers in Israel, of course, even in the pre-monarchical period. But some of these offices come to the forefront in the monarchical period and some new offices appear only in literature belonging to this period. Even though the deuteronomistic history mentions *šar* before the period of Saul, it is always associated with nations or related to the rulers of a city.¹³⁹ Even under Saul, the administration is modeled on the *bêt* “house/family” (cf. 2 Sam 3,1) and the people around him are called *‘ābādîm* “servants” and not *šārîm* “officers”. His servants include David (cf. 1 Sam 17,32.34; 20,8; 22,8; 26,18.19; 29,3;) and Ziba, the servant of Saul (cf. 2 Sam 9,2), who had in fact, 20 “servants” under him (cf. v.10). Rütterswörden is of the opinion that from the time of David many new offices appear on the list (cf. 2 Sam 8,16-18) and they formed a well-organized network by the time of Solomon (cf. 1 Kgs 4,1-20).¹⁴⁰ Thus we may say that some of the existing offices and leadership roles in the society underwent a transformation and new offices came into existence with the advent of monarchy. Society was now stratified, with wide disparities between the ruling, official higher class and a subjected, exploited lower class.

Rütterswörden is convinced of the role of officers as members of the upper class in causing the social crisis, and his arguments seem plausible, though he cautions against ascribing the crisis to this factor or a to particular practice related to the payment of their salaries or distribution of the royal property alone.¹⁴¹ These *šārîm* were actually royal officers, princes or nobles, who did not belong to the communities they administered and that they were not above corruption is evident from the Naboth story in 1 Kgs 21.¹⁴² Mackenzie

¹³⁷ The *hophal* participle of this root, מִשְׁמָרֵם, is used to refer to someone who is appointed to a superior office: 2 Kgs 12,12; 22,5.9; 2 Chr 34,10.17.

¹³⁸ This title stands for rulers or kings in the deuteronomistic history (cf. 2 Sam 6,21; 7,8; 1 Kgs 1,35; 14,7; 16,2; 2 Kgs 20,5).

¹³⁹ Cf. U. Rütterswörden, *Die Beamten*, p. 166.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. U. Rütterswörden, *Die Beamten*, p. 169.

¹⁴¹ Cf. U. Rütterswörden, *Die Beamten*, p. 199.

¹⁴² Cf. J.L. McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 256.

remarks about the method by which the officials might have accumulated wealth: “The king did not need to enrich them directly; he merely needed to allow them to serve in positions where they could enrich themselves.”¹⁴³

That the judicial system under the monarchy underwent changes is clear from many instances in the Bible. There are 20 instances where the king is approached for judicial verdict: 16 from the time of united monarchy and the rest from the rest of the kings.¹⁴⁴ But this does not seem to be the general norm. In 1 Kgs 21, in the Naboth story, the assembly that sentenced Naboth consisted of *zəqēnîm* “elders” and *ḥōrîm* “nobles” (v. 11), who operated in tandem with the king, and acted at his behest. Even though the theme of the story is the condemnation of Ahab and Jezebel, here we find how for the narrator, the combination of the king, the elders and the nobles acted together to pervert justice to an ordinary citizen.

2.2.4.2. Signs of Affluence and Officers in the Light of Samaria Ostraca

A group of sixty-three ostraca, i.e, inscriptions written on potsherds, was found in a house in the southern end of the great west court of the remains of a building which is considered to be “the palace of Ahab”.¹⁴⁵ The writings on the ostraca refers to their contents like “a jar of old wine” (cf. *Samaria Ostrakon*, No.1); “a jar of fine oil” (cf. *Samaria Ostrakon*, Nos. 18; 55) and so on.¹⁴⁶ Thus A. Mazar concludes that the contents of the inscriptions referred to “records of oil and wine deliveries received at Samaria from the outer townships probably as taxes.”¹⁴⁷ The ostraca, in the words of Pritchard, “though jejune in themselves, are of great significance for the script, spelling, personal names, topography, religion, administrative system, and clan distribution of the period.”¹⁴⁸

From the philological point of view, the ostraca have a script belonging probably to the third quarter of the eighth century.¹⁴⁹ Another clue to the date of the ostraca is the 4 mentions of regnal years ranging from 9 to 17. But unfortunately, these clues are of no help in terms of chronological years because we do not know the reign of which king they refer to, or even if they refer to the regnal year of the same king. The ostraca were found from the penultimate stratum at Samaria, which is attributed to the period before the Assyrian destruction of 722. Accordingly the ostraca are generally accredited to the period of Jehoash

¹⁴³ J.L. McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 257.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. F. Crüsemann, *Die Tora*, p. 97, n 114.

¹⁴⁵ G.A. Reisner et al, *Harvard Excavations*, p. 114.

¹⁴⁶ *ANET*, p. 321.

¹⁴⁷ A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: 10,000 – 586 BCE*, New York: Doubleday, 1990, p. 410.

¹⁴⁸ *ANET*, p. 321.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *ANET*, p. 321.

and Jeroboam II.¹⁵⁰ However, there is no unanimity as regards the dating among the scholars,¹⁵¹ which is understandable considering the difficulties mentioned above.

The ostraca have names inscribed on them indicating the provenance of the provisions contained in the jars and the people or officers to whom the things were sent. Thus we have the following details with many names as the reconstruction by Pritchard¹⁵² shows:

- "To Shamaryau (Shemariah) from Beer-yam..." (*Samaria Ostrakon*, No.1)
- "To Gaddiyau from Azzo." (*Samaria Ostrakon*, No.2)
- "From Hazeroth to Gaddiyau." (*Samaria Ostrakon*, No.18)
- "From Shemida to Hillez (son of) Gaddiyahu." (*Samaria Ostrakon*, No.30)
- "(From the) vineyard of Yehau-eli." (*Samaria Ostrakon*, No.55)

The ostraca show to some extent the economic and service practices of this time. According to Rainey, the *lamed* before the names in the inscription indicates the recipient in ancient Hebrew. When a sender or a donor is indicated, the preposition used would have been *mē'ēt*.¹⁵³ According to this interpretation, it is clear that some citizens in Samaria, mostly the officials, had the right to possess land and to make use of its produce.¹⁵⁴ Other ostraca contain inscriptions about receipts for taxes, from which the official classes also profited.¹⁵⁵ Rütterswörden remarks: "From this evaluation of the Samaria ostraca we get a picture of the members of the royal court, who lived in the capital city and depended on provisions from outside the city. These products were distributed through a centre of royal property administration."¹⁵⁶

Another archaeological find that points towards the increased production of grain is a large grain jar from Megiddo dating from late 8th century BCE with the capacity of 450m³.¹⁵⁷ The find, though not very clear as to its exact provenance and purpose, indicates signs of prosperity around the second half of the 8th century BCE, which according to most scholars could have been the time when the historical Amos also made his appearance. The find,

¹⁵⁰ W.H. Shea attributes the ostraca of year 15 to king Pekah, to the year 737/736. Cf. W.H. Shea, "The Date and Significance of the Samaria Ostraca", *IEJ* 27 (1977), p. 22.

¹⁵¹ According to Mazar, "there have been various suggestions ranging from the reign of Ahab till the days of Menahem." A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, p. 410.

¹⁵² Cf. *ANET*, p. 321.

¹⁵³ Cf. A.F. Rainey, "The *Sitz im Leben* of the Samaria Ostraca", *TA* 6 (1979), p. 93.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. A. Schoors, "Die Königreiche Israel und Judah", p. 86.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. A. Schoors, "Die Königreiche Israel und Judah", p. 86.

¹⁵⁶ My translation from "Durch diese Auswertung der Samarischen Ostraka erhalten wir das Bild von Angehörigen des Hofes, die in der Hauptstadt leben und ihre Versorgung von Lebensgütern außerhalb der Stadt beziehen. Die Lieferung von Erträgen aus diesen Gütern erfolgt über eine Zentralstelle der Krongutsverwaltung." U. Rütterswörden, *Die Beamten*, p. 174.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. A. Schoors, "Die Königreiche Israel und Judah", p. 84.

however, like the other finds mentioned above, does not reveal anything about the social inequalities or exploitations that existed in the society.¹⁵⁸

2.2.4.3. Class Distinctions in Archaeology: Tell el-Fār‘a

Even though the Palestinian archaeologists did not care much about the social distinctions during the same period within a geographical area or a settlement excavated,¹⁵⁹ the archaeological finds in Tell el Fār‘a are said to be “exceptional” in providing a clue to this fact. The archaeological finds here, according to some archeologists, offer information helpful in reconstructing the socio-economic development of Israel in 8th century BCE.¹⁶⁰ The archaeologist Roland de Vaux had made an important distinction between level III (10th century) and level II (8th century) strata of the tel. In both levels there were houses of the four room types; however the ones belonging to level II were much better built and larger than those of level III. In particular, the houses of level III were all similar types without significant differences. However in level II, a clear partition of the town is visible: one rich area with well-built houses; and a poor area with primitive buildings. The areas were separated from each other.¹⁶¹

De Geus warns against drawing far reaching conclusions based on this find since it is the only one of this sort and since we do not have many comparable town plans from the Iron Age to gauge the real values of these rare findings.¹⁶² This evidence can at the most prove that there have been differing styles of house construction in Israel. But it does not provide us with sufficient evidence to speak conclusively about the occupants of the houses and their mode of social behavior, or to prove the existence of a class society in the 8th century Israel.

2.2.5. Debt System

The new changes that took place in the social structure had a direct impact on the economic life of the people especially with regard to the debt system. Kessler sees in the basic contradictions of the Bible between the creditor and the debtor (cf. Isa 24,2; Prov 22,7), the phenomenon of an unjust lending system, which in turn is also the principal reason for the class system.¹⁶³ Though a credit system is part of every agricultural society, Kessler finds that

¹⁵⁸ The following subjective interpretation of Rainey, though attractive for the context of 8th century BCE, overburdens the artifacts themselves: He interprets the Samaria Ostraca as “land-grant/patrimony” documents. “A person serving in the capital would receive from his family estate and might also get shipments from other land holdings that he had acquired as grants from the crown. Very important officials and nobles were also in a position to acquire the property of oppressed citizens by crooked and illegal means, and such behavior was notorious precisely in the 8th century when the shipments recorded on the Samaria ostraca were being made (c. Amos 2:6-7; 5:10-12; 8:4-6; Mic. 2:1-2 Isa. 3:13-15; 5:8).” A.F. Rainey, “The *Sitz im Leben*”, p. 92.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. A. Schoors, “Die Königreiche Israel und Judah”, pp. 83-84.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. J.K. de Geus, “Die Gesellschaftskritik der Propheten”, p. 53.

¹⁶¹ Cf. R. de Vaux, *Das Alte Testament und seine Lebensordnungen*, vol. 1, p. 122.

¹⁶² Cf. J.K. de Geus, “Die Gesellschaftskritik”, p. 54.

¹⁶³ Cf. Rainer Kessler, *Sozialgeschichte des alten Israel*, p. 119.

the credit system during the period beginning from 8th century BCE in Israel turns into what he calls “*unumkehrbarer Überschuldung*”¹⁶⁴ (insurmountable debt) and led to the debt slavery of the poor and weak in the society. Class differences on account of heavy debts, according to Kessler, are noticeable from the beginning of 8th century in Israel and Judah. The farmers who were deprived of their possessions were led deeper and deeper into debt by those who were able to give more credit on account of their possessions and forced into a position of dependency.¹⁶⁵

There were two ways in which the debt could be recovered: administrative action against a defaulter of taxes or a private process against a private debtor. If the debtor was not able to repay, he had to sell his goods to the lender, or if he had no property to be confiscated, he had to be interned until someone from his family freed him by paying the sum agreed upon in the debt contract.¹⁶⁶

In such situations it was the family that suffered most. The inherited property of a person, his house and other belongings had to be mortgaged, and the family would be forced to part with these in case of failure to repay the debt. They were subjected to oppression by the greedy creditors (cf. Mic 2,2), and their women evicted from their houses and their children deprived of dignity (cf. Mic 2,9). Kessler has remarked that though the debt system affected men and women, it was the women who were the first victims of it. He cites the instance of Neh 5,1-13 to demonstrate how it was the daughter who was the first to be given away into slavery.¹⁶⁷

2.3. Concluding Summary

To understand the social crisis in the book of Amos and other socio-critical prophets, one has to analyze the manifold factors that played a role in the emergence of the monarchical state in Israel and the changes that took place in the social, political and economic spheres. Here it is important to look for the factors that contributed to the crisis rather than looking for models. The latter, though some of them look convincing, are projections from outside and as such remain hypothetical. Any factors so proposed must have support from the Bible and other epigraphical sources from this period and must be archeologically verifiable. Archeological research, especially the branch dealing with demography in the ancient Middle East, is a well developed discipline today, and when used judiciously, can contribute to the understanding of the society in ancient Israel.

¹⁶⁴ Rainer Kessler, *Sozialgeschichte des alten Israel*, p. 119.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. R. Kessler, *Sozialgeschichte des alten Israel*, p. 121.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. H.G. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*, pp. 142-43.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. R. Kessler, *Sozialgeschichte des alten Israel*, p. 121. That the slaves along with their family remained at the disposal of their masters is evident from Exod 21,2-6.20.26ff. Cf. Pp. 119-20.

A rapid growth of population and urbanization with the emergence of monarchy in Israel is archaeologically provable and its effects are reflected in the historical books of the Bible. These factors led to the cultivation of new terrains, demographic expansion into new territories and consequent dispersal of the originally clan bound population into various parts of the country. The per capita possession of land and other assets decreased due to the distribution of properties among the heirs. The exorbitant expenditures of the monarchic administrative machinery with the royal family, maintenance of a standing army and the monumental construction activities of the kings led to increased taxation, forced labour and compulsory military service. With all these changes, while things went well for a certain category of persons, life became miserable for some others. The manner of production was no longer determined by the needs of the individual household, but by the requirements of the monarchical state and its extravagant administrative, military and construction activities.

The Israelite social system was organized along kinship lines, bound by the principle of solidarity which obliged them to protect the weak and the vulnerable in the community. The institution of *gə'ullā(h)* "redemption" in Israel originated from the theological understanding that YHWH is a *gō'ēl* "redeemer" of Israel and made every Israelite duty bound to redeem clansmen who became either indebted or debt slaves. The structural changes that were introduced in the wake of the monarchy, especially the tributary mode of production, made more and more people indebted and the practice of redemption became impossible. This led to economic disparities in the community and brought into existence a class based society. A dominant part of the upper classes were the royal officers, who are mentioned in the lists of the officers in the Bible and occur very often in association with the kings and their administrative machinery. The names of some of the royal officers, who depended on supplies from outside for their upkeep, are mentioned on the ostraca unearthed from Samaria. The role of the upper classes in the social crisis is also affirmed by the fact that many of their titles appear in the prophetic social critique.

Though the factors are many, we see a pattern in the developing social crisis. The increased population and the need for cultivable land led to the enlargement of existing settlements and establishment of new ones. The partition of the land among the children resulted in insufficient land for each family as the availability of cultivable land was limited. The burden of debts and the geographical rather than kinship basis of the new settlements led to the erosion of traditional values of solidarity and equality in Israelite society. The stratification of society into an upper class consisting of the royal family, relatives, nobles and officers, both civil and military, and a lower class, on which the burden of financially

supporting the royalty and officers rested, was a characteristic of the emerging social system. The Emergence of royalty and the consequent administrative and military machinery, and the increase in population and urbanization effected a change in the social and economic organization of the society. The surplus oriented production and the appropriation of the surplus by a section of the society increased the social and economic disparities. The surplus, on the one hand, added to the power of the higher classes to manipulate justice in their favor, and on the other hand, led many to abject poverty and debt slavery. All these factors contributed to the social crisis, which is addressed in the prophetic books.

To conclude, we should keep in mind the fact that the class society or a stratified society is not a phenomenon that appeared in the 8th century and disappeared. It continued to assume different forms down the centuries as Israel, as the people of Bible and as a nation, underwent various phases of her history. Even accepting the opinion of Christoph Levin that the social critique of “the prophets of 8th century” reflects the sociological situation not only of this century, but also of a few centuries later¹⁶⁸, the impact of a stratified society on the prophetic critique cannot be denied.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. C. Levin, “The Poor in Old Testament: Some Observations”, in his *Fortschreibungen. Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, BZAW 316, Berlin / New York: De Gruyter, 2003, pp. 326-27.

Chapter 3: Amos' Call for Justice, the Institutional Response and their Implications for Theological Social Ethics

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Israelite society underwent social and economic transformations during the course of history as it became established as a monarchy with a centralized administration and as it lived through the successes and failures of the monarchical governments down the centuries. While the new changes went well for a section of the community, to a large majority of the people it seems to have caused only a greater burden of taxation, forced labour and economic and judicial exploitation. This crisis is reflected in the biblical texts composed during this period, particularly in their condemnation of injustice and their call to just conduct in society. The most comprehensive biblical response to the crisis is to be found in the prophetic books and in the social laws of the Bible. A concrete example of the prophetic response is the book of Amos, which we dealt with in the first chapter. Some of the socio-critical sayings in the books of Proto-Isaiah and Micah also can help us in our attempt to reconstruct the response. The second, the legal or the institutional response, can be read in the social laws of the Hebrew Bible, where laws are made or reformulated in order to redress social problems of the time. The analysis of both these responses will help us to understand some of the basic characteristics of the biblical approach to social justice.

The first part of this chapter deals with the realization-focused idea of justice and its socio-ethical implications today. A brief study of the similarities of Amos' idea of justice with the idea of the Kingdom of God preached by Jesus, and the effects it has on the social teachings of the Church shall also be taken up in this section. A second part of the chapter describes the institutional response to injustice in the biblical social laws and their implications for the Church today. The third part of the chapter studies the idea of human dignity and human rights¹ underlying the concept of the social critique of the prophets and the biblical social legislation, stressing their socio-ethical relevance today.

3.1. The Realization-Focused Justice of Amos

The concept of justice is understood variously in general ethics. It can mean primarily, according to Friedo Ricken, what characterizes the external behaviour between persons and structures which regulate these relationships, and secondly, the virtue of justice which is a just

¹ Of course, Amos and other socio-critical prophets do not use modern concepts of human dignity or human rights. But their condemnation of the factors which denied dignity and rights of their fellow human beings are analyzed here in order to understand how similar these modern concepts are to their idea of justice. My own use of these terms in the context of Amos should be understood as interpretative categories.

attitude in the relationship between persons.² While the second aspect of justice mentioned above, i.e., justice as virtue, has received much attention in the classical philosophy³ and in classical theories on justice, it is the first, i.e., justice as a characteristic that regulates relationships in the community, which is the concern of Amos (see 3.1.1 below). Seen as a rule of social order, justice can mean having just laws (*iustitia legalis*) and an equal share of goods and services (*iustitia commutiva*). In these two aspects, the difference of persons does not play any role.⁴ Another aspect of justice, a just distribution of social and economic goods (*iustitia distributiva*), is ambiguous in defining the worth of a person, according to which his/her share is to be determined. Should it be according to each one's need or effort or according to each one's ability?⁵ The prophetic concern about justice can contribute in two ways to the discussion on justice: first, justice is not to be seen as a virtue for its own sake; second, the worth of a person cannot be judged based on his or her need, effort or ability alone. The discussion below makes these aspects clear.

The idea of justice that we find in the prophets can be termed as a “realization-focused” view of justice rather than an “arrangement-focused” view, if we use the terms of Amartya Sen. He distinguishes the “arrangement-focused” view, which he compares with the Sanskrit concept *niti*, and a “realization-focused” view of justice equivalent to the Sanskrit concept *nyaya*. He says,

In contrast with *niti*, the term *nyaya* stands for a comprehensive concept of realization justice. In that line of vision, the roles of institutions, rules and organization, important as they are, have to be assessed in the broader and more inclusive perspective of *nyaya*, which is inescapably linked with the world that actually emerges, not just the institutions or rules we happen to have.⁶

The *nyaya* concept of justice, as Sen describes it,

makes it easier to understand the importance of the prevention of manifest injustice in the world, rather than seeking the perfectly just. ... the subject of justice is not merely about trying to achieve – or dreaming about achieving – some perfectly just society or social arrangements, but about preventing manifestly severe injustice ...⁷

The above observation fits well the prophetic concept of justice. Underlying the prophetic understanding of justice is the conviction that however good the rules and

² Cf. F. Ricken, “Gerechtigkeit. Philosophisch”, *Lexikon der Bioethik*, vol. 2, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2000, p. 71.

³ Aristotle sees justice as the “complete virtue” which sums up the whole of virtue. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V, London: Penguin Books, 1953, p. 115. He identifies justice with equality: “if what unjust is unequal, what is just is equal” (p. 118) or as he later puts it, “What is just in this sense, then is what is proportional, and what is unjust is what violates the proportion.” (p. 120).

⁴ Cf. F. Ricken, “Gerechtigkeit”, p. 71.

⁵ Cf. F. Ricken, “Gerechtigkeit”, pp. 71-72.

⁶ A. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, Cambridge / Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 2009, p. 20.

⁷ A. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, p. 21.

institutions we may have, it may not serve any great purpose, if some sections of society continue to exploit others. Addressing a crisis situation, the prophets contended that there should be social security for all. They reasoned, under the inspiration of God, that it is not possible to have a decent existence, when basic values such as solidarity and compassion are lacking in the society, as we have seen in the first two chapters.

The postmodern philosophic tradition of “pragmatism” known as “American pragmatism” makes a proper understanding of democracy its “basic focus”⁸ and has many similarities to the thinking of Amos on justice. In the words of Cornel West, this philosophic tradition “has to do with trying to conceive of knowledge, reality and truth in such a way that it promotes the flowering and flourishing of individuality under conditions of democracy.”⁹ It requires that theoretical thinking, including religious beliefs, has to be clarified through practice.¹⁰

The rediscovery of pragmatism for the construction of the post-modern society could draw inspiration from Amos’ idea of justice. Amos is concerned about the practice of justice in society as mentioned above. One of the major features of pragmatism is voluntarism, which, in the words of West, deals with “problems of conduct” and believes that “as there can be ultimately no valid distinction of theoretical and practical, so there can be [also] no final separation of questions of truth of any kind from questions of justifiable ends of action.”¹¹ Amos critique tries to remind the people of Israel that their faith in God and their beliefs about the actions of God in history have ethical consequences as it called for practicing justice in the community. Just human actions can make a difference in the way the community operates. Amos advocates religious traditions which justify and promote just human actions to favour the vulnerable sections of society. His stand is reflected in the pragmatic traditions that claim that “no truth is truth at all unless it guides and directs life.”¹²

⁸ C. West, *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times*, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1993, p. 20. Pragmatic philosophy has in fact nothing to do with practicalism or opportunism, as the name might suggest. According to West, it “is a distinct philosophical tradition that begins with Charles Sanders Peirce, through Willaim James, through John Dewey, and Sidney Hook and W. E. B. Du Bois, all the way up to the present.”

⁹ C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 32.

¹⁰ When it comes to the ethical premises, there is hardly any agreement among the pragmatists as to how much of it must be determined by empirical facts. Some of the protagonists even think that it is absolutely unnecessary to translate ethical premises into empirical truths. Cf. M. White, *Pragmatism and the American Mind: Essays and Reviews in Philosophy and Intellectual History*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 102. In his summary of Pragmatism, Morton White mentions that John Dewey believed that “all ethical statements are translatable into empirical statements”, while C. I. Lewis, according to White “the most distinguished Pragmatist of the generation after Dewey”, has in fact “emphatically disagreed.”

¹¹ C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 38.

¹² C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 38. He says, “Truth is a species of good and the conception of the good has to do with defining it in relation to temporal consequences prospectively.” P. 40.

Amos uses traditions in two ways: first, he cites the liberating actions of YHWH in the history as a source of his inner conviction that YHWH wishes a human person to exist in freedom and dignity.¹³ Second, he preaches that the mode of the continued existence of the community depends on how much it derives impetus from the tradition to imitate justice of God in their own personal lives. Amos' creative use of the traditions is once again reflected in the emphasis which philosophic pragmatism places on "the ethical significance of the future" and making use of traditions to chalk out "a new way of talking about possibility and potentiality".¹⁴ Unlike historical empiricism, pragmatism goes beyond repeating past facts and gives space "for possibility and for liberty" and has "a metaphysical implication".¹⁵ The prophetic roots of philosophic pragmatism are seen in its belief that "human will, human thought, and action can make a difference in relation to human aims and purposes."¹⁶

The prophetic proclamations do not define theoretically or systematically what justice is, but they are concerned about the manifestation of justice in the community, or rather, are preoccupied by the absence of it in the community. The prophetic understanding of justice cannot be subjected to systematic categorization under liberal, utilitarian or Marxian concepts. The attempt to categorize their idea of justice under socio-ethical principles in the following chapter has to be seen as my own interpretation of the prophetic ideas in the context of the later traditions of social ethics. Amos himself is more concerned about the lack of justice in different areas of daily life in his society. He does not define, nor even make an attempt to describe, what just conduct is. Though the responses of Amos and the other prophets to injustice cannot be viewed as a treatise on justice, they can help us to understand what just conduct is in unjust social conditions, as the discussion below shows.

3.1.1. Amos' Idea of Justice – Re-establishing Proper Relationships

Amos sees the sad plight of his fellow human beings, who are exploited, oppressed, manipulated and sold in markets, as the starting point for his condemnation of injustice, something which Sen would argue even today as a "good starting point for the theory of justice"¹⁷. Amos was sent by YHWH to prophesy judgement over Israel in a context where, as Deissler puts it, "Exploitation in public, in business and in private areas of life, in rejection of the justice of YHWH had become a cancer in the people of God, which one tried to cover up

¹³ See 3.3.2 below for the importance of historical recollections in Amos and for its socio-ethical implications.

¹⁴ C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 41.

¹⁵ C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 41.

¹⁶ C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 42.

¹⁷ Sen makes this point after citing Thomas Hobbes opening remark for his theory of justice in *Leviathan* that the lives of people were 'nasty, brutish and short'. A. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, p. 412.

with the riches of the economic boom and splendor of the cult.”¹⁸ His concept of justice intended to create conditions where each person could find his existence in the holistic well-being ordered by YHWH.¹⁹ A piety devoid of justice is not acceptable to YHWH in Amos’ view as the book categorically states in 5,21-24:

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (NRSV)

Actions of piety cannot be a substitute for conducting oneself justly. As we shall see further, Amos is convinced that piety or devotion to YHWH includes and necessitates just conduct.

Though Amos is often seen as a prophet of God’s justice, Joseph Jensen has a different opinion. He says, “It would be more accurate to say that he is the prophet who presents God’s demand for justice or to call him the prophet of God’s wrath.”²⁰ The prophetic proclamation included the proclamation of the word of God, which invited solidarity with the weaker sections of society. It proclaimed that faith in YHWH cannot be indifferent to injustices and insisted that the living-out of this faith requires witnessing to the loving care of YHWH for the weak.²¹

A brief note on the two words used to refer to justice in the Bible, *zəḏāqā(h)* and *mišpāt*, can help us to understand the idea of justice in the prophets. The normal translation of these words into English, namely, “righteousness” and “justice” respectively, do not convey the full Hebrew nuance of these words (see 1.4.2.1 above). In the opinion of Simundson, in a juridical context these concepts express the expectation that decisions should “support the one who is right (even if poor and powerless) and reject the one who is wrong (even if powerful, rich and influential).”²² But this nuance does not exhaust the semantic meaning of this word

¹⁸ My translation from “Im öffentlichen, geschäftlichen und privaten Leben wurde die dem Jahwerecht widerstrebende Ausbeutung von Menschen durch Menschen zu einem Krebsübel im Gottesvolk, welsches man durch einen der Wirtschaftsblüte entsprechenden reichen und prächtigen Kult zu überdecken suchte.” A. Deissler, *Zwölf Propheten*, p. 89.

¹⁹ The idea of covenantal obligation as reason for just conduct, which is a prominent treatise of the dtg redactors, does not find its reflection in the teachings of Amos.

²⁰ J. Jensen, *Ethical Dimensions of the Prophets*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2006, p. 73. He points out, “The understanding of what is involved here gives insight into the connection between the people forsaking justice and the prophet’s threat of destruction.” (P. 74) He further comments that Amos is trying to answer the question “what will then happen to a society when righteousness disappears or is perverted” and therefore he finds the concern of Amos “not so much about God’s justice as Israel’s lack of justice, which is a demand God lays upon Israel, and the consequence of this lack.” (P. 75) See 3.3.3 below for a socio-ethical understanding of the punishment of God.

²¹ See 3.3.2 for the relationship between memory, emotions and ethics.

²² D.J. Simundson, *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005, p. 196.

pair. The concept of justice in the Bible means also care, help and love, according to Frank Crüsemann.²³ He points out that, used in relation to YHWH's dealings in the salvation history in psalms and prophets, the term *zəḏāqā(h)*, means the justice of YHWH understood as justice creating, therefore a saving and helping act of YHWH, which seeks to eradicate dangers, injustice, sorrow and bondage.²⁴

Similarly, Hemchand Gossai, who has produced a detailed study of this term in the ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Bible, observes “inherent in the concept of קִדְּוָה, elements such as expectation, responsibility, demand, characteristics which are expressed in the relationship amongst individuals and, more importantly, in the relationship between YHWH and his People.”²⁵ Another word *mišpāt* used to refer to justice can mean “judgement”, “decision”, “custom” or “ordinance”. This term again indicates not “an objective norm which must be subscribed to”, but some sort of relationship where YHWH and his people are expected to fulfill certain obligations with regard to their rights and duties both at the divine-human and human-human levels.²⁶

There are three occasions in the book of Amos where *mišpāt* “justice” and *zəḏāqā(h)* “righteousness” occur side by side (5,7.24; 6,12b). The word pair refers to corrupting and depriving the weaker sections of justice and righteousness in 5,7.24 (see 1.4.2.1 above). In 6,12, it is accused that these virtues become a threat to the life of the people, in contrast to the original intention, i.e., enhancing their lives (see 1.5.2.3 above). These words occur as a pair many times in the prophets²⁷ and elsewhere in the Bible. Gossai observes that approximately two-fifth of the occurrence of these words in the eighth century prophets is in pairs (16x).²⁸ Though often these words are considered synonyms, he sees a special relationship in some of these occurrences, especially in the three occurrences in Amos, where *zəḏāqā(h)* could be seen as the factor that “establishes the relationship” and *mišpāt* as the factor that “sustains this

²³ Cf. F. Crüsemann / W. Dietrich, H-Ch. Schmitt, “Gerechtigkeit – Gewalt – Leben. Was Leistet ein Ethik des Alten Testaments?”, in B.M. Levinson / E. Otto (eds.), *Recht und Ethik im Alten Testament*, Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004, p. 147.

²⁴ Cf. F. Crüsemann / W. Dietrich / H-Ch. Schmitt, “Gerechtigkeit – Gewalt – Leben.”, p. 147. Against this understanding, in the wisdom literature justice means the accountability of persons for their actions, both positive and negative. But here the term *zəḏāqā(h)* is not used.

See 3.3 below to understand the nuances of basing just conduct on the will of a sovereign God in the Bible.

²⁵ H. Gossai, *Justice, Righteousness and the Social Critique of the Eighth Century Prophets*, New York: Peter Lang, 1993, p. 54. He defines *šāddîq* as a person who “exist and live in a manner which allows him or her to respond correctly to the values of the relationship; this may mean strict adherence to the customs, laws, moral code, of the community.” p. 55.

²⁶ Cf. H. Gossai, *Justice, Righteousness and the Social Critique*, p. 198.

²⁷ Isa 32,16; 33,5; Jer 9,23; 22,3; Ezek 18,5.19 et al.

²⁸ Cf. H. Gossai, *Justice, Righteousness and the Social Critique*, pp. 210-11.

relationship”.²⁹ The underlying idea here is that justice flows from having a right relationship with God and human beings. To conclude it can be said that for Amos justice means maintaining proper interpersonal relationship in the community, imitating YHWH’s just dealings in history.

It is to be noted here that the biblical idea of covenant is strange to Amos as the basis of just conduct for him is mutual respect and respect for God. He does not consider even the laws as a foundation for just conduct and there is no exhortation in his preaching to abide by a set of laws. If we compare his foundation of justice to most of the theories of justice, where a contract is proposed as the reason for just conduct, we understand how novel and how enhancing the prophet’s idea of justice could be to later concepts of human dignity and worth. Most theories of justice base themselves on a contract agreed upon by some people, and accepted by others at later stages. Nussbaum remarks that according to the understanding of contract theories, citizens have to live with the principles which the original contracting parties have chosen: “Thus, though they may make practical arrangements for the needs of human and animal beings who were not included in the original contracting group, they are not at liberty to redesign the principles of justice themselves in the light of their awareness of these issues.”³⁰ Amos discerned justice as the realities of his day, especially the situation of the weak in his community, demanded. The prophets’ idea of justice gives, in that way, more space for individual decision making.

The foundation of justice in Amos’ social critique is the realization of one’s responsibility for others, which forms part of a free and dignified relationship with one’s God. Justice is valued here because other human beings deserve to be treated justly as possessors of an innate dignity, derived from having been liberated by YHWH, which cannot be tampered with. Benevolence to others has to be the hallmark of anyone who belongs to the community of Israelites. This aspect sets the idea of justice in Amos and other prophets apart from most of the modern theories of justice, where, as Nussbaum points out, mutual advantage or the fact that ‘we all gain by co-operation rather than domination’ is the motivating factor and not benevolence or love of justice.³¹

The addressees of Amos also includes the inhabitants of Zion, the capital of the Southern Kingdom, in 6,1. As mentioned in the first chapter, the socio-critical oracle against Israel is presented after the oracles against nations, including those of Judah, whose crimes

²⁹ H. Gossai, *Justice, Righteousness and the Social Critique*, p. 219.

³⁰ M.C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Cambridge / Massachusetts / London: The Belknap Press, 2006, p. 17.

³¹ Cf. M.C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, pp. 58. 62.

are condemned (cf. Amos 1,3-2,5). Thus YHWH's demand for just conduct encompasses not only the Israelites, but also the people of the Southern Kingdom and other nations. The openness of Amos could be a guideline for the world today to be universal in the approach to justice.

The realization-focused justice of the prophets is concerned about the actual life situation of the people and places great importance on reading the signs of the times.³² Amos' social critique is the clearest example of reading the signs of the times in the Bible because here we find the word of God touching the reality of life, interpreting it in the light of it. Amos presents his God as someone who "knows" the injustice in the community (cf. 5,12; see 1.4.3 above) and will take corrective measures. He tells us that the relationship in the community is the place where the relationship to God concretely materializes in the world and thus makes it possible to encounter God through the signs of the time. What is characteristic to Amos' reading of the signs of the time is the realization that it is neither the law, nor even the command of the sovereign God that prompts it, but the sight of unjust relationships that has made the life of the people miserable and the recognition of the dignity of each human person impossible.³³ It stimulates him to take an uncompromising stand against injustice, for "human rights", if we use this concept to describe Amos' stand against the exploitation of human persons.

The above trend set by Amos and other biblical prophets continues to be a great inspiration for the social engagement of the Church. The Second Vatican Council understood the prophetic role of the Church in association with the realities of life (cf. *Gaudium et spes* No. 4). Following the vision of the prophets and the Council, Latin American liberation theology proposed a methodology of 'seeing, judging and doing' for the process of reading the signs of the times.³⁴ This would help one to formulate one's response in accordance with the demands of the reality or the situation.

³² See 3.3.1&3 below for Amos' presentation of YHWH as a God who is deeply involved in human history and its socio-ethical implications.

³³ The term "dignity" does not occur in Amos. In the Bible the concept of dignity is often expressed through the Hebrew word *hōd* and the prophetic idea of respect for human persons is similar to this concept. This word occurs 24 times in the Hebrew Bible and in most of its occurrences it stands for the majesty of God (cf. Job 37,22; Ps 8,2; 21,6; 96,6; 104,1; 111,3; 145,5; 148,13; Isa 30,30; Hab 3,3). Used in the context of human beings, *hōd* stands for the special human authority, majesty and dignity conferred on human persons or on a king (Num 27,20; 1 Chron 29,25; Job 40,10; Ps 45,4; Jer 22,18; Dan 11,21). Here dignity signifies the inner qualities of freedom, majesty and beauty, which invoke respect and self-respect in persons. Amos is concerned about people's mutual recognition of each other's dignity.

³⁴ The theological understanding of the prophets that defending the weaker sections is integral to the revelation of God and that it is through the liberation of the oppressed that God's justice takes place in the society is significant for the understanding of the liberation theology, which attempts to give totality to the aspect of liberation by integrating its historical and transcendental aspects. Cf. J. Sobrino, "Die zentrale Stellung des Reiches Gottes in der Theologie der Befreiung", in I. Ellacuría / J. Sobrino (eds), *Mysterium Liberationis*.

As against the “objective, impersonal, and impartial”³⁵ modern understanding of justice, the prophetic understanding is neither neutral nor unconditional. Amos is convinced that YHWH is on the side of the oppressed to help them to overcome the obstacles to their growth. This does not mean that YHWH is a partial God. As Gossai has suggested, to be impartial in the context of imparting justice means to “eliminate perversion and corruption ... that the judge will be righteous and justice will be executed.”³⁶ Solidarity is the hallmark of this relationship in the community which envisions that the fruits of the saving actions of YHWH, namely, freedom and prosperity, should be available to all, especially to the weaker sections of the community. According to the understanding of Amos, justice or the maintenance of proper relationships is the responsibility of the dominant sections of the community. The failure of this responsibility comes under his scathing criticism. He sees reparation on the part of the perpetrators of injustice as the only way to re-establish justice.

It can also be said that Amos emphasizes the responsibility of each individual in his idea of justice. In advocating concern for the weaker sections, Amos does not advocate charity; his demand was that exploitation be stopped so that the poor have a chance to build up their lives. For him it is of foremost concern that the obstacles placed in the way of the deprived in the form of debt-traps, judicial malpractices (cf. 2,6c), and oppression (cf. 2,7a) as hindrances to their economic and social progress (cf.2,7b)³⁷ be removed, so that they have opportunities to build up their lives. If poverty is the deprivation of capabilities, as Amartya Sen says, then the way out of poverty is to create a positive environment where there are increased opportunities to develop one’s own capabilities.³⁸ What prompts concern for the weak in Amos is not sympathy, but empathy, a value that expresses the “human connection”³⁹. Cornel West defines it as “the capacity to get in contact with the anxieties and frustrations of others”.⁴⁰ One cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of others. Amos’ social critique invited his fellow human beings to keep their eyes open to the realities around them and to make amends in terms of justice and righteousness.

Grundbegriffe der Theologie der Befreiung, vol. 1, Luzern: Edizion Exodus, 1995, p. 462. See 3.3.3 below for more on the prophetic reading of the signs of the time.

³⁵ J. Jensen, *Ethical Dimensions of the Prophets*, p. 74.

³⁶ H. Gossai, *Justice, Righteousness and the Social Critique*, p. 72.

³⁷ See 3.1.2&3 below for the categories of deprived sections and for the various kinds of injustices mentioned by Amos that denied a decent life to the weaker sections.

³⁸ Cf. A. Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford: University Press, 1999, p. 87ff. The creation of positive environment does not mean for Sen mere economic development. He recommends in this regard the model of the Indian state of Kerala, which has succeeded better than the other states in India in reducing the income poverty by improving capabilities “through the expansion of basic education, health care and equitable land distribution for its success in reducing penury.” p. 91.

³⁹ C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 5.

The poor have a dignity and worth as human persons and as beneficiaries of God's favour bestowed on them preferentially in the vision of Amos. Muhammad Yunus, another contemporary advocate of welfare economics like Sen, also argues from a similar viewpoint:

Poor people are endowed with the same unlimited potential for creativity and energy as any human being in any situation of life, anywhere in the world. It is only a question of removing the barriers faced by the poor so that they can unleash their creativity and intelligence in the service of humanity.⁴¹

Amos is the initiator, if we use the term of Cornel West, of "a subtle social analysis" which aims "to look at the world from the vantage point of those below".⁴² Amos stands on the side of those who had to pay the social cost (see 3.1.2 below) when evaluating the social and economic developments of his day. This approach becomes increasingly relevant in postmodern times as West points out,

I believe, in fact, that the condition of truth is to allow the suffering to speak. It doesn't mean that those who suffer have a monopoly on truth, but it means that the condition of truth to emerge must be in tune with those who are undergoing social misery – socially induced forms of suffering.⁴³

While most of the modern theories of justice are primarily concerned with equal distribution of goods and services, Amos' foremost interest is the recognition of the worth of persons. Though Amos writes no treatise on justice, his understanding in some ways is similar to one of the clearest presentations of the theory of justice in our times by John Rawls, especially to the first principle of justice in his theory: "Each person has the same inalienable claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme of liberties for all"⁴⁴. Amos too has stated unambiguously that freedom and liberty are not possible unless situations of exploitation and suppression are removed. On this aspect there is clear agreement between both.

However, we notice a distinction between Amos' understanding of justice and the second principle of Rawls:

Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (the difference principle).⁴⁵

While both are concerned about the less-privileged members of the society, Rawls' theory speaks about equality of opportunity, whereas Amos' social critique stresses the removal of

⁴¹ M. Yunus, "Economic Security for a World in Crisis", *World Policy Journal*, vol. 26, No. 2 (2009), p. 12.

⁴² C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 4.

⁴³ C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 4.

⁴⁴ J. Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Cambridge / London: Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 42.

⁴⁵ J. Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 42-43.

obstacles that block the opportunities to the poorer sections as we shall see below. It is injustice to grant equal opportunities in a situation where one section of the society is unable to make use of the opportunities or is prohibited from doing so. Therefore it is very important that the oppressive conditions are eradicated before equal or fair opportunities are provided.

Finally, justice for Amos is the living-out of just relationships in the community, a responsibility of every individual. He called upon the money lenders, judges, and the upper class, especially those who exploited the weak, to be aware of their responsibility. Amos does not call for the involvement of a third person to ensure justice for the victims because he is convinced that YHWH himself is going to step in to punish Israel. However, the prophet was aware of his own role as the messenger of God. His role consisted in reminding the people of the demands of YHWH and their own responsibility for one another. He condemned the perpetrators of injustice on behalf of YHWH and called for a life seeking justice and righteousness. He warned of consequences if they failed to realize their responsibility in the community and if unjust practices were not rectified. Thus, Amos is not an initiator of a revolution or a social movement to fight for justice. He understands his role theologically as the messenger of YHWH to make people aware of their responsibility. If Amos called for a rebellion at all, it should be seen as a rebellion against inertia and apathy, so as to stay always “close to human life, human suffering, [and] human hope.”⁴⁶ This theological task of the prophet is the task of the Church today, which includes not only the official Church, i.e., the hierarchy, but also of the Christian laity, the people.⁴⁷

In summary, we could say that Amos’ idea of justice springs from his firm conviction that YHWH has willed a just and righteous relationship in his community. The dominant sections of the community have the responsibility to maintain this relationship and to be especially concerned about the less privileged members of the community. They have to create an environment free of corruption and oppression so that the weaker sections have space for a meaningful existence.

Now we shall see how the realization-focused idea of justice, i.e., the idea of justice that is concerned about manifestation of justice and prevention of injustice, is found in the biblical prophets. One can observe it in the prophetic concern to assure justice to the deprived sections, in their condemnation of the unjust actions against these sections, and in their critique of the people who are responsible for injustice, as we shall see below. In my textual analysis of Amos 2,6-16, I claimed this text as a specimen text for the prophetic social

⁴⁶ P.L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies: Christian Commitment and Religious Establishment in America*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961, p. 179.

⁴⁷ Cf. P.L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, p. 136.

critique as a whole. In the following analysis I shall demonstrate how the call for justice is reflected in this specimen text. Here we also see specifically who the victims of injustice are, what the unjust actions are, and who the perpetrators of injustice are. The rest of the socio-critical sayings in the book of Amos and the relevant sayings in the books of Proto-Isaiah and Micah shall also be surveyed in order to better understand the prophetic response to injustice.

3.1.2. Assuring Justice to the Deprived Sections

The community of Israel, which is called to live justice or a particular mode of relationship as willed by YHWH cannot ignore the people on the margins or the sections of the community who are deprived of a meaningful existence. These people come under the general category of “poor” in many of the modern translations of the Bible. However, if we check the Hebrew words used by the prophets to describe these sections of the community, we see a multifaceted vocabulary. The definition of these categories of people is a difficult task even in our day. There has been some kind of unanimity in accepting that they do not just belong to the category of people who have low income or are materially poor.⁴⁸ Sen’s notion of poverty as “capability deprivation” fits well with the understanding of poverty and deprivation in the prophets because they include victims of various types of deprivations (see 3.1.2 below). Such people in the book of Amos include the categories given below. A short description of the above sections of people, with special references to the understanding of other eighth century prophets could help us to understand the nature of these groups.⁴⁹

i. The *ṣāddîq* is a “righteous person” or a person who is innocent in the context of a trial (2,6a; 5,12b). Amos presents this category of persons as victims of judicial malpractice in his days (see 1.2.2.2 above). The same category is mentioned in 5,7 as those to whom *mišpāṭ* “justice” and *ṣəḏāqā(h)* “righteousness” are denied. The prophet Isaiah also saw *ṣāddîq* “righteous” as one of the groups of persons oppressed in society. This can be inferred from Isa 3,10, where a judgement is pronounced on the arrogant, and on the other hand, the righteous (*ṣāddîq*) is promised that *it shall go well* (*tôb*) with him as he will be rewarded for his good deeds. In Isa 29,20-21, in an announcement of future hope, those who without reasons turn aside or deny (*nṯh hiphil*) justice to the righteous (*ṣāddîq*) are condemned to be cut off. A judicial context is obvious in this instance.

⁴⁸ Cf. A. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, p. 254.

⁴⁹ A detailed description of each of the above groups of persons is included in the textual analysis in the first chapter. The very mention of the existence of these groups in the society means that there were deprived sections in the society of the prophet. However, the texts neither elaborate on their origin, nor give further details about their formation as the prophet was not so much interested in a social analysis as in evaluating the life of the people in the light of the demands of justice placed on them by their God, and calling for conversion involving a change in their lifestyle.

ii. The *'ebyôn* “needy” or “destitute” (2,6b; 4,1b; 5,12b; 8,4.6) a section of the community, whose interests are harmed in the legal process, and in unfair trade (see 1.2.2.2; 1.3.2.2; 1.4.2.3; 1.6.1.1 above).

iii. The *'ānî/ 'ānāw* “afflicted” (2,7b; 8,4) represented the categories of people who lived in physical and mental misery (see 1.2.2.4 above). The term *'ānî* denoted persons who were not only economically deprived, but also those who were victims of internal suffering. In Amos this category of people is hindered from obtaining its right to a meaningful existence by the wealthy (see 1.2.2.4 above).

In a parallel use with *'ānî/ 'ānāw* “afflicted”, *'ebyôn* “needy” is the victim of the wickedness of the rogue in Isa 32,7. Whether the above terms are used here as an economic or an ethical category is difficult to judge. Hans Wildberger defines them as “disadvantaged, who are not able to make their way in society”⁵⁰, stressing the aspect of deprivation to which they are subjected. This description supports the view that for the prophets, poverty is not a fate brought upon by individuals themselves, but it is a situation caused by unjust socio-economic structures.⁵¹ Denial of justice to *'ānî* the “afflicted” of the people is mentioned also in Isa 10,2.

iv. *dallîm* “poor” (2,7a; 4,1b; 5,11a [*singular*]; 8,6) who are in a miserable condition due to material poverty (see 1.2.2.3; 1.3.2.1 above) are another group of deprived persons who deserve special attention in Amos’ social critique. *dallîm* appear as the victim of injustice in Isa 10,2 too. The nobles of Jerusalem who promulgate the decrees are condemned in misusing this responsibility on two grounds. They were arbitrary in dispensing this function because they were making iniquitous decrees and writing down oppression (v. 1)⁵² in order to turn away the poor (*dallîm*) from a legal claim and to rob the afflicted of justice, victimizing especially widows and orphans (cf. v. 2). Here the treatment meted out to these groups is comparable to the treatment of enemies in a war, as they are seen to be objects to be plundered (with regard to similar treatment of *'ānî* see 3,14).

v. Other than the above general categories, the victims of injustice in the book of Amos include also a *na'ārā(h)* “a girl” (2,7c), who is defenseless and sexually exploited (see 1.2.2.5 above), a poor debtor who is forced to mortgage his garment (2,8b; see 1.2.2.6 above), a *môkî^ah* “a censor” in the court who defends justice (5,10; cf. 1.4.2.1 above), and *dōbēr tāmîm* “a person of integrity” who is reviled (5,10; see 1.4.2.1 above).

⁵⁰ My translation from “Benachteiligte, die sich in der Gesellschaft nicht durchzusetzen vermögen”. H. Wildberger, *Jesaja 28-39*, BKAT 10/3, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1982, p. 1260.

⁵¹ This view is expressed by C. Schäfer-Lichtenberger / L. Schottroff, “Armut”, in F. Crüsemann et al (eds), *Sozialgeschichtliches Wörterbuch zur Bibel*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009, p. 23.

⁵² Ps 94,20 also condemns the “wicked rulers ... who contrive mischief by statute” (NRSV).

Here one may also notice the parallel uses of the above terms denoting the various kinds of deprived sections, which Jensen has brought to our attention.⁵³ He notices the following parallel usages:

- i. *ṣāddīq* “righteous” and *’ebyôn* “needy” in 2,6
- ii *ṣadāqā(h)* righteousness” and *mišpāt* “justice” side by side in 5,7.24; 6,12
- iii. *’ānāwīm* “afflicted” parallel to *dallīm* “poor” in 2,7
- iv. *’ebyôn* “needy” parallel to *’ānī/’ānāw* “afflicted” in 8,4

These parallel usages and the mention of other sections of the community mentioned above show that Amos’s concern for the deprived sections of the community is not restricted to those who are economically poor. They include people who are denied their legitimate interests in the society, those who are victims of exploitation of various kinds, and those who are denied justice. Thus the prophetic critique can pave the way for an understanding of poverty in a wider perspective. This perspective is similar to Markus Vogt’s understanding of poverty in social ethics, which states that

The problem of poverty in social ethics is not to be measured primarily on the basis of the distribution of a particular amount of goods for individual needs, but on the basis of the social deprivation of elementary freedoms through despotism, absence of economic opportunities, ignorance of public institutions, suffocating controls or exclusion from the process of social communication and exchange.⁵⁴

Another characteristic of the social critique of Amos is that he, living during the prosperous times of Jeroboam II, did not identify the prosperity of a section the people with the prosperity of the land. Instead, he observed the great inequality that existed among the people and took a stand in favor of social justice for all. His approach is an eye-opener to many of the countries who boast of a high GNP as a sign of national prosperity, and do not take distribution, great poverty and high rates of inequality into account.⁵⁵

It is also the conviction of many economists today that material prosperity alone cannot remove deprivation in society. Sen has said:

⁵³ Cf. J. Jensen, *Ethical Dimensions of the Prophets*, p. 80.

⁵⁴ My translation from “Sozialethisch ist das Armutsproblem nicht primär an einer bestimmten Menge von Güterzuteilungen für den individuellen Bedarf zu messen, sondern an der gesellschaftlichen Vorenthaltung elementarer Freiheiten durch Despotismus, fehlende wirtschaftliche Chancen, Vernachlässigung öffentlicher Einrichtungen, erstickende Kontrolle oder die Exklusion aus gesellschaftlichen Kommunikations- und Tauschprozessen.” M. Vogt, “Mit Armut Geld verdienen – ist das verantwortbar?“, A Paper presented at the Conference on “Wachstumsmarkt Mikrofinanz”, Tutzing, 5-7 March, 2010 (unpublished), p. 13.

⁵⁵ Cf. M.C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, p. 282. As Cornel West also remarks, it is the “commitment to economic growth – corporate power” which directs most of the economic policies of most nations today. C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 61. He talks about the economic growth and income disparities in the United States: “The society in which 1 percent of the population owns 30 percent of the wealth – not income I’m talking about but wealth – the properties, the stock, the dividends. Another way of looking at this is that the bottom 45 percent of the population own 2 percent of the wealth.”

Focusing on human freedoms contrasts with narrower views of development, such as identifying development with the growth of gross national product, or with the rise in personal incomes, or with industrialization, or with technological advance, or with social modernization. Growth of GNP or of individual incomes can, of course, be very important as *means* to expanding the freedoms enjoyed by the society. But freedom depends also on the other determinants, such as social and economic arrangements (for example, facilities of education and health care) as well as political and civil rights (for example, the liberty to participate in public discussion and scrutiny).⁵⁶

Amos' categorization of the deprived sections is more inclusive than most of the modern theories of justice. When mutual advantage is the motivation behind co-operation in a society, then the categories of people who cannot contribute productively are likely to be ignored. One of the major drawbacks of most theories of justice, including the social contract theory, is the exclusion of people with severe mental impairments, animals and so on.⁵⁷ The disabled are inadequately treated in these theories. According to Nussbaum,

The classical theories all assumed that their contracting agents were men who were roughly equal in capacity, and capable of productive economic activity. They thus omitted from the bargaining situation women (understood as non-“productive”!), children and elderly people – although the parties might represent their interests.⁵⁸

Even the practice of democracy in Europe and the United States did not include property-less white men, women, slaves or people of African descent for a long time.⁵⁹ Amos, on the other hand, names “the girl” as a special category, against whom justice is denied. Though he does not name the other categories mentioned above such as children, elderly people and mentally impaired, the categories used by him, as seen above, could easily encompass more deprived people than these theories.

In short, we can say that the prophets condemn poverty in all its forms, if it is caused by human beings and society, because in all its forms, it is an affront to the dignity of human persons and a violation of the will of God. The poor have a right to be treated decently or in a way that they are not humiliated. It should be noted that the prophets do not ask for pity but for rights. Asking for pity or charity would only humiliate the poor even more.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ A. Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 1999, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Cf. M.C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, pp. 31-32.

⁵⁸ M.C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, p. 14.

⁵⁹ Cf. C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 9.

⁶⁰ Cf. A. Margalit, *The Decent Society*, Cambridge / Massachusetts / London: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 235. He rightly points out that the traditional religious idea of pity which flows from piety is misplaced. The moving force behind concern for one's neighbour should be the recognition of that person's worth rather than fulfilling an obligation to God.

3.1.3. Condemning Injustice and Oppression

It is the observation of unjust situations in his community that serves as the platform on which Amos bases his call for justice. This has been the concern of most of the moral and economic thinkers of recent generations like Adam Smith, the Marquis de Condorcet or Mary Wollstonecraft too, as Sen sums it up: “for the elimination of some outrageously unjust arrangements”⁶¹ in order to enhance justice. Amos understands that justice as willed by YHWH condemns the prosperity built on the violation of the rights of the weaker sections. The assumed material prosperity of the time of Jeroboam II did not promote justice and the life of a larger section of the community did not improve with the material prosperity, as the references to injustice in the book of Amos show. The material prosperity did not make the people free; instead it increased inequality and equipped some sections of the society with more power and opportunities to exploit others and thereby to restrain their freedoms.

While condemning the injustice in society, the prophets do not use a definite terminology of justice, and I would suggest that such terminological determinations are not necessary in describing injustice in society. Sen has brought to our notice the importance of not being imprisoned by words in comprehending justice and he cites the *Magna Carta*: ‘To no man will we sell, or deny or delay, right or justice’ to show how justice can be better described through its manifestation. He further says that “We have reason to celebrate the fact that the leaders of that great anti-authoritarian agitation not only knew what they were doing, they also knew which word to use ...”⁶² Injustice, in fact, takes place when we sell, deny, or delay a right or justice. This can be a very good commentary on the prophetic condemnation of injustice as we see below. The prophet takes special care to describe the humiliating situations, even when the victims and those responsible are not mentioned by name.⁶³

The unjust treatment of some sections of the society mentioned by Amos can be compared to some aspects of the practice of the caste system in India. The caste system is indeed a clear example of humiliation, where the humiliating agent is not even visible. The very fact of being born into a lower caste is a humiliating experience for the individual. Margalit has rightly pointed out that it is not the caste distinction itself which is dehumanizing, but the treatment of the lower caste by the upper castes, in which the untouchables are given only an instrumental value as sweepers, ear-wax removers and toilet

⁶¹ A. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, p. 26.

⁶² A. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, p. 73.

⁶³ Margalit has pointed out that “The shift from a humiliating agent to a humiliating situation is important because institutional humiliation is independent of the peculiarities of the human agent, depending only on the nature of humiliation.” A. Margalit, *The Decent Society*, p. 129.

cleaners.⁶⁴ Similarly, it is the abuse of the lower classes in the community which is the object of Amos' critique and we see the following actions which characterized it. They could be classified under three heads: the manipulative use of money and power; the exploitation of the weaker sections of the community; and the luxurious lifestyle of the upper class.

Manipulative Use of Money

One of the unjust practices condemned by Amos is the manipulative use of money and power to deprive the weaker sections of their legitimate rights. Three verbs in the Israel oracle indicate corruption in the area of dispensation of justice: *mkr* "to sell" (2,6b), *šwp* "to trample" (2,7a), *nṯh* "to pervert" (2,7b). The unjust behaviour condemned through these verbs includes bribery of judges and subsequent distortion of the judicial process to the disadvantage of the righteous, poor and needy, even to the extent of selling them on account of their debts. Amos mentions the buying of the poor again in 8,6. The rights of the deprived sections are trampled underfoot and hindrances are put in the way of a meaningful existence with human dignity for them. The use of money and power to sell or to buy human persons comes under the critique of the prophet here. Positively read, the prophetic critique imparts a valuable lesson: money should serve the mankind and it should not be used to manipulate the fate of the poor.

Amos condemns the perversion or manipulation of "the way" or the destiny of the afflicted in 2,7. This phrase "to bend the way" is not used with a moral or judicial sense here, as we saw in the analysis of the text, but it means physically putting hindrances in the way of a meaningful existence with human dignity. Their right to participate in normal economic and social activities so as to have a dignified existence is deliberately hindered or is made difficult (see 1.2.2.4 above).

The manipulative use of money for personal motivations and the utter disregard for the plight of the poor comes under prophetic scrutiny. This idea is a stepping stone to evaluating the use of money in our own times too. If I draw a parallel to our times, the prevention of individuals from participating in the normal social and economic activities for a decent living mentioned in Amos is similar to what Markus Vogt points out:

The expulsion of the poor from capital markets contradicts the principle of distributive justice and the rule of social participation. They are neither too stupid nor too passive to earn money, but they do lack first and foremost access to capital as a prerequisite for developing their abilities.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Cf. A. Margalit, "Menschenwürdige Gleichheit", in A. Krebs (ed.), *Gleichheit oder Gerechtigkeit. Texte der neuen Egalitarismuskritik*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000, p. 110.

⁶⁵ My translation from "Der Ausschluss der Armen von Kapitalmärkten widerspreche dem Prinzip der Beteiligungsgerechtigkeit und dem Gebot der gesellschaftlichen Teilhabe. Sie sind weder zu dumm noch zu

Money could be also used with social objectives, without putting the disadvantaged persons at risk, even while doing business, as the social economists of our times point out.⁶⁶ Money could instead become a medium to take up responsibility for oneself and for others as Yunus, an advocate of modern micro-finances, has proposed.⁶⁷

In 8,4-6, it is the corn trade that is misused and made another context of rampant exploitation. Here the needy are trampled upon (*šwp*) and the afflicted are eliminated (*šbt hiphil*) (v. 4a). Amos' listing of unjust practices in business includes disregard for the observation of the obligatory holy days (8,5; see 1.6.1.2 above). The profit motive of the traders is devastating as they have scant regard for the holy days. The feasts like Sabbath and New Moon have also a sociological importance to protect the rights of the poor and vulnerable. Trade should respect the right of the workers to rest, and the religious and other sentiments of the public.

Creating more profit alone cannot be the motive for business, if we follow the spirit of the above prophetic critique. The traders cheat the poor and needy not only by falsifying weights and measures (v. 5b) and selling (*šbr*) the refuse of grain (v. 6b), but also by buying (*qnh*) them literally (cf. v. 6a). Selling substandard products comes under the criticism of the prophet, which is a practice rampant even today. The existence of the accursed scant measures, false scales and deceitful weights, which Wolff calls as the most common means of cheating in the ancient Orient,⁶⁸ are affirmed by the book of Micah too (cf. 6,10-11). A similar instance of malpractice is seen in the book of Isaiah as the "iniquitous decrees", which are used to manipulate justice to the needy and to rob the poor of their rights in Isa 10,1-2, could be understood as property documents, credit statements, and selling and buying contracts.⁶⁹

Thus greed and malpractice in business are objects of criticism in the prophets. The responsibility of those who make economic policies and of bankers towards the economically backward sections of society is called to our attention here. The prophet's stand raises questions about the morality behind unscrupulous speculation in the financial markets today. Yunus narrates how such speculation takes place in the modern business:

In recent years, however, the credit markets have been distorted by a relative handful of individuals and companies with a different goal in mind to earn

passiv zum Geld verdienen, sondern ihnen fehlt vor allem der Zugang zu Kapital als Voraussetzung dafür, ihre Fähigkeiten produktiv entfalten zu können." M. Vogt, "Mit Armut Geld verdienen", p. 4.

⁶⁶ See the concept of "social business" below in this section in association with this point.

⁶⁷ Cf. M. Yunus, "Economic Security", p. 10.

⁶⁸ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 4. Micha*, BKAT 14/4, Neukirchen Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1982, p. 167

⁶⁹ Cf. W.A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja 1-12*, p. 268.

unrealistically high rates of return through clever feats of financial engineering. They repackaged mortgages and other loans into sophisticated instruments whose risk levels and other characteristics were hidden or disguised. Then they sold and resold these instruments, earning a slice of profit on every transaction. All the while, investors eagerly bid up the prices, scrambling for unsustainable growth and gambling that the underlying weakness of the system would never come to light.⁷⁰

Another message that can be drawn from the above prophetic condemnations is doing business without looking for undue personal gain. Amos condemns those who exploited the vulnerability of the poor in order to oppress them further and to make economic gains even by selling them for meagre sums of money (cf. 2,6c; see 1.2.2.2 above). The distinction that Yunus makes with regard to “social business” and “socially responsible business” can in some ways help us to understand how an idea of doing business without undue profit motive can materialize in our days. The purpose of social business, according to him, is

to address and solve social problems, [*and*] not to make money for its investors. ... profits remain with the company and are used to expand its outreach, to improve the quality of the product or service it provides, and to design methods to bring down the cost of the product or service.⁷¹

The socially responsible business, on the other hand, refers to the business of the “traditional for-profit companies that chose to modify their business activities so as to promote social goals, or at least to minimize the social harms they cause”,⁷² though it has profit-making as its principal aim. The profit generated from the business goes directly to promote social causes and not into the pockets of the greedy businessmen.

The encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, No. 40 also stresses “the need for greater *social responsibility* on the part of business.” While sounding a note of dissonance with “the ethical considerations that currently inform debate on the social responsibility of the corporate world” with “the perspective of the Church’s social doctrine”, it reminds that

business management cannot concern itself only with the interests of the proprietors, but must also assume responsibility for all the other stakeholders who contribute to the life of the business: the workers, the clients, the suppliers of various elements of production, the community of reference.

However, there is a fundamental difference between the approach of Yunus and that of the encyclical mentioned above on the one side and that of the biblical prophets and the biblical social laws on the other. Yunus, while advocating social business, finds the business practices of capitalism “still the best economic system known to humanity”⁷³ and criticizes

⁷⁰ M. Yunus, “Economic Security”, p. 6.

⁷¹ M. Yunus, “Economic Security”, p. 9.

⁷² M. Yunus, “Economic Security”, p. 9.

⁷³ M. Yunus, “Economic Security”, p. 5.

only the misuses of the system in the present society. The encyclical too acknowledges the fact that “today’s international capital market offers great freedom of action” (No. 40), though it calls for greater responsibility on the part of business to include the interests of all stakeholders as we saw above. What Yunus aims to do is make the “Half-Built-Structure”⁷⁴ of capitalism complete through his idea of social business. The pursuit of self interest and profit-making still remain the goals of business, though he would prefer that the profit remains with the borrowers and is used “to help the poor in one way or another.”⁷⁵ Lending on interest to the poor and even taking higher rates of interest are legitimate in his practice of business.

The approach of the biblical prophets is at variance with the above approaches as the prophets understand justice as the maintenance of a relationship in society in which one is not supposed to use the vulnerability of others for economic gain. The same idea is behind the explicit prohibition of charging interest in the biblical social laws as we shall see below. Both the prophets and the biblical social laws place the welfare of the community above making even legitimate profit in the area of economic activities. It is the worth and dignity of a person and the fundamental equality of all human beings that lie at the foundation of Amos’ vision of the community. His idea serves to promote the freedom of individuals, and as Christian Felber points out, if each one acts only in his/her own interest, then the other is no longer considered as equal, but as an instrument, an attitude which will endanger the freedom of all.⁷⁶ Felber is categorical in his rejection of the market economy which, in his view, is oriented to profit and competition and therefore a contradiction in terms to be called a “free” economy.⁷⁷ The prophetic responsibility of the Church today is to judge the economy not by the amount of goods it can produce and the profit it can make for the already rich of the world, but by how it can protect the interests of the poorest of the poor. The following observation of the US Catholic Bishops to “judge any economic system by what it does *for* and *to* people and by how it permits all to *participate* in it” (*Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, A Pastoral Message, No. 13⁷⁸) is a right step in this direction.

Exploitation of the Weaker Sections of the Community

The manipulative use of power and influence is further mentioned in the socio-critical sayings in ch. 5, the crimes include ignoring justice and righteousness (v. 7); hating (*śn*) the

⁷⁴ M. Yunus, “Economic Security”, p. 8.

⁷⁵ M. Yunus, “Economic Security”, p. 10.

⁷⁶ Cf. C. Felber, *Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie. Das Wirtschaftsmodell der Zukunft*, Wien: Deuticke, 2010, p. 15.

⁷⁷ C. Felber, *Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie*, p. 15.

⁷⁸ Full title: U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, 1986.

one who reproves, and loathing (*t'b*) the one who speaks truth (v. 10); afflicting (*šrr*) the righteous, taking a bribe, and manipulating the justice due to the needy at the gate (5,12). Perverting justice and righteousness (6,12b) is also blamed on the people who indulge in eating and drinking at the cost of the poor (cf. 1.5.2.2). The fact that unlawful practices in the courts were widespread in Israel and Judah is also evident from Micah 3,9, as here the heads of the house of Jacob and the leaders of the house of Israel are accused for abhorring (*t'b*) and perverting (*'qš*) what is right. Their crime in this regard is pinpointed as taking a bribe (*šōḥar*) for a judgement in v. 11. The above offence finds mention also in Isa 5,23, where the prophet condemns those “who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of their rights” (NRSV). These instances show that the prophets condemn the denial of the judicial rights of individuals through bribery and other manipulations. To deny the right to justice before the court of law is to curtail the fundamental freedom of the individuals. This makes the life of the deprived sections all the more humiliating.

The exploitation of the weaker sections of the society takes an ominous dimension in which a defenseless young girl is sexually exploited by the persons who are entrusted with her protection (cf. Amos 2,7c). A man and his father sexually exploiting the same girl show also the collapse of the familial values in society. The most accurate description of this situation is found in Micah 7,6, where we read: “for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; your enemies are members of your own household.” (NRSV) The blind love for gifts and chasing after rewards on the part of prominent people, also leading to grave injustice to the disadvantaged sections of the community such as widows and orphans, is also mentioned in Isa 1,23.

Moreover, the prophets are concerned about using gender as a factor for social control and they criticize the exploitation of the weaker sex in the family or in the work place. Though the prophets do not speak about the cultural prejudices based on gender, their stand against the exploitation of women and their reminders to protect the interests of women, especially those of the servant-girl and the widows, sets a firm foundation for a dignified treatment of women in society. However, the reception of this perspective in the Church, especially in the social teachings of the Church till the twentieth century has been by and large negligible. Even the social encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* (1931) discouraged the right of women to seek employment outside home: “Mothers, concentrating on household duties, should work primarily in the home or in its immediate vicinity.” (No. 71)

In the pre-World War II order, the understanding of gender, as Marianne Heimbach-Steins points out, was clearly hierarchical and in favor of the social domination and defining

power of men, which claimed as its source the strongest possible foundation –the authority of God.⁷⁹ Here one can see how the perception of Amos in this regard contrasts with the above mentioned approach of the Church. He considers the ill-treatment of a servant girl as profanation of the name of his God (2,7c; see 1.2.2.5 above).⁸⁰ He discerns the will of God as supporting the protection of the rights of the oppressed and exploited and not as restricting their rights or as justifying their exploitation.

Luxurious Lifestyle of the Upper Class

Another area of gross injustice mentioned by Amos is the luxurious life of some sections of the community, who are not only insensitive to the plight of the poor, but also exploit and rob them in order to sustain their affluent lifestyle. Two verbs, “to stretch out” (2,8a) and “to drink” (2,8b) in the Israel oracle indicate the luxurious life of the upper classes. In Amos 4,1ff., the exploitative actions include ‘šq “to oppress” the poor (v. 1b); ršš “to crush” the needy (v. 1b); and colluding with their husbands in exploitation (cf. v. 1c). Trampling (*bws/bss*) on the poor by levying grains (5,11a) and building houses of dressed stones (v. 11b) are highlighted in chapter 5 as instances of the merciless exploitation of the disadvantaged. The criticism of the exploitation of the poor and living a luxurious life is found elsewhere in the book of Amos too: cf. 3,10ff.15; 6,4.

Though Amos does not speak about the class structure in his society, he criticizes the upper classes⁸¹ for their indulgent life-style and lack of care about the misery of the poor. In 6,1-14, a false sense of security and alliances against the will of YHWH (v. 1), the overconfidence that the day of evil (*yôm rā’*) will not overtake them (v. 3), and boasting about recent military victories (6,13) are said to be leading to an indulgent life which involves “lying (*šōkəbîm*) on the beds of ivory”, “lounging (*səruḥîm*) on the couches”, “eating (*’ōkəlîm*) lambs from the flocks” (v. 4), “singing idly” or “groaning” (*pōraḥîm*) (v. 5); and “drinking (*šōḥîm*) wine in bowls” (v. 6). The false confidence in the Lord on the part of the leaders, priests and prophets, who thrive on unjust conduct, is criticized also in the book of Micah (cf. 3,11). Here it is the tendency of human beings to trust in the structures created by themselves to the exclusion of God and ethical obligations that is the subject of prophetic critique.

Though the class disparities might have existed from earlier times, the decisive change that is seen in this book, according to Kessler, is the antagonism among the classes: “The rich

⁷⁹ Cf. M. Heimbach-Steins, “... nicht mehr Mann und Frau”. *Sozialethische Studien zu Geschlechterverhältnis und Geschlechtergerechtigkeit*, Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2009, p. 27.

⁸⁰ For the gradual change that is taking place in Church’s approach to the dignity of women, see 3.2.3.1 below.

⁸¹ For more on the description about this group see 3.1.4 below.

are rich because of their exploitation of the poor; the poor are poor because they are exploited by the rich. *From being poor and rich side by side, it becomes an inimical against each other.*⁸² The biblical prophets do not condemn riches in itself, but enjoying a luxurious life at the cost of the poor. It is the lack of concern on the part of the upper classes for the plight of the poor which comes under the prophetic sword of judgement. As Simundson points out, “the indulgent way of life in itself is sinful if it ignores the huge disparity between rich and poor.”⁸³

All the indulgent activities mentioned above take place in the context of a cultic feast, Marzē 𐎠, and therefore the perpetrators are culpable of misusing this ritual for drunken debauchery (cf. 6,7a). The social injustice does not remain with the juridical, social and familial levels. That it spills naturally over to the sacred realm, the cult, is evident also from 2,8. The moral and ethical decadence of the society is seen here as spreading into the cultic field. The people do not feel the prick of conscience when they use the cloak taken in pledge from the debtor for cultic practices. The depth of their utter disrespect for ethical norms is evident also in their using the money received from the poor as fines for drinking wine, again in the very house of their God. Thus the prophetic social critique is not silent on the wrong use of cult for the benefit of the powerful in the society.⁸⁴

3.1.4. Critique on the Perpetrators of Injustice

The texts we analyzed in chapter 1 show how different classes of people were present in society as these texts were being composed or edited. Though the author does not name the classes or any particular group who is responsible for the exploitation in his society, there are general references to groups who are condemned. The group is addressed generally as “Israel” in the Israel oracle (cf. 2,6), and is further characterized through the mention of the condemnable offences of which they are guilty. They are those who sell the righteous and needy (2,6), those who trample on the head of the poor (2,7), those who deliberately block justice to the afflicted (2,7,) and those who sexually exploit a servant girl (2,7). They do not

⁸² My translation from “Die Reichen sind reich aufgrund ihrer Ausbeutung der Armen, die Armen sind arm, weil sie von den Reichen ausgebeutet werden. *Aus dem Nebeneinander von Arm und Reich ist ein antagonistisches Gegeneinander geworden.*” R. Kessler, *Sozialgeschichte des alten Israel*, p. 117. He observes similar developments in the books of Isaiah and Micah: the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few (Isa 5,8; Mic 2,1ff.); women and children as the victims of this development (Mic 2,9ff.); widows and orphan as classical *personae miserae* (Isa 1,21-26; 10,1); the upper class, who are accused (Isa 3,14ff.); charges against the economically powerful (Mic 2); indulgent life of the upper class (Isa 5,11ff.). Cf. p. 118.

⁸³ D.J. Simundson, *Hosea, Joel, Amos*, p. 186.

⁸⁴ As we saw in the second chapter, the political changes have played a role in creating an unjust social structure. We shall deal more with the relationship of the religion of this time to the political order later in the analysis of the theological founding of prophetic social critique and social laws below in 3.3.

have any respect for God and holy places (2,8), nor do they respect the Nazirites and listen to the prophets (2,12).

The other socio-critical sayings and oracles in the book of Amos can provide us with more details about this group. They include the affluent women of Samaria (cf. 4,1), and “the house of Israel”(5,4; 6,14), described as the cream of Israelite society (cf. 5,10-12). To this section of the society belong also those who live in false security, i.e, trusting in their own might rather than trusting in God, in the capital cities of Zion and Samaria (6,1). This group referred to as “those who are at ease in Zion” and as “those who are secure in Mount Samaria” by Amos could have definitely belonged to the upper class of *šārîm*, though the word itself is not used. The accusations in 8,4-6 repeat their actions of trampling on the needy and harming the interests of the afflicted as mentioned in the Israel oracle. Here the oppressors are further specified as greedy business people (8,5-6). Kessler thinks that these upper class people could have included those who are named in the Samaria ostraca and the class of people known as *'am-hā'āreš* “people of the land” or the nobles and the aristocratic officers in Judah.⁸⁵

A juridical context can be inferred from the nature of some of the accusations, and therefore, it may not be wrong to include among the culprits the people who are responsible for the administration of justice. They allow themselves to be bribed and let the judicial process to be subverted. The socially and economically higher classes of people (see 2.2.4 above), in whose hands the land and wealth accumulated, colluded with the judiciary to grab the meagre assets of the weaker sections of the community. Though some of the accusations are of a juridical nature, the term judge (*šōpēṭ*) seldom finds expression as the subject of the crimes committed. The only exception is Micah 7,3⁸⁶, where the judge is blamed for asking the common people to pay a bribe.⁸⁷ However we have ample information to show that the judicial system was corrupted in this time in the words of the prophets, not only in the book of Amos as we saw in the textual analysis, but also in the books of Isaiah and Micah (cf. Isa 1,23.26; 3,2; 11,4; Mic 3,11). Jeremiah, speaking later about the corruption of his compatriots, accuses them of not defending (*šāpāṭ*) the right of the needy (cf. Jer 5,28). As already mentioned above, the dispensation of justice in Israel was the function of the officials as a

⁸⁵ Cf. R. Kessler, *Sozialgeschichte des alten Israel*, p. 121. Kessler thinks that some of the women of the princes who ruled in Jerusalem came from the noble families (2 Kgs 14,2; 15,2; 21,19; 21,2; 23,31 et al). Along with the land nobles there were also officer families: e.g. the family of Shaphan (2 Kgs 22,3.9), Ahikam (2 Kgs 22,12.14; Jer 26,24), Gemariah (Jer 36,10.12.25) and so on. Cf. p. 103.

⁸⁶ Inserting this word following the suggestion of *BHK*.

⁸⁷ The judges are the objects of YHWH's wrath in Amos 2,3 (judges of Moab) and in Isa 3,2 (judges of Jerusalem).

whole around this time in Israel and this could be the reason why the perverting of justice is not blamed on the office of judge specifically. The corruption among those responsible for the dispensation of justice was rampant as we understand from the words of the prophets.

The general categories of the upper class, who are objects of the prophetic critique, are the nobles and officers, who are known as *šārîm*. Amos uses the term *šar* twice, though not in his socio-critical utterances.⁸⁸ He refers to the upper class of his society as “the house of Israel”, a group consisting of the nobles and residents of the capital city, and does not mince his words in condemning their rapacious mentality as we have seen in Amos 5,11-12. In Micah the word *šar* occurs only once (Mic 7,3) and here they are responsible for evil acts in line with Mic 2,1; 3,2.4, and for the perversion of good, in which they ask for a bribe along with the judges. Isaiah too strongly criticized the oppression of the lower classes. Isa 1,21-23 is a clear prophetic condemnation of exploitation by the upper classes in Jerusalem just like his other sayings against the exploiters: 3,1-5; 5,18-24; 10,1-4; and 28,14ff. The components of this class are described in 3,2-3: hero and fighter, judge and prophet, diviner and elder, commander of fifty and dignitary, counselor and gifted magician, and the expert enchanter.

In Isa 1,21-22, the nobles of the city are accused of harlotry, a metaphor normally used to indicate the unfaithfulness of the people to YHWH, especially by prophet Hosea.⁸⁹ The decadence in cult and the relationship with YHWH now find their reflection in the social life of the people too. The city that used to be full of justice and right is now full of murderers. ‘To murder’, in the context of Isaiah, seems to imply the corruption and oppression of the socially weaker sections as the following verses show. The metaphors of silver becoming dross and wine diluted are indicators of the corruption prevalent in official circles and the decadence of the nobility of Jerusalem. In these verses, using two terms that underlie the ethical message also of Isaiah, *mišpāt* and *šəḏāqā(h)* cf. 1,27; 5,7.16; 9,6; 16,5; 26,9; 28,17; 32,1.16; 33,5 et al,⁹⁰ a comparison is made between a previous ideal situation, perhaps in Israel’s remote past, and the changes that have taken place. The reference to a situation where the will of YHWH, justice and righteousness prevailed makes the contrast with the present

⁸⁸ In Amos 1,13-15, the king (cf. v. 15) of Ammon is culpable for heinous crimes along with his princes, and it is interesting to note that the punishment mentioned here for their crime is exile, just as for those who oppress the poor and needy in 4,2-3 and to those who deny justice to the righteous in 6,7. In the oracle against Moab (2,1-3) too, the destruction of “her princes” in the punitive intervention of YHWH is stressed. In the foretold punishment of Elam in Jer 49,38 too “the king and his princes” are included (cf. also Jer 25,18).

⁸⁹ Cf. Hos 1,2; 4,10.12.13.14.15.18; 5,3; 9,1. The 2nd masculine singular suffixes in Isa 1,22 and 23 show that the described picture is not of the city but of its corrupted administration. So it is not the city that is condemned, but its officers who have made it so. In Isa 3,14, in a *riḅ*, the Lord accuses “his people and its princes” (*ziqnê ‘ammô wəšārāyw*) of devouring the vineyard and looting the poor.

⁹⁰ Cf. W.A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja 1-12*, HThKAT, Freiburg / Basel / Wien: Herder, 2003, p. 82.

situation, where the will of the corrupted and murderous nobles prevails, crystal clear. Here the word *šārîm* may refer to the officials in the court of law as the context indicates.

It is a fact that in prophetic books, the *šārîm* are generally accused for their unjust way of living and oppression (cf. Isa 1,23; 10,8; 43,28; Hos 5,10; 7,5; 8,10). The description is obviously negative, applying to people such as those who through their lies please the king (Hos 7,3), those who are made sick with the heat of wine (Hos 7,5), those who caused the exile and burdened the people (Hos 8,10)⁹¹ However, in the book of Jeremiah sometimes we find *šārîm* in a favorable light (cf. Jer 26,10-16) as they protect the prophet against the people and prophets who intended to put him to death. They warned Jeremiah and his disciple Baruch to hide themselves from the king after the critical prophecy against the king in chapter 36. This positive evaluation of the *šārîm* is found in the “patristische/schafanidische” layer of the book of Jeremiah, according to Hermann-Josef Stipp.⁹² But in the dtr layer of the book, the evaluation of the nobles is obviously negative (cf. Jer 37,15). Here it is *šārîm* who beat and imprison the prophet and they are assessed as responsible for the catastrophe of exile. We see a similar approach also in 1,18; 8,1ff.; 32,32; 34,10ff. 19-21; 44,17.21.⁹³

Two of the components of the upper class who appear by name in the prophetic social critique are the priests and the elders. Mic 3,11 refers to the corruption of priests who teach for money, in his accusation of the aristocracy of Jerusalem. Wolff, in his commentary on the verse, says that the priests, as the protector of the Torah, have the duty to assure that the Torah is observed faithfully, that the rights of the innocent are upheld (cf. Deut 17,8-11; 33,10), and that no corruption takes place in the holy place.⁹⁴ The neglect of this duty is vividly demonstrated in the prophetic accusations. Israel loses its prerogative to minister to YHWH as priests once they forget the law, according to prophet Hosea (cf. 4,4-6). Amos 7,10-17, though in itself not a criticism of priests, shows how the priest Amaziah obstructs the preaching of the word of God by the prophet.

⁹¹ Reading with F.I. Andersen / D.N. Freedman, *Hosea*, AB 24, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980, p. 501.508. However, the MT is problematic here: *meleḵ šārîm* “the king of princes” could refer to the Assyrian king and the context and meaning are not clear. If the Assyrian king is meant here, then the text has no social critical content.

⁹² H-J. Stipp, *Jeremiah, der Temple und die Aristokratie. Die patrizische (schafanidische) Redaktion des Jeremiabuches*, Waltrop: Hartmut Spenner, 2000, pp. 7.17-38. The patristic redaction may have taken place during the post-exilic period and had the apologetic function of showing the Jewish aristocracy as loyal to the prophet. Cf. p. 58.

⁹³ Cf. H-J. Stipp, *Jeremiah, der Temple und die Aristokratie*, pp. 7-9. The reason for the divergent attitudes towards aristocracy has to do with the composition history and growth of the book of Jeremiah. In this complex redaction history, Stipp attributes Jer 26,7.10-16 and 36 to a post-dtr redaction called “patrizische Redaktion”. P. 11.

⁹⁴ Cf. H. W. Wolff, *Dodekapheton 4*, p. 78.

Jeremiah later accuses the priests of not seeking the Lord (cf. 2,8), along with teachers of law, rulers and prophets. He also includes priests among those who deal falsely (6,13). Jeremiah narrates a similar experience, where the priest Paschur, son of Immer, went even to the extent of beating and putting him in the stocks (Jer 20,1-6). It is no wonder that the prophet nicknames him *māgôr missābîb* “Terror-all-around” (v. 3, NRSV). Jer 26,7-24 too shows how the priests tried to get rid of the Lord’s prophet through violence. These instances show also how the priests worked in tandem with the whims and fancies of the crown. In Isa 28,7-13, in a criticism of the elites of Jerusalem, the priests are accused of drunkenness at religious meals (cf. also Jer 13,13). The most strident criticism of the priests is to be found again in Jeremiah: for dealing falsely, being greedy for grain (6,13; 8,10); for being ungodly and wicked (23,11); and for being a burden to YHWH (23,33-34).

Isaiah condemns the elders of the people along with their princes in 3,14. The prophet condemns them for having “devoured the vineyard” and for having the spoils of the poor in their houses. Their crime includes also crushing the people and grinding the faces of the afflicted (v. 15). They are also included in those who lead the people astray and thus deserve punishment in 9,14ff.

From the fact that there are only a few mentions of the responsibility of judges, priests or elders in the prophetic social critique and from the absence of the mention of many other parties that formed the upper class it is not to be concluded that the share of these sections in the social crisis was any less. The prophets do not make, in fact, a distinction between the various sections of the higher class. They were en bloc responsible for the social crisis in the prophetic books. Therefore, Frank Crüsemann is fully right when he says,

In the whole of the prophetic critique of 8th century – in spite of some differentiation in terminology and evaluation – the entire upper class is often seen as a unit. All of them exploit the poor and weak. And to them belong the elders, i.e., the heads of the leading tribes, as well as the royal officers, judges and military, mostly also the religious apparatus.⁹⁵

It is evident from the above analysis that faced with the emergence of new structures and a stratified society, with the upper classes having more resources and opportunities to exploit the lower classes, the prophetic critique called for justice in society to protect the interest of the weaker classes. It is a fact that stratifications exist in almost all societies. Groups playing various roles in the society are an integral part of every society. But when the

⁹⁵ My translation from “In der gesamten kritischen Prophetie des 8. Jahrhunderts ist – trotz mancher Differenzierung in Terminologie und Wertung – stets die gesamte Oberschicht als Einheit gesehen. Sie alle beuten die Ärmeren und Schwächeren aus. Und zu ihnen gehören sowohl die Ältesten, also die Häupter der führenden Sippen, wie auch die königlichen Beamten, Richter, Militärs, meist auch die religiöse Apparat.” F. Crüsemann, *Die Tora*, p. 101.

higher strata of the society exploit and humiliate the lower strata, it is an unjust society. In the view of the prophets, the upper class has a special responsibility to protect the rights and self-respect of the lower class, but in reality they found the opposite taking place in their society and they spared no word to condemn those responsible for it.

Socio-ethical Reflections

Given below are some of the socio-ethical implications of the prophetic critique on the unjust practices in a stratified society:

First, by taking on the class structure in their society, the prophets wanted to defend the lower classes from the shame and humiliation to which they are exposed. The very fact of the existence of classes in society is an obvious instance of “institutional humiliation”⁹⁶, as Margalit has pointed out, where humiliation is felt even when the agents of humiliation are not directly involved. A class society can fit his description of “shame society”, where humiliation takes “the form of a demotion – lowering people in the social hierarchy in such a way, that they feel shame with regard to the others.”⁹⁷ In the case of the traditional egalitarian tribal society in Israel, the emergence of class structure might have caused a diminution of the dignity and worth of persons who now belonged to the lower strata of the society.

Second, the prophetic critique of a class-based society is a protest against the unequal distribution of power in the society. Behind their criticism lies the fact that the social relationships in a society are also, in some ways, manifestations of power. According to Christoph Hübenal and Werner Veith, power is “the individual or collective empowering to self-determined and successful functioning, [and] ... the empowering to successful functioning of one person has an effect on the successful functioning of others.”⁹⁸ This way of understanding the power relationships in the community can be enriched by the understanding of power relationships that is the background of the social critique of the prophets. It first of all makes us aware that one cannot remain neutral when power relationships are manipulated in the community. Their critique of the powerful or the upper classes is aimed at removing the barriers which they place in the way of the weaker sections. The primary concern of the prophetic critique is not the leveling of the power structure, but opening the vista of opportunities for the oppressed and exploited.⁹⁹ Moreover, rather than being advocates of

⁹⁶ A. Margalit, *The Decent Society*, p. 128.

⁹⁷ A. Margalit, *The Decent Society*, p. 131.

⁹⁸ My translation from “die individuelle oder kollektive Befähigung zur eigenbestimmten erfolgreiche Wirksamkeit. ... die Befähigung zur effektiven Wirksamkeit des einen Auswirkung auf das erfolgreiche Wirkenkönnen des anderen hat.” C. Hübenal / W. Veith (eds.), *Macht und Ohnmacht. Konzeptionelle und Kontextuelle Erkundungen*, Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2005, pp. 9-10.

⁹⁹ The critique of Michael Walzer is relevant here: “A society of equals, they say, would be a world of false appearances where people who were not in fact the same would be forced to look and act as if they were

equality of opportunities, the prophets are concerned about restoring the dignity of human persons, by removing the obstacles placed against their legitimate aspirations to power.

Social ethics could draw inspiration from their social critique for its discussion on power to propose a just distribution of power by assuring equal potential for power to each, and in this process not leveling downwards (“*Angleichung nach unten*”¹⁰⁰) by making all equally powerless, but by empowering the powerless to strive for and achieve fulfillment. At the level of application, it refers to the attempts at equality through the increase of possibilities for power to the disadvantaged sections and by avoiding the monopoly¹⁰¹ of some over the goods of the world. As Walzer comments,

It is not the hope for the elimination of differences; we don't all have to be the same or have the same amounts of the same things. Men and women are one another's equals (for all important moral and political purposes) when no one possesses or controls the means of domination.¹⁰²

Thirdly, by their critique on the stratified society, the prophets envision an inclusive community where social differences based on social positions, ranks and gender are not working to the disadvantage of the weaker sections. In the face of glaring class inequalities in postmodern society, the Church has either denied this phenomenon altogether or has remained indifferent.¹⁰³ Peter Berger comments in the context of the Church in America that the religion of today serves to maintain and justify “status symbolism”¹⁰⁴. He points out two levels at which class distinctions are visible in the American Church today, which can definitely serve as a mirror of the universal Church: at the level of racial segregation; and at the level of denominational segregation. At both levels, religious affiliation determines a person's social status.¹⁰⁵ Class segregation on the basis of ethnicity and confessions does not help the Church to be an inclusive community. Though the ecclesiastical gatherings, especially ecumenical gatherings, pretend to foster solidarity and overcome class divisions, in

the same.” M. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*, New York: Basic Books, 1983, p. xii.

¹⁰⁰ C. Hübenal / W. Veith (eds.), *Macht und Ohnmacht*, pp. 11.

¹⁰¹ I use this term with the same meaning with which Walzer uses it: “Monopoly describes a way of owning or controlling social goods in order to exploit their dominance.” M. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 11.

¹⁰² M. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. xiii. He says, “a good [is] dominant if the individuals who have it, because they have it can command a wide range of other goods” (p. 10) and proposes “breaking the monopoly of power” in order to neutralize its dominance. (p. 16)

¹⁰³ Cf. P.L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, p. 36.

¹⁰⁴ P.L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, p. 73.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. P.L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, pp. 73-75.

reality they only serve “to obscure the reality of class segregation” and do not eliminate them.¹⁰⁶

3.1.5. Amos’ Vision of Just Society and Jesus’ Idea of Kingdom of God

Finally, a brief comparison between the content of the Kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus, which is the central theme of the synoptic gospels,¹⁰⁷ and the vision of Amos about a just society can help us to understand the idea of justice underlying both. Jesus begins his ministry, according to the Gospel of Mark, by proclaiming the arrival of the Kingdom of God (cf. Mk 1,9). This proclamation of Jesus is an invitation to accept the ever active role of God in the world in securing the dignity of human persons and the world and to seek ways in which this dignity can be preserved in history (cf. *Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching*, No. 41). Though Amos does not use the term Kingdom of God, his stand for the claim of YHWH over human history and its inseparable relation to practicing justice in the community is similar to the idea of the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus.

The Nature of the Just Society

Though the title “Kingdom of God” is not used by the prophets, the theme of the reign of God¹⁰⁸ runs through the whole of Hebrew Bible, including the prophetic preaching, as the idea of the reign of God and his justice for the earth.¹⁰⁹ Though both Amos and Jesus envision a just society, they do not describe the exact nature of it. However, their understanding of God’s vision for this society, the indications of practices in this society, and their description of the beneficiaries of this society can offer us insight into its nature as we shall see below:

i. The addressees or the beneficiaries: The oracles and sayings of Amos are oriented to defend the victims of injustice. The description of these groups of people gathered from his oracles and sayings can help us to understand on whose behalf the prophet speaks. The addressees of Jesus too are concrete and they include the poor, understood as a social and economic group or as the group of people for whom life has become a burden on account of the difficult life-situations and marginalization.¹¹⁰ Justice thus means for both of them setting oneself on the

¹⁰⁶ Cf. P.L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, p. 90. He cites the recommendation made in the Study by Adorno, Allport and their associates and argues that “Americans who maintain some religious affiliation express more racial and ethnic prejudice than those who are not so affiliated.” (P. 100).

¹⁰⁷ Urs Eigenmann mentions that the concept „kingdom of God”, referred to also as “Kingdom of Heaven”, “Kingdom of Father”, and “Kingdom” occurs over 90x in the synoptic gospels. U. Eigenmann, “*Das Reich Gottes und seine Gerechtigkeit für die Erde*“. *Die andere Vision vom Leben*, Luzern: Edition Exodus, 1998, p. 14.

¹⁰⁸ See 3.3 for the biblical understanding of the concept “reign of God” in reference to the understanding of power.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. U. Eigenmann, “*Das Reich Gottes*”, p. 19.

¹¹⁰ Cf. J. Sobrino, “Die zentrale Stellung des Reiches Gottes”, see pp. 482-487.

side of the oppressed and establishing healthy and mutually affirming relationships in the community, which make possible a dignified existence for all.

ii. The vision: As we saw above, Amos envisions a just society as a society where the relationships are defined by *zəḏāqā(h)* and *mišpāṭ*. Jesus sees love and salvation of human beings as the objective reality of the Kingdom of God.¹¹¹ Mutually affirming relationships which foster individual dignity and thus aim at individual and communitarian fulfillment is fundamental to both Amos' and Jesus' vision of justice.

iii. The practices: Amos condemns the oppressive practices that do not tally with the will and actions of God in history. Jesus performs a series of wonders and signs through his healings and liberation of others from bondage, and by setting himself on the side of the weaklings and outcasts, which set in motion the Kingdom of God.¹¹² Condemnation of injustice and liberating actions in favour of the weaker sections constitute just practices in the Kingdom of God. The following words and actions of both Amos and Jesus symbolized the advent of the reign of God.¹¹³

a. Amos calls sinners to a life that would reflect justice and righteousness in order to experience the grace of God (cf. 5,15.24); Jesus too offered God's mercy to the sinners (cf. Mk 2,17).

b. Amos takes up the cause of the deprived sections of the community such as those who are denied justice, those who are needy, poor, or afflicted, and women (see 3.1.2 above). Through his table fellowship with the outcasts of society Jesus took up the cause of those who suffered social discrimination (cf. Lk 7,36-50; 15,1-10 et al).

c. The misuse of religion without caring for the principles of charity and justice also come under the critique of Amos (cf. 2,8; 5,21-28 et al) and Jesus (cf. Mk 7,9-13; Mt 23,23 et al).

The social critique of Amos and Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God thus aim to condemn the unjust practices in society in order to establish a society which accords with their religious convictions: a society where the dignity and worth of every person as willed by YHWH is assured; a society where the wellbeing of all, especially of the weaker sections, is taken care of; a society where just relationships are maintained, securing a dignified treatment of all that involves healing and empowering the weaker ones.

Thus the elimination of exploitative relationships and the fostering of life-enhancing relationships are the concern of both Amos and Jesus. The Church, following the prophetic

¹¹¹ Cf. J. Sobrino, "Die zentrale Stellung des Reiches Gottes", see pp. 471-74.

¹¹² Cf. J. Sobrino, "Die zentrale Stellung des Reiches Gottes", see pp. 474-482.

¹¹³ The Pastoral Letter of the US Catholics Bishops gives a brief recapitulation of the liberating actions of Jesus which heralded the reign of God. Cf. *Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching*, No. 42. My presentation is a comparison of this recapitulation with the idea of justice in Amos.

traditions of Amos and Jesus, is called to witness to the Kingdom of God through the upholding of healthy relationships with God, with other human persons and with the world. Amos spoke about the maintenance of these relationships in the everyday life of the people. That these relationships should be visible in the life here and now is stressed also by Jesus when he says that the Kingdom of God is among the people (cf. Luke 17,21). It has already begun with the life and ministry of Jesus. This stand taken by Jesus and Amos questions an all too spiritual understanding of the Kingdom of God and makes the practice of justice in the community the visible sign of the presence of God in the world.

The Vision of an Inclusive Society

A comparison Amos' vision with Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God can help us to deepen our understanding of an inclusive community and its relevance for the idea of justice in the Bible. Some of the characteristics highlighted by Eigenmann regarding the inclusive nature of the Kingdom of God can help us in our comparison.¹¹⁴

i. Amos criticizes the feasting on the garment taken on pledge and on the wine taken as fine (cf. 2,8). Feasting without caring for the poor is an aberration to his God (6,4ff.). The prophet Isaiah also used the banquet to talk about his future vision of the community (cf. Isa 25,6ff.). Jesus uses the instance of a feast to refer to his vision of the Kingdom of God, where the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame are also invited (cf. Lk 14,21). The community of God, symbolized by the festive community, cannot exclude either the weaker sections or the sinners. Feasting while excluding the weaker sections of the community is a counter-witness to the community of God for both Amos and Jesus. According to their criteria, justice is measured by the way in which the poor and other deprived sections are treated in the community (cf. *Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching*, A Pastoral Message, No. 16). This is the reason why Amos expresses his disgust when the poor are exploited to add to the solemnity of the feasts.

ii. The prophetic critique of the upper classes who lead self-indulgent lives and the condemnation of these people to exile reverberates in Jesus' conviction that the rich enter the Kingdom of God only with difficulty (cf. Mk 10,23-25).¹¹⁵

iii. The prophetic foundation of just conduct and a life of solidarity in the community are founded on the actions of God in solidarity with his people in history (see above 2.2.3 for YHWH as *gō'ēl*). The prophets criticize the use of debt as an occasion to exploit a fellow human person. One of the clearest expressions of solidarity is the remission of debt in the

¹¹⁴ U. Eigenmann, "*Das Reich Gottes*", See for the content of the Kingdom of God in Jesus preaching pp. 33-94.

¹¹⁵ Cf. U. Eigenmann, "*Das Reich Gottes*", p. 43.

Hebrew Bible (see 3.2.3.4 below). Jesus believed that God remits the debts of his people and people are duty bound to remit one another's debts (cf. Mt. 18,13-15.21ff.), though the theme in the New Testament is about remission of sins.

The vision of the Kingdom of God expresses the vision of an inclusive society by the prophets as well as by Jesus in a very creative way. Eigenmann describes this inclusive vision aptly:

As the kingdom of those considered unimportant in society, the Kingdom of God is the vision of a solidarity society and a world in which nobody is ignored, discriminated against, or out-cast, in which all have a place and are assured of human affection, social recognition and unconditional forgiveness, which they need for a life in dignity and fullness.¹¹⁶

3.1.6. Impact of the Prophetic Critique on the Church

Amos is the first of the so called "writing prophets" in the Bible and his words have a strong accent on social justice as we have seen above. Even when the authorities objected to his preaching (as in the instance of the priest Amaziah (cf. ch. 7) it had an impact on the system, as is reflected in the spirit of Israel's social legislation down through the centuries (see 3.2 below). The effects of prophecy influencing day to day life in private as well as public spheres, in science, art, and politics, is a phenomenon that occurs even in our times, as Mayer-Tasch has pointed out: "Reflections of prophetic prognosis of various times spring up as feelings and directives of behavior, as impulses for action and as a framework for reactions."¹¹⁷ It is necessary that the energetic potential of the prophetic message is kept alive.¹¹⁸

Here it is legitimate to ask the question how many of these teachings find their echo in the social teachings of the Catholic Church. It is surprising that none of the major social encyclicals and documents of the Catholic Church, even those published in recent decades such as *Reurm novarum*, *Quodagesimo anno*, *Pacem in terris*, *Mater et magistra*, *Populorum progressio*, *Centesimus annus*, *Solicitudo rei socialis*, *Laborem exercens*, *Caritas in veritate*, *Tertio millenio adveniehnte* and the Document of the Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et spes* do not make a single reference to Amos. The radical nature of the prophetic preaching on justice seems to be missing in the Church's teachings.

¹¹⁶ My translation from "Als Reich der gesellschaftlichen Niemande ist das Reich Gottes die Vision einer solidarischen Gesellschaft und Welt, in der niemand verachtet, diskriminiert oder ausgeschlossen wird, in der alle Platz haben und all das an menschlicher Zuwendung, sozialer Anerkennung und vorbehaltloser Vergebung erhalten, was sie zu einem Leben in Würde und Fülle brauchen." U. Eigenmann, "Das Reich Gottes", p. 94.

¹¹⁷ My translation from "Spiegelungen prophetischer Prognosen verschiedener Zeiten tauchen auf als Stimmungen und Verhaltensdirektiven, als Aktionsimpulse und Reaktionsmuster." P.C. Mayer-Tasch, *Über Prophetie und Politik*, München: Gerling Akademie Verlag, 2000, p. 71.

¹¹⁸ Cf. P.C. Mayer-Tasch, *Über Prophetie und Politik*, p. 75.

The absence of the idea of social justice after Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire and until its loss of political influence in recent decades justifies the criticism that the institutionalization of the Church led to a domestication of the radical idea of justice preached by the prophets and Jesus Christ. The monopolization of the prophecy by the institutionalized Church led to its domestication and consequently to a dilution of its content.¹¹⁹ The danger of such a system is that the institution would then try to suppress the prophecy which is against its own interests. It can lead to the peril of reducing prophecy to mere preaching of virtues. Mayer-Tasch rightly questions whether this was not the case after Christianity became an established religion: “*Hier wie dort wurde Wasser gepredigt, und Wein getrunken*”¹²⁰ (here and there was water preached and wine drunk), as he sarcastically puts it.

The greatest concern in the Church which prevented it from taking a stand for social justice and human rights has been the fear of secularization. Bitter historical experiences with the French Revolution, Communism and many other secular revolutionary movements have in some way forced the Church to throw the baby out with the bathwater. In defending itself against secular movements, the Church often forgot the fact that the concept of justice underlying human rights and dignity was part of her own prophetic heritage long before any of these movements emerged.

The absence of direct references to Amos even in the recent social encyclicals of the Church, as mentioned above, cannot be used however to negate the influence of Amos’ ideas on the thinking of the Church on social justice, as the encyclicals quoted in many parts of this dissertation also would show. After the initial suspicion and fear of identifying human rights with secularization, the Church has made significant inroads in recognizing human rights as the cultural heritage of its prophetic traditions. Significant attempts have been made to incorporate it in the Christian social ethics and Church doctrines.¹²¹ *Gaudium et spes* has clearly recommended human rights against political oppression and the legitimacy of defending “their own rights and the rights of their fellow citizens against the abuse of this [public] authority, while keeping within those limits drawn by the natural law and the Gospels.” (No.74). If human rights have become one of the fundamental principles of the

¹¹⁹ Mayer-Tasch warns that a conscious institutionalization or orchestration of prophecy as an instrument of politics is to be prevented because such a monopolization of prophesy would serve only its domestication. Cf. P.C. Mayer-Tasch, *Über Prophetie und Politik*, pp. 77-78.

¹²⁰ P.C. Mayer-Tasch, *Über Prophetie und Politik*, p. 82.

¹²¹ Cf. R. Uertz, *Vom Gottesrecht zum Menschenrecht. Das katholische Staatsdenken in Deutschland von der Französischen Revolution bis zum II. Vatikanischen Konzil (1789-1965)*, Paderborn / München / Wien et al: Schöningh, 2005, p. 470.

Church's social teaching today,¹²² it definitely owes this to the spirit of the prophetic social critique.

The task of Christian social ethics in this context is to reinvent the spirit of prophetic social critique. It requires, first of all, a sharp and clear-sighted perception of the realities around, which is the result of what Mayer-Tasch calls "a correct prognosis of its [*the Church's*] experience, intellectual speculation or a combination of these qualities."¹²³ The element missing in Mayer-Tasch's observation as far as the biblical prophets are concerned is that of their faith in YHWH. For the prophets, faith in YHWH and his actions in history offered a framework for a dignified treatment of persons. Konrad Hilpert adds the implications of this element to the prophetic task of the Church today. He affirms that God and religion can contribute to the ethical discussion a framework "for observation and understanding of the experienced reality, a horizon for interpreting and meaning, in which we sort out our experiences, and on which our actions and practices reflect."¹²⁴ The cornerstones of this meaning horizon for him are:

- the recognition of one's own finiteness,
- the awareness of one's existence being a gift,
- the unconditional recognition of the other as equal,
- the confidence that the ethical effort, in spite of its notoriously fragmentary nature and ability to hurt, and in spite of the constant potential to become guilty and to be guilty, is meaningful.¹²⁵

Amos takes the risk of pointing out hypocrisy in society in his critique and warns against being self-righteous. His encounter with the priest Amaziah shows how he is critical of a religious establishment that accepted uncritically the unjust political set-up. Cornel West points out this role of the prophecy as "keeping track of human hypocrisy ... accenting boldly and defiantly, the gap between principle and practice, between promise and performance,

¹²² R. Uertz, *Vom Gottesrecht zum Menschenrecht*, p. 478.

¹²³ My translation from "zutreffenden Prognosen ihrer Erfahrung, ihrer Intuition, ihrer intellektuellen Spekulation oder einer Kombination dieser Qualitäten." P.C. Mayer-Tasch, *Über Prophetie und Politik*, p. 90.

¹²⁴ My translation from: "... um die Wahrnehmung und das Verstehen der erlebten Wirklichkeit, um den Horizont von Deutung und Sinn, in den wir unsere Erfahrungen einordnen und von dem her wir dann auch unser Handeln und unsere Lebenspraxis reflektieren." K. Hilpert, "Die Rolle der Theologie in der Ethik und ihre Implikationen für die Theorie der angewandten Ethik", in M. Zichy / H. Grimm, *Praxis in der Ethik. Zur Methodenreflexion in der anwendungsorientierten Moralphilosophie*, Berlin / New York: De Gruyter, 2008, p. 227.

¹²⁵ My translation from:

"- die Anerkennung der eigenen Endlichkeit,
 - das Bewusstwerden der Geschenkhafteit des Daseins,
 - die Vorbehaltlose Anerkennung der Anderen als gleich,
 - das Vertrauen-Dürfen darauf, dass sittliches Bemühen trotz notorischer Fragmentartheit, Verletzbarkeit und der steten Möglichkeit, schuldig zu werden und schuldig zu sein sinnvoll ist." K. Hilpert, "Die Rolle der Theologie in der Ethik", p. 227.

between rhetoric and reality.”¹²⁶ There is another side of not being self-righteous, i.e., being self-critical, which means that “one must point out human hypocrisy while remaining open to having others point out that of your own.”¹²⁷

The biblical prophets present to us an example of living out faith in God or religion as socially and politically relevant. It offered them a meaning system to understand the social and political realities around them. Their impact on religion and faith today will depend upon how much the Church integrates the prophetic teaching in her decision-making process.¹²⁸ A renewed pledging of allegiance to the prophetic teachings on social justice and human rights is needed to give expression to the new outlook of the Church in a secular and pluralistic society.

3.2. The Institutional Response to Injustice: the Biblical Social Laws

As mentioned above, the prophetic understanding of justice is realization-focused. The prophets were not teachers of the norms of conduct, but critics of lack of justice in society. The norms of justice are laid down by the biblical social laws that embody the spirit and good intention of the prophetic critique. The practical laws of the Bible can be considered as the institutional response to the social crisis analyzed in the second chapter. The idea of justice and its principles remain as abstract ethical norms, unless it is framed into concrete laws and rules that govern the normal life of the community. It is also an important phase of the application of justice, as Rawls points out, as “the legislative stage in which laws are enacted as the constitution allows and as the principles of justice require and permit”¹²⁹. This stage is similar to the phase of the formulation of the biblical social laws and is followed by the final stage of the application of the principle of justice proposed by Rawls as the phase “in which the rules are applied by administrators and followed by citizens generally and the constitution and laws are interpreted by members of the judiciary.”¹³⁰ The following analysis shows that though the Church has been slow in assimilating the spirit of the prophetic critique in her social and ethical teachings, the Bible itself presents a very concrete example of countering social injustice through its institutional legislation.

Rainer Kessler has pointed out that the biblical references to the existence of written laws apparently come from the epoch in which social crisis broke out.¹³¹ I would agree with

¹²⁶ C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 5.

¹²⁷ C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 5. West further says, “This is why a conception of the prophetic in our times cannot be one that claims that we have unmediated access to God. But, rather, we are fallen vessels through which more critique is brought to bear on ourselves.”

¹²⁸ Cf. P.C. Mayer-Tasch, *Über Prophetie und Politik*, p. 94.

¹²⁹ J. Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p. 48.

¹³⁰ J. Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p. 48.

¹³¹ Cf. R. Kessler, *Sozialgeschichte des alten Israel*, p. 123.

this suggestion, but would insist that the following two concessions are made: first, the biblical references to the writing-down of laws are scarce and uncertain; second, the biblical laws cannot be considered as a response to a particular social crisis, even though similar social concerns are touched upon in the social laws and biblical prophets. The relatively long period of composition of both genres of literature makes it impossible to make definite chronological or thematic correlations.¹³² Frank Crüsemann has rightly said:

The precepts of law cannot be seen as a description of actual social order, although this admittedly happened often in the case of ancient Israel in the absence of other sources and still happens, nor can the written laws be seen merely as an ideal and as a presentation of the reformation of the reality.¹³³

Even accepting this, we have to admit that many of the concerns expressed by the prophets are addressed in the social legislation of the Bible. A mere perusal of the social laws that are found in the Covenantal Code (Exod 20,22-23,33), the Priestly Code or the so-called Holiness Code (Lev 17-26), and the Deuteronomic Code (Deut 12-26) reveals this fact. Therefore, it is necessary to go a little deeper into the exact nature of relationship between the biblical prophets and the biblical laws.

3.2.1. The Prophets and the Torah

Wellhausen had found an intimate relationship between the Torah of the priests and the word of the prophets not only because both have their origin in YHWH, but also because they existed as word in the mouth of the priests and prophets.¹³⁴ He placed the Priestly documents and Deuteronomy with the laws after the prophets. He did not deny the existence of the law, though in oral form, before the prophets, but he asserts that the Priestly document with its accent on God's laws came after the prophets. The prophets were, therefore, more than just freelance preachers of the Torah. They were proclaimers of the word of God in particular life situations as Zimmerly later described:

¹³² As already proposed above, the social critical references of the prophetic books do not pertain to a particular chronological epoch. Similarly, the writing-down of all the laws did not take place in one sitting or during a certain period, and certainly not during the life time of the eighth century prophets.

¹³³ My translation from "Weder können Rechtssätze einfach als Beschreibung der faktischen gesellschaftlichen Ordnung angesehen werden, wie es freilich für das alte Israel mangels anderer Quelle vielfach geschehen ist und noch geschieht, noch kann das schriftliche Recht einfach als Ideal und Reformvorstellung der Realität entgegengestellt werden." F. Crüsemann, *Die Tora*, p. 23.

¹³⁴ J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1886. p. 415. He dates the written appearance of the Priestly Torah to 444 BCE and attributes to Ezra the enthroning of it as the constitution of the people of God signifying the transfer of "the people of the word" into "the people of the book" (cf. pp. 424.428). He rejects the assumption that the prophets were interpreters of the law (cf. p. 417). About the chronological evolution of the Torah his conclusion was: "Es ist darum leicht zu begreifen, dass die Thorah, obwohl als schriftstellerisches Produkt jünger als die geschichtlichen und prophetischen Bücher, dennoch als Gesetz älter ist als jene Schriften, die ja ursprünglich und ihrem Wesen nach gar kein gesetzlichen Charakter tragen, sondern denselben accessorisch erlangt haben, im Anschluss an ein vorhandenes eigentliches Gesetz." (p. 429). He describes this process: "Das Wasser, das in der Vergangenheit gequollen war, fassten die Epigonen in Cisternen." (p. 429).

So just as a messenger has to bring a context-related message on a day of battle, so the prophetic messengers, as the structure of their sayings in the early written prophetic period clearly shows, know that as messengers, they are sent with an announcement of God's actions relevant to their time.¹³⁵

Zimmerli also points out that Amos is not speaking with a completely new ethos of his own, but instead from very specific issues and concerns dealt with in the law of Israel, either in the older formulations of Exod 22,20ff. when he speaks about the weaker sections and 22,25ff. when he refers to the pledged garment, or in the later formulations of Deut 25,13-15 and Lev 19,35ff. in his critique of malpractices in trade.¹³⁶

Before studying the response to the social crisis in biblical laws, we should try to answer the vexing questions: "To what extent did written laws exist during the time of the prophets?" and "What evidence do the biblical texts present in this regard?" The three references in the Bible which Kessler proposes as witnesses for the "writing-down" of laws during the prophets are: Isa 10,1; Hos 8,12; Jer 8,8ff. When these texts are critically evaluated, we find the following:

i. The "woe" introduction and the use of present participles in Isa 10,1 seem to suggest that the "decreeing" and "writing" activities indicate the actual situation. Some commentators have thereby concluded that these references mean that "either new, unjust laws were promulgated to the benefit of the wealthy and/or ruling classes or existing laws were interpreted so as to deprive the powerless of their goods and property."¹³⁷ The first part of the verse Isa 10,1 condemns those who make iniquitous decrees. There is mention to *mākattābīm* or "writers" in the second part of this verse. However it is not clear whether the object of their writing is law or statute as the word *'āmāl* is not used anywhere in the Bible with these meanings. In a similar phrase in Ps 94,20 *yōšēr 'āmāl 'ālê-ḥōq* "those who form injustice by statutes", *'āmāl* and *ḥōq* are related but this evidence is not adequate to suggest the same meaning for both words. Whether Isa 10,1b could express the immoral zeal of the scribes, as commentator Beuken claims¹³⁸, is also anybody's guess. However, that laws and statutes in some form existed during the time of the prophet is inferable from this verse.

¹³⁵ My translation from "So wie ein Bote an einem Kampftag eine ganz situationsbezogene Meldung zu bringen hat, so wissen sich die prophetischen Boten, wie die Formgestaltung ihrer Sprüche in der früheren schriftprophetischen Zeit deutlich zeigt, als Boten, die mit einer situationsgebundenen Ansage vom göttlichen Handeln in ihre Stunde gesandt sind." W. Zimmerli, *Das Gesetz und die Propheten*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969, p. 101.

¹³⁶ Cf. W. Zimmerli, *Das Gesetz und die Propheten*, pp. 103-04.

¹³⁷ J.H. Hayes / S.A. Irvine, *Isaiah: The Eighth-century Prophet; His Times and his Preaching*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987, p. 191.

¹³⁸ Cf. W.A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja 1-12*, p. 261.

ii. The existence of written Torah seems to be presupposed also in Hos 8,12, where the general accusation of the disrespect of YHWH shown by building shrines for other gods is viewed as an utter disregard for the laws written for them by YHWH. Here too the existence of written laws can be only indirectly assumed and it would be too far-fetched to presume the existence of a systematically codified system of laws even from this reference.

iii. In Jer 8,8ff., the prophet questions the wisdom of the people of Jerusalem who claim to be wise because *wəṭōraṭ yhw* “and the law of the Lord” is with them, even though their law is the product of the lying pen of the scribes and the falsehood of the wise (cf. vv 8-9). Here there is reference to a group that possesses the law of the Lord; a group called “wise”, “scribe”, belonging to the high officials. The phrase seems to suggest that they have the written laws in their hands and have reworked them. Even though they think that the law of the Lord is with them, they are fools because what they have is not the word of YHWH. The lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie. Though the context of this remark remains elusive, the existence of written laws during the time of Jeremiah is inferable from this verse. However, we do not know whether *wəṭōraṭ yhw* here is associated to “the book of the Law”.¹³⁹

Though we do not have sufficient information to draw reliable conclusions, it must be granted that the references in Isaiah, Hosea and Jeremiah seem to suggest that some kind of writing activity with regard to laws had taken place or was going on already during their times. There are also a few other instances in the prophetic books where they refer to the Torah of the Lord. In Amos 2,4, in the oracle against Judah, the rejection of the law of the Lord is pointed out. Hosea accuses the people of forgetting the law of the Lord (cf. 4,6) and complains against the transgression of this law (8,1). Israel’s rejection of the law of the Lord is mentioned by Isa 5,24 and 30,9. A perusal of these texts reveals that the prophets understood laws as setting demands on human beings and wherever they use the term, it is to show people ignoring, rejecting, and rebelling against these demands of YHWH. But if the laws existed in a written and a codified form is not evident from the prophetic books themselves.

I would further suggest that it is unnecessary to draw a watertight distinction between the law and the prophets regarding their chronological sequence. Chapman has appropriately pointed out,

Historically the process of *scripture* in Israel began with the preservation of tradition and the commitment of tradition to written form. However, the origin of

¹³⁹ Whether it refers to “the book of the Law” found during the reign of king Josiah (cf. 2 Kgs 22,8ff.), or whether it means that Jeremiah was originally opposed to the reform of Josiah is not clear from the reference.

Israel's *canon* (when defined as a conceptual and literary framework for those scriptures) is to be found in the insight that 'the Law and the Prophets' comprise an indissoluble unity of tradition and faith.¹⁴⁰

He further concludes: "In the Law and the Prophets, Judaism and Christianity have not received 'Law plus commentary' or 'Prophets plus background,' but the fully mature witness of Israel to a dialectic that continues to be constitutive of the reality of God."¹⁴¹

3.2.2. A Socio-Historical Understanding of the Law Codes in the Bible

The prophetic exhortations and the legal codes are, of course, two entirely different literary genres, but as far as the social laws in the Bible are concerned, this distinction should not be overemphasized as the biblical laws too are in fact ethical exhortations "with an appeal to the heart of the people to behave in accordance with the norm depicted",¹⁴² in the words of Gershon Brin. True to this definition, the biblical social laws are not actually precepts and statutes that can be implemented through a court of law. Rather, they are ideals and principles that must guide the life of the people of God. As van Houten points out,

The existence of motive clauses attached to the laws again points to their didactic function. Although they are not so common in the Book of the Covenant as in the laws in the Deuteronomy, it should be noted that all the motive clauses in the Book of the Covenant are attached to the apodictic laws.¹⁴³

This apodictic function is what, in fact, distinguishes the biblical laws from the other legal codes of the ancient Near East.¹⁴⁴

The Covenant Code (Exod 20,22-23,33), the first of the biblical legal codes, has its origin probably at the end of the 8th century BCE, though some parts of it undoubtedly have very old origin – to the early part of monarchy or even prior to it, as Childs has pointed out.¹⁴⁵ The Covenant Code is also called the Book of Covenant, and is regarded as the oldest of the legal corpus in the Bible after Exod 34,11-27.¹⁴⁶ It might have originated in the Canaanite-Mesopotamian and other cultural milieu of the ancient Near East. In its present structure it is put together into an artificial formulation to function as the requirements on the people of God in their life lived in a special relationship with YHWH. The underlying idea of the covenant laws is that "...the divine power guards the organization of man" and that "The Deity will

¹⁴⁰ S.B. Chapman, *The Law and the Prophets: A Study in Old Testament Canon Formation*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 27, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000, p. 151.

¹⁴¹ S.B. Chapman, *The Law and the Prophets*, p. 292.

¹⁴² G. Brin, *Studies in Biblical Law: From the Hebrew Bible to the Dead Sea Scrolls*, JSOTSS 176, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994, p. 82, n 11

¹⁴³ C. van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law*, JSOTSS 107, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991, p. 48.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. C. van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. B.S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary*, OTL, London: SCM Press, 1974, pp. 455-56.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. J. Scharbert, *Exodus*, The New Echter Bibel, Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1989, p. 88.

step in to punish the evildoer.”¹⁴⁷ Dohmen calls therefore the Covenant Code a “*verschriftete Gottesrede*”¹⁴⁸ (a written speech of God). Literally too, the beginning and the end of the Code are delimited by the direct speech of God.

The Covenant Code coming after the Exodus event, the fundamental act of liberation carried out by YHWH on behalf of his people, imbues the spirit of exodus to be practiced in the community.¹⁴⁹ It includes casuistic and apodictic laws. The laws regarding the poor belong to both types. The apodictic laws are found in Exod 20,23-26; 22,21-23,9; and 23,10-19. The laws pertaining to the poor in the Covenant Code precede the Deuteronomic Code because the typical dtr exhortations and phrases do not occur here. The precepts of the Code are not addressed to courts or judges and the offenses are to be redressed by kin. It presupposes an agrarian, non-urban society. Gerstenberger remarks: “The family with its taboos, the legal institutions, the distinction between social classes, age groups, friends and enemies, the established religious practices and social habits are all taken for granted”.¹⁵⁰ But the society presented here is a segmented society, where the tribal solidarity structures had already weakened. The concern of the code is to preserve the given order and to warn the people that any attempt to transgress will be punished by the deity. The earliest guardians of the precepts were probably the elders, fathers, tribal heads, and wise men.

The legislative activity of Israel is continued by the dtr in Deut 12-26 in 7th century BCE with special accent on reform.¹⁵¹ In Deut, we find an urban society instead of an agrarian clan society, even though agriculture was the main source of income.¹⁵² The society that is pictured here shows class distinction, probably representing the situation during the monarchy. The new socio-economic reality is reflected in the laws. Van Houten thinks that these laws address the landowning, rich people and they aim to protect the interests of the poor who were “land-owning Israelites who had become debt-ridden”¹⁵³. She describes Deuteronomy and Leviticus as “reform documents”¹⁵⁴ – adapting to the new historical and

¹⁴⁷ E. Gerstenberger, “Covenant and Commandment”, *JBL* 84 (1965), p. 49.

¹⁴⁸ C. Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, HThKAT, Freiburg / Basel / Wien: Herder, 2004, p. 148.

¹⁴⁹ The individual laws are well structured and connected to each other. The kernel of the Covenant Code is seen between the slave laws (21,2-11) and the regulations regarding Sabbath year and the rest day (23,10-11).

¹⁵⁰ E. Gerstenberger, “Covenant and Commandment”, p. 49.

¹⁵¹ R. Kessler, *Studien zur Sozialgeschichte Israels*, Stuttgarter Biblische Aufsatzbände 46, Stuttgart: Verlag Katholische Bibelwerk, 2009, p.13.

¹⁵² See the frequency of the word ‘*ir* “city” used in Deut: 28x plural; and 29x singular.

¹⁵³ C. van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law*, p. 123. She affirms the claim that the legal collections are tied to stages in history: First stage: to the period of judges, marked by the sole legal responsibility of the patriarch – justice was enacted by clans of people and by the elders. Second stage: to the period of monarchy – influenced by the eighth-century prophets, addressed to the responsible citizens – enacted by a council of elders at the city gate. The first level of Priestly laws is dated to this stage. Cf. p. 164.

¹⁵⁴ C. van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law*, p. 159.

sociological situations. Her claim is similar to that of Joseph Blenkinsopp, in whose view several of the stipulations in Deut 12-26, the legal core of the book, represent an updated and revised form of laws in the Covenant Code.¹⁵⁵

The hallmark of the Deuteronomic Law is that it associates the faith in Yahweh to the task of creating a just society. Its utopian character is apparent in its abolition of poverty – “there may be no poor among you” (15,4). It applies a brake on debt slavery and the conventional practices of a market economy, such as loans, credits, interest, mortgages, and debt management.¹⁵⁶ It goes beyond the Covenant Code in its insistence on the remission of debts in the seventh year and adds appropriate measures to prevent evasion or abuse of this law (cf. 15,1-11) and prohibits usury and abusive debt collection (cf. 23,20-21; 24,6.10-13.17).

The most recent in the developmental history, the Priestly Laws, have their origin in the exilic and early post-exilic times in 6th and 5th century BCE. In the exilic context, without land and king, the identity of being the chosen people of God had to be re-determined. There is no more any distinction between alien, widow and orphan on the one hand, and the poor on the other. The poor in the Priestly Code are all those persons who are economically at risk.¹⁵⁷ This Code has many laws that come from pre-exilic times, but the final redaction must have taken place in post-exilic times. According to van Houten, “The evidence suggests that the final phase of editing and consolidation occurred in the Persian period in response to the policy of the empire to allow people to live according to their own religion and customs.”¹⁵⁸ The provision of the Jubilee Year in this Code is aimed at preventing permanent land alienation (cf. Lev 25,23-24). It is a significant modification of the system of *gə'ullā(h)* or kinship redemption, a system that originally guaranteed the retention of ancestral land within the clan. In Lev 25, the redeemer from the same clan is commanded to restore the land to its original owner, as concern now shifts from the clan to the individual owner.¹⁵⁹ This again reflects the situation in pre-exilic Israel, where the kinship relations were not strong any more.

3.2.3. Concern for the Deprived Sections in the Biblical Law Codes

I shall attempt to demonstrate how the social issues addressed by the book of Amos and other socio-critical prophets are reflected in the above three major law collections of the

¹⁵⁵ Cf. J. Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism*, Oxford: University Press, 1983, p. 94.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. W. Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001, p. 164.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. C. van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law*, p. 123.

¹⁵⁸ C. van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law*, p. 117.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. B.A. Levine, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary, Philadelphia / New York / Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989, cf. p. 168.

Bible. The laws in the Covenantal Code are later interwoven with the priestly laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. They do not follow any pattern of arrangement or of content. The context of origin and application of the laws may also vary, as we saw above. We find the concern for the weaker sections of the community in the special interest the law codes show in protecting the slaves, in regulating lending on interest and pledging things, and in the provisions for the jubilee release. The specific parts that deal with social legislation in these codes are: Exod 21,1-11; 22,20-26; 23,1-9; Lev 25,25-49; Deut 14,27-29; 15,1-18; and 24,7-10.

3.2.3.1. Laws to Protect the Interests of Slaves

Exod 21,1-11 are casuistic laws, which are specially aimed at protecting the interests of slaves. The implicit acceptance of slavery and ascribing lower status to women in these ancient law codes have to be read keeping in mind the historical and cultural limitations of the time. They are not concerned with abolishing slavery but with regulating this institution within the community of Israel while respecting the dignity of each individual.¹⁶⁰ The slaves referred to here are the fellow Israelites, who on account of debts are forced to sell themselves into slavery. Commentators such as Dohmen and Childs have tried to show how each of the precepts is an affirmation of the dignity of the person rather than a provision to control or to assure the power of the master over the slaves:

- i. In v. 2, though the exodus is not mentioned, the spirit of it is invoked in the liberation of slaves at the end of the 7th year. The danger of a slave being in permanent slavery is thus addressed too. The free will of the slave is respected when he is given freedom to continue at the service of the master (cf. v. 5).
- ii. The ritual of piercing the ear (cf. v. 6) has nothing to do with a kind of ancient custom of marking a slave, but it is a sign of the free will of the slave to continue his service. The ritual marks the relationship of affection between the slave and his master¹⁶¹ where the interest of the slave is also taken into account.
- iii. The restriction on the release of a female slave (*'āmā(h)*) is designed more for her protection because she would otherwise be left without resources and rights. Vv. 8-9 shows

¹⁶⁰ The biblical understanding of a slave is different from the Greco-Roman world. The Hebrew word *'ebed* does not mean a slave in the modern sense but more “a servant”, or “a worker” or “a subordinate”. Cf. C. Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, p. 160. Bruckner also points out: “The implied approval of slavery points to the limitations of any culture in manifesting the righteousness of God.” The regulation itself was a big step towards realizing God-given rights and the dignity of his people at this time. J.K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, NIBC 2, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008, p. 199. The laws of the ancient Near East may sound barbaric to modern ears, but they are to be understood in the cultural milieu in which they were formulated. The biblical laws, though are very similar to some of them, have special clauses to protect the rights of slaves as the above laws show.

¹⁶¹ Cf. C. Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, p. 161.

that the buying of a women slave could be with the honorable intention of making her one's spouse or daughter-in-law. In the case of making her a daughter-in-law, one is expected to treat her as one's own daughter. Such a "slave bride" had some fundamental rights and if they were violated, she had the right to be set free.¹⁶² As a concubine of her master, she enjoyed privileges as a member of the larger household.¹⁶³

iv. V. 20 asserts that the murder of a male or female slave is to be avenged. Interestingly though, if the slave suffers a slow death, the death is not to be avenged (cf. v. 21).

v. In the case of what was a usual practice in the ancient Near East, polygamy, the first wife is not only to be provided with her necessities of life, but she has to be assured of equal conjugal and material rights with the second wife. cf. vv. 10-11. The fulfilling of the conjugal rights of the first wife is nowhere mentioned in the other oriental laws. That this right to protection cannot be denied to a woman who was sold on account of a non-payable debt shows how important the dignity of human beings was for the biblical law-makers. The ancient Near Eastern slave laws assured the trias of "food, cloth and anointing oil" to a female slave.¹⁶⁴ The biblical law amends the trias to include "food, clothing and marriage rights". This is a significant development as the marriage rights assured the women the right to have children and the right to family. Dohmen remarks: "The deviation from the widely practiced ancient oriental trias shows clearly that here – as in other Old Testament laws – models from the ancient Orient are used, which are adjusted to their own requirements and conditions in a thoroughly creative and independent way."¹⁶⁵

Dtn laws also have provisions to protect slaves (cf. Deut 15,12-18) and the measures adopted here for the emancipation of slaves go beyond those of the Covenant Code (cf. Deut 15, 12-18; 23,16-17; 24,7). Here a slave who is freed from his debts is not to be let go empty-handed. To a fellow Hebrew the slave owner owes much more and he is obliged to give from his own possessions the resources for the freed slave to begin anew (cf. 15,13-14). He has to be socially rehabilitated and economically reintegrated.¹⁶⁶

The dtn laws make it obligatory for the rich to care for the poor. In the slave laws Deut 15,12-15, it is not the slaves who have to demand their liberation, but it is the master who has

¹⁶² Cf. J.I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3, Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987, p. 322.

¹⁶³ Cf. B.S. Childs, *Exodus*, p. 469.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. C. Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, p. 162.

¹⁶⁵ My translation from "Die Abweichung von der breit belegten altorientalischen Trias zeigt deutlich an, dass hier – wie auch bei anderen alttestamentlichen Rechtsätzen – Vorbilder aus dem alten Orient benutzt wurden, die aber durchaus kreativ und eigenständig an eigene Voraussetzungen und Bedingungen angepasst wurden." C. Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, p. 163.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. G. Braulik, *Deuteronomium 1-16,17*, Die Neue Echter Bibel, Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1986, p. 114.

the duty to free them and to socially integrate and economically rehabilitate them. Men and women slaves are accorded liberty (cf. 15,12). A captive female slave has the right to mourn the death of her husband/father and is to be set free if her captor does not intend to keep her as his wife. Deut 23,16-17 legitimates the escape of a slave and provides him with the right to take refuge and seek protection. The provision is a radical challenge to the conventional economic system that allowed debt slavery, as Brueggemann points out, “The statute commits to the dismantling of slave laws and therefore the disruption of conventional economics. It asserts that the humanity (and therefore freedom) of the slave is a conventional reality that overrides conventional economics.”¹⁶⁷

The Priestly Code of Leviticus is primarily concerned about the holiness of Israel as the People of God and refers to slaves only in the case of the ambiguous position of a betrothed slave caught in fornication (Lev 19,20). Here she is not to be stoned due to the ambiguity of her status.¹⁶⁸ The priestly solution against social injustice, the Jubilee Year, does not allow taking slaves among the Israelites and they – literally “your brother” (*'āhîkā*) cf. Lev 25,39) – have to be treated as hired servants (*śākîr*)¹⁶⁹ and they are to be allowed to return to their household in the Jubilee Year (v. 41). Vv. 44-46, in fact, expressly allow the practice of taking and keeping those slaves who are not Israelites, following the normal ancient Near Eastern custom. It is obvious here that the biblical social program is meant for Israelites as a community, the chosen people of God. However, a concession is made to the resident alien (*gēr*) in vv. 47-55. He could be redeemed by his relative, but only after paying his worth until the Jubilee Year. Alternatively, if the resident alien has become prosperous enough to pay for his redemption, he may redeem himself. If none of the above came to pass, the resident alien was to be set free with his household in the Jubilee Year.

The above program of the Jubilee Year, intended virtually to abolish the institution of slavery in Israel, “may, however, never have been put into practice”¹⁷⁰ in the opinion of Milgrom. The practice of keeping Hebrew slaves seems to have continued until the days of

¹⁶⁷ W. Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, p. 231.

¹⁶⁸ The concern of the law here is the holiness of the man who lies sexually with a slave woman, as he is required to offer a ram as a guilt offering (v. 21). See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, AB 3A, New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 1665-66. Similarly letting a priest's resident hireling (*śākîr*), Israelite or non-Israelite, eat from the portion assigned to the priest (cf. Lev 22,10b) is part of regulations defining the holiness of the priest rather than any social concern for the slave.

¹⁶⁹ Lev 25,40 talks about *śākîr*, i.e., “a day laborer, who returns to his family each evening”, who is not “a resident hireling”, defined by Milgrom as “a long-term employee who lives with his family on the landowner's property”. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, AB 3B, New York / London / Toronto et al: Doubleday, 2001, p. 2221.

¹⁷⁰ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-25*, p. 2214.

Jeremiah as we understand from Jer 34,8ff., and Milgrom could be correct in stating that “The jubilee laws remain utopian; at least there is no hard evidence that they were ever enacted.”¹⁷¹

The Holiness Code’s ethics touch also upon the rights of women. Israel’s early society as presented by Priestly redactor is not all that patriotic: A woman could make a vow to the Lord (Num 30,4; 1 Sam 1,11) and she could be a Nazirite (Num 6,2). The Holiness Code prescribes that an impoverished father shall not make his daughter a harlot (cf. Lev 19,29). According to the Deuteronomic laws, sexual assault against a defenseless engaged woman is punishable by death, while a similar assault on an unmarried woman is to be redeemed by paying a fine and by marrying her, foregoing his right to divorce her for life (cf. Deut 22,25-29). However, I find the biblical law codes, like all the other law codes of the ancient Near East, most inadequate when it comes to protecting the interests of women, though we should evaluate them according to the cultural limitations of the time.

Though the Catholic Church was slow in affirming the dignity and rights of women (see 3.1.3 above), a gradual change of approach in tune with the prophetic vision and the biblical social laws is seen in the 11 September 1947 address of Pope Pius XII which recommended the participation of women in politics and equal payment for the same work without gender discrimination.¹⁷² A definite affirmation of the aspiration of women for their natural rights and dignity is found in the Encyclical *Pacem in terris*:

Women are gaining an increasing awareness of their natural dignity. Far from being content with a purely passive role or allowing themselves to be regarded as a kind of instrument, they are demanding both in domestic and in public life the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons. (No. 41)

This was, in fact, the first instance of a social encyclical recognizing women as the subjects of social activities.¹⁷³

The pastoral constitution of the Second Vatican Council is ground-breaking in this direction and complies fully with the biblical vision as it calls for “working diligently” to ensure without distinction of sex “the right of all to a human and social culture in conformity with the dignity of the human person” (*Gaudium et spes*, No. 60). The biblical point of view is also reflected in the clear-cut statement of Pope John Paul II in his apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*: “The woman cannot become the “object” of “domination” and male “possession”.” (No. 10) This positive outlook towards the interests of women in Church documents shows that the Church is slowly coming to recognise women as possessing human dignity founded on human rights.

¹⁷¹ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-25*, p. 2214.

¹⁷² Cf. M. Heimbach-Steins, “... nicht mehr Mann und Frau”, pp. 27-28.

¹⁷³ Cf. M. Heimbach-Steins, “... nicht mehr Mann und Frau”, p. 31.

3.2.3.2. Lending on Interest and Pledging

Exod 22,20-26 is constructed in apodictic style. These laws originated definitely within the borders of Israel, according to Alt.¹⁷⁴ The ordinances deal with the normal law and order problems in a society and are in particular designed to protect the interests of the weaker sections. The marginal groups mentioned embrace *gēr* “resident aliens”, *'almānā(h)* “widow”, *yātôm* “orphan”, along with *'ānî* “afflicted”. The actions that are prohibited include exploitation of the marginalized sections of society such as oppressing the immigrant, widow and orphan (vv. 20-21), exacting interest by lending money to the poor neighbour (v. 24)¹⁷⁵, and keeping the pledged garment overnight (v. 25).

The prohibition on lending on interest is found in all three biblical law codes. Interest was the means by which the upper classes held the lower ones in complete sway and assured their continued bondage.¹⁷⁶ Lending on interest was allowed only to foreigners¹⁷⁷ and charging interest to an impoverished brother is prohibited also in Deut 23,20-21 and in Lev 25,35-37. The Leviticus text stresses the need to support the brother by not charging him interest or making a profit out of his miserable situation (cf. vv. 36-37). In the words of John F. Hartley, “The issue is that no fellow Israelite is to profit from a brother’s need for financial assistance.”¹⁷⁸

This approach in the biblical social laws contrasts starkly with conventional economics and even with the popular idea of “social business” of Yunus, mentioned above. It is not certain whether the Bible prohibited all loans on interest or not. Probably loans on interest for commercial purposes were allowed. However, the law stipulated that no interest be charged on a loan to the poor (cf. Exod 22,24). Thus the law was specifically oriented to protect the interests of the poor and to promote the common welfare. This prohibition envisions a radically new economic relationship in the covenant community, which is based on mutually co-operative existence, where the neighbors do not treat each other as occasions

¹⁷⁴ Cf. A. Alt, *Die Ursprünge des israelitischen Rechts*, Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1934, p. 60.

¹⁷⁵ Here as well as in the laws with regard to freeing the slaves the beneficiaries are restricted to the Israelites. The social laws are an institutional response formulated with the people of a particular country in mind and therefore, probably, had to be restricted in their destination.

¹⁷⁶ The classical biblical commentator Rashi remarks about the root *nešek* which means “to bite” when literally translated, and in this context used for taking interest: “it resembles the bite of a snake ... inflicting a small wound in a person’s foot which he does not feel at first, but all at once it swells, and distends the whole body up to the top of his head. So it is with interest.” As quoted by B.S. Childs, *Exodus*, p. 479.

¹⁷⁷ Deut 23,21 expressly allows taking interest from a foreigner (*nokri*), i.e., someone who was in the land of Israel for a short period of time. Lending to this category of people on interest was allowed probably because they were likely to have taken a loan mostly for business purposes, and because of their mobility they constituted a high risk, as Sarna points out. Cf. N.M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary, Philadelphia / New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991, p. 139.

¹⁷⁸ J.F. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC 4, Nashville / Dallas / Mexico City / Rio de Janeiro et al, 1992, p. 440.

of profit.¹⁷⁹ This law incorporates the spirit of Amos' critique of selling and buying of the poor using money power (cf. 2,6; 8,6) because charging interest to them amounts to putting them at greater risk of losing their financial independence and becoming chronically bankrupt due to the increasing burden of debts.

The prohibition on interest, which was in force in the Church till the middle of 19th century, includes the spirit of the above legislation. The long-standing practice of this law in the Church shows that it is not an altogether utopian idea. Considering the number of countries that are on the verge of going bankrupt on account of debt burden, and the harm the mounting debt can do to the world's poor in lesser developed countries, it is becoming an imperative to seek alternatives for lending on interest. Some speak these days of a negative interest, i.e., interest levied not on loans but on the money in possession, that is not invested.¹⁸⁰

Modern financial markets, however, run on a system of interest generated by accumulated capital, which is often liable to large-scale manipulations and great risks as the frequent financial crises over the world have shown. They are liable to be manipulated by the corruption and greed of unscrupulous elements. In today's "finance industry", money is considered as a good for the purpose of making profit and the business in money has taken precedence over productive business.¹⁸¹ Here, contrary to the precept of the biblical law, the profit attained as abstract shareholder values¹⁸² replaces the business operating as a medium to enhance the common good of all. The modern business empires built on the sweat of a few and the tears of many stand in direct contrast to the economic system envisioned by the biblical laws.

That the biblical law cannot be considered utopian today is affirmed also by the opinion of Christian Felber, one of the ardent advocates of welfare economics. He proposes banking without interest through his idea of a "Democratic Bank". Instead, the creditor could remit a fee on credit that is sufficient to cover the expenses of the bank and the inflation-indexed loss of the investor. Moreover, there should be no more profit made from the credits for the bank or income for the investors.¹⁸³ He further proposes: "Instead of claims like "let

¹⁷⁹ Cf. W. Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, p. 232.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. M. Vogt, "Das gerechte Geld", *CIG* 7 (2011), p. 77.

¹⁸¹ Cf. M. Vogt, "Das gerechte Geld", p. 77.

¹⁸² Cf. M. Vogt, "Das gerechte Geld", p. 77.

¹⁸³ Cf. C. Felber, *Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie*, p. 55.

your money work for you”, which creates a wall between the investor and the investment, the concept of Democratic Bank encourages the motto “see what happens with your money.”¹⁸⁴

Even though interest on loans was not permitted, security or a pledge (*’ābōt*), i.e. something taken as a surety in return for a loan or a favor, was not prohibited. Nevertheless, some important conditions were laid down to protect the interest of the poor borrower, especially when the basic necessities of life were mortgaged (cf. Exod 22,25-26; Deut 24,10-13). Such provisions were:

i. One is not supposed keep the pledged garment (*šalmā(h)*) overnight (cf. Exod 22,25-26; Deut 24,12-13). The noun *šalmā(h)* stands for a long cloak used for covering the body and for the poor it served also as a blanket during sleep. In some cases it may have been the only possession of a poor person.¹⁸⁵ Exod 22,26 gives the reason for this prohibition: “for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep?”

ii. One is not supposed to enter the house of the borrower while collecting the pledge (cf. Deut 24,10-11). This prohibition was probably aimed at restricting the arbitrary power of the one who lends the money and to protect the privacy and dignity of the poor. Brueggemann explains the meaning of this law: “This law prevents voyeuristic confiscation. Second, the vulnerability of the debtor is even more if the debtor is “poor”. In such a case the creditor might insist on more substantive collateral to secure a risky loan, and take everything the poor person has.”¹⁸⁶

iii. One is not allowed to take something absolutely necessary for the survival of a person, e.g. a mill or an upper millstone, as a pledge (cf. Deut 24,6). Here taking the millstone as collateral could have either deprived the people of the tool to produce their daily bread or robbed the poor, who operated the millstone as their means of livelihood.

Here, once again, this is not so much an ethical evaluation as to whether pledging is right or not, or the social difference between the poor and rich, but how one treats one’s fellow human being. The aspect of solidarity and community is stressed (cf. *rē’ekā* “your neighbour” Exod 22,25; Deut 24,10) and concern for the weaker sections (cf. *’ānī* “afflicted” Deut 24,12) is made a prerequisite for being the people of God. They are united as a community in solidarity with one another and have responsibility for one another. Dohmen

¹⁸⁴ My translation from “Anstatt mit Sprüchen wie „lassen Sie Ihr Geld für sich arbeiten“ eine Nebelwand zwischen SparerInnen und Geldanlage hochzuziehen, ermuntert die Demokratische Bank zu „Schauen Sie hin, was mit Ihrem Geld passiert.” C. Felber, *Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie*, p. 55.

¹⁸⁵ Sarna uses the mention on a seventh century BCE Hebrew inscription from an Israelite fortress excavated near Yavneh-yam, to throw light upon the practice of taking garment as a pledge: “... the complaint of an agricultural labourer that the officer in charge was holding his garment pending satisfaction of a disputed claim that the worker had not fulfilled his obligation”. N.M. Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 139.

¹⁸⁶ W. Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, p. 238.

says: “The dominant theme here is not the social differentiation between poor and rich, but the relatedness in one and the same ethnic community.”¹⁸⁷ The community aspect of society requires that someone is not treated as a creditor in his own community (*'immāḳ*)¹⁸⁸, and therefore, lending of money on interest is prohibited in this community. The solidarity of the people of God requires acting always with common welfare in view and not using the need of another member to enrich oneself.¹⁸⁹

This above exhortation of the biblical law prohibiting the exploitation of a fellow Israelite’s precarious economic situation through lending on interest or by taking the necessities of life as pledges sets the tone for a community life in solidarity. The clarion call to re-focus one’s life and economic activities has greater socio-ethical implications in our day. In the modern society “the feeling of duty to one another” has disappeared and Amitai Etzioni points out: “The social bonds which once ruled all relationships – which considered the practice of taking interest on loans from a community member as usury – is swept away in favour of the free market, which decides prices and interest based on its own logic.”¹⁹⁰

The glorifying of the individual and the egocentric pursuit of success motivated by the greed to earn more and more, though they have led to blooming of business and society, have reached their limits. There is a yearning for community and a communal way of living from many corners today. The sign of this yearning is seen in the formation of associations and organizations which transcend geographical and ethnic borders.¹⁹¹ Such associations can address to a large extent the vacuum created by the loss of traditional community solidarity support and in some cases they function better than the traditional community set-up which was too authoritarian at times.¹⁹² Thus, a return to a life characterized by solidarity in community is the foremost concern of the biblical law on prohibition of interest and exploitation through pledges.

¹⁸⁷ My translation from “Nicht die soziale Differenz von arm und reich ist hier das beherrschende Thema, sondern das Verbundensein in ein und derselben Volksgemeinschaft.” C. Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, pp. 175-76.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. C. Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, p. 175.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. C. Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, p. 176.

¹⁹⁰ My translation from “Die sozialen Bindungen, die einst alle Beziehungen dominierten – von einem anderen Gemeinschaftsmitglied Kreditzinsen zu verlangen, galt als Wucher -, würden zugunsten eines freien Marktes weggefegt, der Preise und Zinssätze nach seiner Logik bestimme.” A. Etzioni, *Die Entdeckung des Gemeinwesens. Das Programm des Kommunitarismus*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1998, p. 138. He observes that social services and social help too make the individual less and less dependent on the family, clan or ethnic bonds.

¹⁹¹ Cf. A. Etzioni, *Die Entdeckung des Gemeinwesens*, p. 143. Such associations are formed among fellow-workers, in university campuses or among people who work in the same field.

¹⁹² Cf. A. Etzioni, *Die Entdeckung des Gemeinwesens*, p. 144.

3.2.3.3. Securing Justice for the Poor before Law

Exod 23,1-9 is a collection of social laws which is aimed at protecting the interests of the weaker sections especially before the institutions designed to impart justice. They include prohibition of fraudulently colluding with one of the parties by being a malicious witness (v. 1), having the courage not to be coerced by the powerful and the majority opinion to give false testimony (cf. v. 2), not being partial even with the intention of favouring the poor (*dal*: v. 3), just treatment of the needy (*'ebyôn*: v. 6) in a lawsuit, not putting to death the innocent and the righteous (*šāddîq*), and resisting bribes (*šōḥad*) to subvert a righteous cause (v. 8). As pointed out by Dohmen, these precepts should not be taken merely as instructions for court procedure although the vocabulary used is legal. They in fact deal basically with the human behavior concerning ethical and moral procedures which can cause a gain for one and at the same time damage for the other.¹⁹³ The guiding principle behind them is the call to “social justice” to every Israelite “to establish a society characterized by justice through his/her just behaviour in various situations in life.”¹⁹⁴

V. 3 and v. 6 read together mean that the poor should not be preferred or disadvantaged and underline the conviction that all are equal before the law. V. 3 implies that one must not be unlawfully partial to the poor. This verse, though it contradicts the common belief that YHWH is partial to the poor, puts into proper perspective the concern for justice while dealing with the less privileged: it was never a call “to show favoritism, but always to practice justice.”¹⁹⁵ Judicial injustice in terms of partiality towards the powerful or the poor is prohibited also in the stipulations of the Holiness Code (cf. Lev 19,15). Exod 23,4-5 underscores the moral duty to show concern even to the enemy and the humanitarian concern to prevent cruel treatment of animals.

Exod 23,6 *lō' taṭṭe(h) mišpaṭ 'ebyōnkā bārîḇô* “you shall not pervert justice to your needy in his judicial dispute” reflects the language and concern of Amos 2,7b *wāḏerek 'ānāwîm yaṭṭû* “and they pervert the way of the afflicted” and Amos 5,12c *wā'eb̄yônîm bašša'ar hiṭṭû* “and perverting the needy at the gate”. A similar interest is also found in Exod 23,8. The Exodus phrase “You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds ...” (23,8) is repeated almost verbatim in Deut 16,19c. These prohibitions echo the alarm raised by Amos in 5,12b against afflicting the just (*šāddîq*) with a bribe and the woe saying with a similar theme in Isa 5,22-23. Deut 16,18-20 reminds the judges and officers entrusted with the dispensation of

¹⁹³ Cf. C. Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, p. 181.

¹⁹⁴ My translation from “soziale[n] Gerechtigkeit, die den Einzelnen in die Pflicht nimmt, durch sein Verhalten in unterschiedlichen Lebenskontexten eine von Gerechtigkeit bestimmte Volksgemeinschaft entstehen zu lassen.” C. Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, p. 182.

¹⁹⁵ J.K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, p. 217.

justice to render just decisions (v. 18), to shun partiality and bribes (v. 19), and to hold fast to justice (v. 20). The biblical law codes thus envision that justice has to be impartial and all have to be treated as equals before the law. They insist that the above values, which were hallmarks of the tribal solidarity social structure, should not be ignored in a centralized system of dispensing justice. The underlying idea is that the court should be transparent and no manipulation of the law shall take place.

The business ethics of the Holiness Code prohibit cheating in commercial transactions (Lev 19,35-36). The Code prohibits manipulation of the measures of length, weight and capacity (cf. v. 35), and exhorts the use of honest scales, weights, ephah and hin (cf. v. 36). The Deuteronomic laws too stipulate measures against dishonest gauges (cf. Deut 25, 13-16). The core of the Deuteronomic laws here is the same as the provisions of the Holiness Code and the rest is only an expansion as Milgrom has shown.¹⁹⁶ He also argues with Knohl that Lev 19 is the priestly answer to Amos, exhorting the observance of Sabbath (cf. Lev 19,3b.30a) and honest business practices.¹⁹⁷

3.2.3.4. Seventh Year Rest and Jubilee Releases

It was a common practice in the ancient Near East, as Norbert Lohfink points out, to force creditors to relinquish periodically their demands so that the poor and the debtors had the possibility of reconstructing their lives as economically and socially free persons.¹⁹⁸ The only difference in Israel in this regard was that unlike in surrounding states where this was a duty of the rulers, in Israel it was a responsibility of the people of God as a whole. In the biblical law codes, in fact, the social laws are primarily concerned about indebtedness as we saw above. Many of these laws were specifically ordained to address the crisis of many persons losing their land and falling into debt slavery. Two of the most innovative solutions proposed to break the shackles of debt were the releases during the Sabbath and the Jubilee Year.¹⁹⁹

The original aim of leaving the land uncultivated in the seventh year uncultivated had nothing to do with economic or social motives, but followed from a sacred custom of not cultivating and harvesting the land in the seventh year,²⁰⁰ so that the land could preserve its

¹⁹⁶ Cf. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, p. 1707.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, p. 1708.

¹⁹⁸ N.F. Lohfink, *Option for the Poor: The Basic Principles of Liberation Theology in the Light of the Bible*, Berkeley Lecture Series 1, N. Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 1987, p. 15.

¹⁹⁹ There were also some other provisions in the laws which addressed this crisis: the tithe of every third year is to be brought together and stored up in their hometowns to feed the Levites, who were not supposed to possess land, and the immigrants, orphans and widows. Thus a provision was made to take care of the landless and the destitute classes. (Cf. Deut 14,27-29; 26,12ff.).

²⁰⁰ Cf. G. Braulik, *Deuteronomium 1-16,17*, p. 111. Cf. also S.M. Sarna, *Exodus*, pp. 143-44.

fertility and enhance production. However, the Biblical law in this regard has two equally important motives:

- i. The original aim, as mentioned above, was the sustainability of agriculture. It meant that the land itself has a right to rest in order to revitalize it. This ancient noble conservationist custom is, no doubt, preserved in the Bible too. According to A.P. and A.H. Hüttermann, the biblical laws, like the one mentioned here, have highly significant ecological consequences. The authors claim that two thousand years ago the Jews already had “*ein unglaubliches biologisches und ökologisches Verständnis der Natur*” (an unbelievable biological and ecological understanding of nature) which Europe could claim only in the 19th or in some cases even the 20th century CE.²⁰¹ They believe that many of the Jewish ecological laws have to do with the tough geographical conditions in Palestine.²⁰² The over-exerted land could be regenerated only with great difficulty and the strict observance of the ecological rules was a question of survival in Palestine.²⁰³ The most “unbelievable” of these ecological rules were, according to them, the rules regarding the Sabbath Year, which was intended for the regeneration of the land and for the recuperation of its fertility.²⁰⁴ This practice could in fact produce more and this wisdom is implied probably in Lev 25,19-22, where an abundance is promised even in the sixth year, which would, in effect, take care of consumption during the Sabbath Year. In this way, the custom was economically advantageous in reality.²⁰⁵
- ii. However, the seventh year of rest and release proclaimed in the biblical law codes (cf. Exod 23,10-12, Deut 15,1-18; Lev 25,1-7) has the added social motive of providing for the maintenance of “the poor of your people” (*'ebyōnē 'ammeḳā*) (cf. Exod 23,11), for the male slaves (*'ebed*), female slaves (*'amā(h)*), hired workers (*śāḳīr*), and immigrants (*gēr*) who lived in Israel (cf. Lev 25,6). Lev 25,2-3 names the seventh year “a Sabbath” for the first time in the

²⁰¹ A.P. Hüttermann / A.H. Hüttermann, *Am Anfang war die Ökologie. Naturverständnis im Alten Testament*, München: Verlag Antje Kunstmann, 2002, p. 12. Though it is possible that the sustainable practices might have increased the productivity of the land and reduced poverty, it is difficult to verify the claim of the authors that in spite of such a hostile terrain, there have been no famines in this region for many centuries now due to any “nachhaltig praktizierte Volkswirtschaft” (sustainable practice of agriculture). Cf. pp. 12-13.

²⁰² Cf. A.P. Hüttermann / A.H. Hüttermann, *Am Anfang war die Ökologie*, p. 12.

²⁰³ Cf. A.P. Hüttermann / A.H. Hüttermann, *Am Anfang war die Ökologie*, p. 59.

²⁰⁴ A.P. Hüttermann / A.H. Hüttermann, *Am Anfang war die Ökologie*, p. 62. The other two significant rules were the prohibition against the planting of crops for many years in succession on the same field (Deut 22,9; Lev 19,19) and not eating the new fruits of a tree during the first three years, till the tree became strong and stable. (cf. pp. 61-62).

²⁰⁵ Furthermore, if the jubilee provisions are implemented and the land is restored to the tenants or the original owners, it can give impetus to their initiatives and production is bound to go up as experiments in South Korea and Taiwan have shown. Milgrom points out that the economic upsurge in these countries preceded the return of ownership of the land to the farmers. Cf. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-25*, p. 2271.

biblical codes. The Exodus statute, unlike the Leviticus, emphasizes the humanitarian consideration for the underprivileged and unfortunates which lies behind the observance.²⁰⁶

It is remarkable that the biblical law-makers use ancient ecological law to protect the interests of the poor. In doing so, though the ecological concern is not mentioned in the biblical laws, the ecological and sociological wellbeing are taken care of. This is a lesson that political and economic decision makers of our day have to learn from the Bible. There is no doubt that we need to take decisive steps to preserve the environment in the face of global warming and the damage caused to the ozone layer. There is an urgent need to depend more and more on renewable energy. At the same time it should not be done at the cost of the poor and their aspirations for a meaningful existence. Cutting down the rain forests and giving incentives to produce for cash to procure raw materials for renewable energy will only worsen the ecological crisis and the condition of the hungry millions around the world. Instead, the biblical laws suggest applying a brake to the consumerist life style of the world's "super-rich", literally taking a Sabbatical from profit-making periodically, in order to solve both the environmental crisis and the socio-economic problem of poverty.

The Deuteronomic Code declares every seventh year as the year of release (cf. Deut 15,1-6) and thereby demands the periodic release from debts. According to this regulation, every lender who has lent to his fellow Israelite was to "drop" (*šmṭ*) the debt at the end of the seventh year. It is called "the remission of the Lord" (*šəmittā(h) layhwh*) (cf. v. 2). It is not certain whether a permanent remission of the debt or a temporary relaxation during the year of rest was intended. The former is likely to be the case because here in v. 1 and in 31,10 the phrase "at the end of the seventh year" (*miqqēš šba'-šānīm*) is used. This was intended to be an effective control against debt slavery as we see its implications particularly for the practice of slavery in 15,12-18. The credits are considered restituted as Braulik comments: "The credit is not at all collected. It is considered as not just deferred, but as paid off."²⁰⁷

However, we do not know to what extent this ideal was practiced in Israel.²⁰⁸ The ultimate goal of the debt release was the total eradication of poverty (cf. vv. 4-6). Deuteronomy foresees the possibility of manipulating this provision and invokes the brotherly

²⁰⁶ Cf. N.M. Sarna, *Exodus*, pp. 143-44. However, there are only a few texts in the Bible, even these originating from the Second Temple Period, which indicate that a Land Sabbatical was observed (cf. Neh 10,32; 1 Macc 6,49-54).

²⁰⁷ My translation from "Der Kredit wird überhaupt nicht eingetrieben. Er gilt auch nicht bloß gestundet, sondern als getilgt." G. Braulik, *Deuteronomium 1-16,17*, p. 111.

²⁰⁸ The idea conveyed in the text of Lev 25 is that the Jubilee irrevocably cancelled the debts, but it could not be logical that the unequal distribution of property among the pre-exilic Israelites could be restored in any just way. The textual evidence for its implementation in the pre-exilic period is absent. Cf. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, p. 2243.

solidarity of Israelites, as indicated by the terms *rē'a* “neighbour” and *'āh* “brother” as recipients of the remission of debts (cf. vv. 2.3.7.11). They are called to abide by their obligation to help those in need (*'ebyôn*; cf. Deut 15,7-8) and warned not to pervert the will of YHWH by withholding a loan to the needy because the year of remission is near (cf. v. 9).

Added to these, the laws of gleaning in the Deuteronomic laws (24,19-22) were not oriented to charity to the deprived sections but at “establishing a support system, which would ensure that vulnerable, landless members of society would not be poor.”²⁰⁹ These sections, named here as alien, orphan and widow, are given the right “to their own grain, olive and grape harvest.”²¹⁰ The reason for the remission is not only charity, but the dignity of each human person as a steward of creation. This fact is underlined also in *Tertio millenio adveniente*, the apostolic letter published by Pope John Paul II in preparation of the Jubilee Year 2000:

If in his Providence God had given the earth to humanity, that meant that he had given it to everyone. Therefore *the riches of Creation were to be considered as a common good of the whole of humanity*. Those who possessed these goods as personal property were really only stewards, ministers charged with working in the name of God, who remains the sole owner in the full sense, since it is God’s will that created goods should serve everyone in a just way. *The jubilee year was meant to restore this social justice*. (No. 13).

The seventh year release receives a new dimension in the declaration of a Jubilee Year every fifty years (cf. Lev 25,8-55), i.e. at the end of every seven Sabbatical years. The Jubilee Year affirms the release of slaves and prisoners, return to one’s possessions (vv. 10.13) and rest for the land (v. 11) as also envisaged by the Sabbath Year. The provisions of Jubilee lay down principles for debt release and make the privilege of being redeemed (*g'l*) a right for the Israelites (cf. vv. 25-59). All those persons and properties that were not redeemed by a relative or by their own earnings were liable to be set free in the Jubilee Year (vv. 28.31.33.40-41.54). In Leviticus too, one of the characteristics of the system of redemption is its strictly family character.²¹¹ The redeemer is always a “brother”, and redemption means returning to the clan and not just regaining the lost property as Kessler also has pointed out.²¹² *Tertio millenio adveniente* captures this spirit of the Jubilee Year as ““*emancipation*” of all the dwellers on the land in need of being freed” (No. 12), which meant “to restore equality

²⁰⁹ C. van Houton, *The Alien in Israelite Law*, p. 123.

²¹⁰ C. van Houton, *The Alien in Israelite Law*, p. 98.

²¹¹ Kessler comments regarding this feature: “Sie beruht wesensmäßig auf den Verwandtschaftsbeziehungen innerhalb einer Sippe. Denn der Löser ist *per definitionem* immer ein Verwandter, nie eine beliebige Person, die etwa – aus welchen Gründen auch immer – einen Sklaven freikaufen würde. In 1 Kön 16.11 heißt das hebräische Wort *go'el* geradezu „Blutverwandter“ und wird von den „Freunden“ als Nicht-Verwandten unterschieden.” R. Kessler, *Studien zur Sozialgeschichte Israels*, p.78.

²¹² Cf. R. Kessler, *Studien zur Sozialgeschichte Israels*, p. 82.

among all the children of Israel, offering new possibilities to families which had lost their property and even their personal freedom.” (No. 13). The Jubilee as a renewing of the relationships in the family, restoring to each one his original dignity, has wider implications for the international community, which is becoming increasingly globalized.

Unlike the official remission at enthronement, the release prescribed in the Jubilee Year “was immutable and periodic”²¹³. The fifty years gave pragmatic benefit to the creditor, if the loan was not credited just before the Jubilee Year. The principle behind redemption was that the ancestral lands should never be alienated from the family/kin. As attested in Jer 32, the redeemer retains the land till Jubilee to compensate for his costs. Jubilee devised a system by which the status quo ante could be restored and the accumulation of land by avaricious creditors could be prevented. This arrangement lies behind what Levine calls “the theory of land tenure” in Israel according to which

the God of Israel to whom all land ultimately belongs, has granted the Land of Israel to His people, Israel, as an everlasting *’ahuzzah*, “holding”. In so doing, he has imposed on them certain conditions of tenure. Foremost among these is the denial of the right to alienate land through its permanent conveyance to a purchaser.²¹⁴

Jesus’ ministry adds another dimension to the Jubilee. In his proclamation of “good news to the poor” (εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς,) and “the favorable year of the Lord” (ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν) in Lk 4,18-19.21, it is not a chronological time that is mentioned but his activity in the world among the poor, captives, blind, and oppressed being anointed by the Spirit of the Lord (cf. v. 18). His disciples understood preaching the good news as their own mission (cf. Mk 16,20). *Tertio millenio adveniente* spells out its implications for the Church today: “From this point of view, if we recall that Jesus came to “preach the good news to the poor” (*Mt 11:5; Lk 7:22*), how can we fail to lay greater emphasis on the *Church’s preferential option for the poor and the outcast?*” (No. 51). The apostolic letter notes the conflicts and glaring inequalities existing in the present world and recommends remission of international debt as a prerequisite for the creation of a secure world:

Thus, in the spirit of the Book of Leviticus (25:8-12), Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world, proposing the Jubilee as an appropriate time to give thought, among other things, to reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations. (No. 51)

²¹³ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, p. 1407.

²¹⁴ Cf. B.A. Levine, *Leviticus*, p. 270.

3.3. Theological Frameworks: Justice as Affirmation of God-Willed Dignity

It is often taken for granted that every person has a right to justice irrespective of his/her geographical, economic and social background, and that others should respect this right. But “what is the source of one’s rights?” or “why should one act in a just way?”— these questions have been the objects of human inquisitiveness from time immemorial. Amos finds the source of this right in the actions of God, which have created a precedent of securing basic rights to people in history. This conviction is evident in the theological framework of his socio-critical oracles through which he presents his condemnation of injustice.²¹⁵

From an external perspective, the Israel oracle and other socio-critical sayings in the book of Amos are presented as the words of YHWH, thus projecting him as their source. Internally too, the content of accusations are intimately associated with the fact that YHWH is a just God, who liberated Israel from slavery in Egypt, and that it is his will that every one of his people remain free. He is the provider of security in terms of land and prosperity, and it is in his interest that everyone has a right to the produce of the land and to a decent human existence. He would not be a mute spectator, when some sections of his people are denied a dignified life.

When we come to the biblical social laws too, the above theological framework can be observed. Israel is asked to be sensitive to the socially vulnerable because it is the divine imperative, the will of YHWH. Violation of the social norms is a violation of his will. Like the social critique of the prophets, the social laws of the Bible too are presented as the word of YHWH. Van Houton rightly remarks that what motivates Israel to obey the laws in Leviticus is “because the law derives from the Lord, their God”.²¹⁶ The laws are presented with a theological framework which is meant to motivate Israel and to ensure its adherence to their precepts. First of all, the Israelites are obliged to show concern to the weaker sections of the community because they themselves had experienced vulnerability in Egypt and they know from their own experience what it means to be oppressed and deprived. Secondly, the invitation to imitate YHWH the liberator is integral to being the chosen people of God. And thirdly, the future security of Israel is determined by the will of YHWH, who has power to shape and reshape their fortunes, depending on whether they abide by the demands of his law.

However it does not mean that, as far as the prophetic social critique and the social laws of the Bible are concerned, just conduct in the society is seen as merely fulfilling the command of a sovereign who orders a particular mode of conduct and then waits to punish

²¹⁵ For the detailed analysis of the frameworks see 1.2.3-4; 1.3.3-4; 1.4.3-4; 1.5.3-4 and 1.6.2-3 above.

²¹⁶ In motivation clauses attached to the Priestly laws, the phrase “I am the Lord” is repeated many times (16x in Lev 19 alone). Cf. C. van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law*, p. 124.

any aberrations. The God of the prophets is personally concerned about the practice of justice in the community, because he has willed and demonstrated in history that human beings and creation have a dignity which should not be violated under any circumstances. It has to be the hallmark of his community to be concerned about its vulnerable members without looking for personal advantage. If we use modern concepts, we could say that Amos recognized the human rights foundation of human dignity. This recognition, for him, is inspired by the realization that for his God these rights are extremely important. It was his conviction in faith that what the situation demanded ethically was also the demand of YHWH. His critique shows how faith convictions work as a motivating factor for just treatment.

The founding of human rights and just conduct in the society on the will of a sovereign God is characteristic to all the Semitic religions. The relationship between power and salvation representing politics and religion in the light of the political theology in ancient Egypt and Israel has been recently studied by Jan Assmann. He makes the following proposals, which are important to understand the historical and sociological background of the theological foundation of the prophetic social critique and the biblical social laws. Assmann notices the following developments:

- i. A stand against the monarchy marks the prophetic critique and later the political theology of dtn and dtr school during the emergence and reign of a monarchical state in Israel.²¹⁷
- ii. The legitimacy of political power lies in the fact that it is the earthly manifestation of God's power. God was the king in effect and the earthly king was supposed to be a representative figure. The Israelite theocracy meant that "*das Königtum Jahwes duldet keinen irdischen König neben sich*"²¹⁸ (the kingship of YHWH would not tolerate an earthly king beside him).
- iii. Unlike in Egypt, where the king represented god's rule over the people, in Israel the king was the representative of the people, who were also chosen by God, just like the king. Thus in Israel not only God, but also the people fulfilled the role fulfilled by Pharaoh in Egypt.²¹⁹

The decisive factor in the change of approach to the king in Israel, according to Assmann, could have been the negative experiences of oppression and exploitation under the monarchy.²²⁰ The moral of the fable of Jotham in the book of Judges points to this negative approach to the monarchy. The fable compares the Israelite monarchy to the kingship of trees, where all the useful trees reject the kingship, while bramble accepts it gleefully (cf. Judg 9), even though it is unworthy and incapable of carrying out the responsibilities associated with

²¹⁷ Cf. J. Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil. Politische Theologie in Altägypten, Israel und Europa*, München / Wien: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2000, p. 47.

²¹⁸ J. Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil*, p. 48.

²¹⁹ Cf. J. Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil*, pp. 48-49.

²²⁰ Cf. J. Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil*, p. 50

it. The certain failure of the experiment with monarchy and the rejection of it by all competent persons are indicated by this fable. It shows that the negative historical experience with the monarchy led to the conviction in Israel that religion cannot be represented in the king and in the political order, but becomes a separate order often critical of and against the political order.

This trend is evident in the dtn and in the dtr schools, especially with regard to the idea of the covenant between God and people. The eighth century prophets do not speak about a covenant, but they express the relationship between God and people through the metaphor of a love-relationship, especially that of a marriage.²²¹ It is in the light of this background that we have to understand the theological foundation of the prophetic social critique and the biblical social laws.

The dtr write some four centuries after the emergence of monarchy in Israel and have the failure of this experiment as the basis of their conviction that YHWH is the only one capable of ruling over Israel, in contrast to the oppressive and exploitative rule of man over man (cf. 1 Sam 8,11-18; 12,12).²²² In their vision, the monarchy in Israel has to function within the framework of the covenant and follow YHWH without fail (cf. 1 Sam 12,14). Based on this theological background, Edward Schillebeeckx argues that the reign of God in the dtr theology is meant for “the liberation of human beings and that it is not an oppressive theocracy.”²²³ It meant for Israel “the overthrow of all alienating reigns, rejection of the reign of one man over others, and liberation from all self-imposed bondage.”²²⁴ Such an understanding of the reign of God has nothing to do with what Schillebeeckx calls “an abused concept of God’s sovereignty, but rather it refers to the offer of salvation, which is revealed in solidarity with the weakness of human beings and strives to uplift the downtrodden.”²²⁵ This historical and theological background has to be kept in mind as we analyze the theological foundation of just conduct in the prophetic social critique and the biblical social laws.

²²¹ Cf. J. Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil*, p. 50

²²² Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Menschen. Die Geschichte von Gott*, Freiburg / Basel / Wien: Herder, 1990, p. 183.

²²³ My translation from “Befreiung des Menschen, keine menschenunterdrückende Theokratie.” E. Schillebeeckx, *Menschen. Die Geschichte von Gott*, p. 184. He says that the duty to serve JHWH means the freedom from all the other suppressive forces as one can serve only one lord.

²²⁴ My translation from “Aufhebung jeder entfremdenden Herrschaft, die Absage an alles Herrschen von Menschen über Menschen und an selbstaufgelegte Bindungen.” E. Schillebeeckx, *Menschen. Die Geschichte von Gott*, p. 184.

²²⁵ My translation from “eines ebensosehr missbrauchten Begriffs von Gottes Allmacht, sondern zugunsten des Heilsangebots Gottes, das sich solidarisch zeigt mit menschlicher Ohnmacht und die Erniedrigten aufrichten will.” E. Schillebeeckx, *Menschen. Die Geschichte von Gott*, p. 184.

3.3.1. Involvement of YHWH through the Signs of the Times

The personal involvement of YHWH in the call for justice on behalf of the weaker sections in society is indicated by the following structural and thematic aspects of the socio-critical sayings of Amos. These themes are developed in the textual analysis in chapter 1 and do not require further textual explanations.

- i. The prophetic messenger formulas (2,6; 5,16)²²⁶ and the concluding formulas (2,16; 4,3; 5,17) project the accusations and condemnations as the word of YHWH.
- ii. YHWH's will to call Israel to account is firm and he will not change his decision. The prophet seems to be certain about the future course of actions on the part of YHWH. This is indicated by the assertion of irrevocability in the opening formula of the Israel oracle: "for the three transgressions of Israel and for the four I will not reverse it" (2,6a). The numerical sequence connects the non-deferrable decision of YHWH to the ethical conduct of Israelites.
- iii. The recollection of the role played by YHWH in conquering the land (2,9).
- iv. The reminder of the liberation effected by the Lord (2,10), who passed through their midst (*'ābar bā*), saving them from the Egyptians – will do it again to punish them (5,17a).
- v. The recollection of the role of YHWH in raising up prophets and Nazirites (2,11)
- vi. The swearing formulas indicating YHWH's own personal intervention, fulfilled promise of land, and the Pride of Jacob (4,2a; 6,8a; 8,7a).
- vii. The fact that the Lord is aware of their transgressions (5,12a).
- viii. The theme of false security without trusting in YHWH, and its futility (6,1-3).
- ix. The recollection of YHWH's hatred for the "pride of Jacob" (6,8b).
- x. The word *hās* "hush" indicates the presence of God in punishment (6,10).
- xi. Insisting on YHWH's hand in raising up a nation to punish Israel (6,14).
- xii. The reminder that YHWH does not forget their works (8,7a).

The prophets have something to say because God has spoken. They themselves do not have a claim over the people, but God who is active in their history does have a claim over their life and actions. This claim is seen in Amos' conviction that YHWH has irrevocably decided to intervene in the life of Israel, as seen in the formula of irrevocability in the Israel oracle and his personal involvement in the present history of Israel. God is, as Waldenfels puts it, a "*Handelnd-Sprechender*"²²⁷ (someone who speaks through his actions). In Amos, we can say, he is someone who "passes through", "raises up prophets and Nazirites", "swears", "knows", "remembers", "is present", "reminds" and "does not forget" as we saw above. The

²²⁶ Other than in the social critical oracles and sayings, the messenger formula is used in predicting the punishment of Israel in 3,11.12; 5,3; 7,11.17.

²²⁷ H. Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, p. 26.

special characteristic of the God of the prophets is his nearness to the people and his active role in protecting the weak against injustice and oppression. The presentation of God as someone who is deeply involved in human history has socio-ethical consequences. Faith is to be understood and lived in connection with the concrete realities of life and God becomes an inspiration to live it free of bondage and oppressive forces, both external and internal.

In Jan Assmann's political theology, from the replacement of the king by God as the source of authority, it follows that now God be identified as the all powerful law-giver through a process of theologizing.²²⁸ This process is evident in the theological foundation of the prophetic critique and social laws, which is an affirmation of the continued task of God in carrying forward the liberating role he played in the past into the present, as we shall see below.

Living in an unjust society, the prophets were convinced that the will of God has to be read in the signs of the times,²²⁹ in the intervention of YHWH on behalf of the oppressed and in the light of the saving actions of God which continue to take place in the history. Even in the apparently negative experiences such as exile and natural catastrophe, they were able to read the actions of YHWH in favour of the weaker sections. Here the prophets do not view these terrible events as signs of God's presence, but rather, they see the hand of God working through historical events and punishing injustice.

By insisting on the will and ability of YHWH to take corrective measures against injustice, the prophets and the biblical social laws show that YHWH's will is manifested in condemning and countering unjust practices in the community. It is an invitation to his community to avoid the structural causes of poverty, suffering and oppression.²³⁰ The prophets emphasize here the interconnection between faith and ethical actions as constitutive and condemn the disassociation of them as a contradiction to the will of God.²³¹ The biblical social laws see the will of God as a foundation for the dignified treatment of persons in the community. While the stipulations of the laws are similar to other ancient near-eastern laws, the motivational clauses set the biblical laws apart from them. The motivational clauses make recognition of the worth of the other person, which is innate to him/her because he/she is liberated by YHWH, the foundation of the laws. They make it clear that the motive behind observing a law is not a mere desire to be free, seeking of mutual advantage or an obligation

²²⁸ Cf. J. Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil*, p. 52.

²²⁹ See 3.1.1 above for association of this concept with the idea of justice in Amos.

²³⁰ Cf. J. Ostheimer, *Zeichen der Zeit lesen*, p. 169. Though Amos does not mention structural injustices in his critique, the background of the social crisis addressed by Amos, as we saw in the second chapter, might have been caused by the emergence of the monarchy.

²³¹ Cf. K. Hilpert, "Die Rolle der Theologie", p. 224.

to act in a particular mode, but rather the faith conviction that a person is liberated by YHWH and is meant to remain free.

Both the prophets and the biblical laws understand the concept of the will of God on account of his revelation in Israel's history through his saving deeds. In the light of these saving interventions of God they were able to draw out the implications of the saving will of God for the people, especially the weak and oppressed in their own days. Thus it could be said that they interpreted the revelation and discerned the will of God according to the signs of the times. The plight of the poor and exploited becomes the concern of YHWH himself and their liberation becomes the task of YHWH, to which the prophets by their vocation of being spokespersons of YHWH feel themselves committed. This is an invitation to the Church to be "kairologically sensitive"²³² and to discern the will of God always in the light of the treasure of experiences which it has in living out the word of God in the world.

Gaudium et spes recommends understanding the will of God in association with the changed or changing situations in the world (cf. No. 4 and 11). The analysis of the signs of the times helps us to connect the will of God to the present as influencing relationships with other human beings and nature. The conviction that the experience of God is possible through fellow human beings and that human history is the place where the saving activities of God take place opens up new possibilities to encounter God.²³³ The theological conviction of the prophets that God is active in history and has a will in favour of the dignified treatment of the poor and oppressed, and that this will is manifested through the liberating practices in the community, can become the foundation of a vibrant living of faith in the Church.

The changed understanding in the Church that the idea of natural rights alone cannot give practical solutions for most of today's problems and the recognition of the freedom and autonomy of human conscience require Christian social ethics to give a practical orientation to Christians for being and acting in the world while responding adequately to the signs of the times. Markus Vogt has pointed out that these signs of the times in its hermeneutical understanding are "not just the social realities as such but the *kairos* of God or the designs of God which manifests through them."²³⁴ Reading the signs of the times would mean recognizing the action of God in the aspirations and initiatives to create hope and to take up responsibility for the poor, for the environment and for future generations.

²³² Cf. M. Vogt, *Prinzip Nachhaltigkeit. Ein Entwurf aus theologisch-ethischer Perspektive*, München: Oekom Verlag, 2009, p. 40.

²³³ Cf. J. Ostheimer, *Zeichen der Zeit lesen*, p. 25.

²³⁴ My translation from "... nicht die soziale Wirklichkeit als solche, sondern der sich in ihnen manifestierende, von Gott her gegebene *kairos*." M. Vogt, *Prinzip Nachhaltigkeit*, p. 41.

3.3.2. Recollecting the Past to Live in the Present

Israel's own theology of concern for the weak is based on the recollection of the fundamental experience of the exodus, the oldest expression of which is found in Num 20,15-16:

how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we lived in Egypt a long time. And the Egyptians dealt harshly with us and our fathers. And when we cried to YHWH, he heard our voice and sent an angel and brought us out of Egypt. And here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your territory.

A more developed version of it is found in Deut 26,5-10. As Norbert Lohfink has already remarked, this credo refers back to the themes of poverty, affliction and liberation.²³⁵ It is no surprise that the prophets and the legal codes base the social obligations of Israelites on this fundamental experience. The programme of the book of Deuteronomy "that there shall be no needy among you" (Deut 15,4) springs up from this understanding and from the conviction that YHWH continues to bless his people by intervening on behalf of the oppressed.

Remembering is a cognitive and emotional act in the Hebrew language tradition. The heart is considered to be the dwelling place of memory. It is also the seat of understanding, feeling, will, conscience and intellect.²³⁶ Remembering the past is thus an emotional act for the prophets and for the biblical social laws. They do not recall the exodus event as an example of God's might and power and to remind them of his claim over the people of Israel, but in order to tune the emotional chords in their hearts and to make them realize their duty towards the weaker sections in their community.²³⁷ They want to show how ungrateful and hurtful the actions of the people are to their God. Amos draws a contrast between the behaviour of their God in history and the people's own ingratitude in the Israel oracle. God has been benevolent to the weak Israel in defeating its supremely powerful neighbors as Israel entered the Promised Land. Looking further back in history, Israel cannot forget the fact that it was YHWH who brought Israel out from slavery in the Land of Egypt and guided them through the desert for forty years. The remembrance of these mighty and benevolent actions

²³⁵ Cf. N.F. Lohfink, *Option for the Poor*, p. 29.

²³⁶ Cf. V. Lenzen, "„Die Zukunft hat ein altes Herz.“ (Walter Benjamin). Festvortrag zum Symposium „Erinnerung als Herkunft der Zukunft“, in her (ed.), *Erinnerung als Herkunft der Zukunft*, Bern / Berlin / Bruxelles et al: Peter Lang, 2008, p. 18. Lenzen points out that the imperative form *zechor* occurs 46x in the Hebrew Bible and remarks that where it appears it demands not just a contemplative reflection, but actions and conversion. (P. 15)

²³⁷ Avishai Margalit too contends that memory of past emotions can become a binding force in an ethical community. He says, "But an important part of what holds an ethical community based on thick relations together is the memory of past emotions, of great solidarity in trying times and perhaps enmity toward a common enemy." A. Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, Cambridge / Massachusetts / London: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 144.

should have helped Israel to be more concerned about the weaker sections in their own society.

The foundation of the expected ethical behaviour in Israel is not just dry obedience to a law prescribed by a sovereign, but imitation of the love and benevolent actions of a gracious God who cares for everyone, especially the weaker sections of the society. However Amos finds that his contemporaries have failed miserably to remember this God and have shown utter disregard for his will. He has taken upon himself the task of condemning the ingratitude of Israel and warning of the consequences. John A. Dearman points out:

Amos' critique may reflect his acceptance of the (popular) tradition that YHWH granted the land to the nation, but also that he rejected the social structure and many economic practices in eighth century Israel. If this is correct, then his demands for socio-economic rectitude are rooted in a demand that YHWH's gift of land and home be morally honored by the recipients.²³⁸

In Isa 10,1-4 also the affliction (*'āwen*) and suffering or the oppression (*'āmāl*) of the just is something which YHWH takes to his heart, and he makes himself ready to intervene directly on behalf of the affected (cf. also Deut 26,7; Judg 10,16; Ps 10,14; Isa 53,11).²³⁹ The condemnation of false weights and scales in Micah begins with a question of YHWH, "can I forget?" As in Amos 8,7, here too the fact that YHWH does not forget the deeds of his people and will visit the consequences upon them is underlined in this reminder.

The reason why Israel should not oppress a resident alien in Exod 23,9 is the fact that she herself was a resident alien in Egypt. The prohibition of mistreating the sojourners in Exod 22,20 is theologically founded with near similar phrasing of the above prohibition and motivation. The word used for oppression here is *lāḥaṣ*, the same verb as used in Exod 3,9 to refer to oppression of the Israelites in Egypt (similarly also in Deut 26,7; Judg 6,9; and Isa 19,20). The word *lāḥaṣ* is the normal word used in the Bible to designate oppression by a nation (cf. Judg 1,34; 2,18; 4,3; 10,12; 2 Kgs 13,4 et al). Amos has prophesied the same punishment on Israel, that YHWH will raise up a nation to oppress (*lāḥaṣ*) them for their iniquities (cf. Amos 6,14; similarly also Ps 106,40-42).

Deut 5,15 says in a motivation clause that Israel is obliged to observe the Sabbath because she herself was a slave in Egypt. In 16,12 the above remembrance is to prompt Israel to faithfully observe the statutes. It is again proposed as the driving force behind the social legislation for the protection of aliens, orphans and widows (cf. 24,18.22). The slavery in Egypt and the redemption by YHWH are referred to again in the motivating clause for

²³⁸ J.A. Dearman, *Prophecy, Property and Politics in the Eighth-Century Prophets: The Conflict and its Background*, SBLDS 106 Atlanta / Georgia: Scholar Press, 1988. p. 76

²³⁹ Cf. W.A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja 1-12*, p. 268.

upholding the law concerning honest measures in Lev 19,36 and for redeeming Israelites who have fallen into debt slavery in 25,42. The underlying idea here is to make the historical recollection a motivating factor for social and humanitarian conduct in Israel.²⁴⁰ As Brueggemann puts it, “The neighbor – especially the neighbor in need – lives in a world governed not by the ruthless “iron law” of the market or by the unencumbered autonomy of the powerful, but by the same God who curbed Pharaoh.”²⁴¹

The allusion to Exodus events gives a dramatic emphasis to YHWH’s imploring Israel to observe the laws (cf. Exod 22,22-23). In the reference to *šā’aq* “to cry out” (cf. v. 22), which is often used in the context of oppression in Egypt (cf. Exod 3,7.9; 5,8.15; 8,8; 14,10.15 et al), the decisive intervention of YHWH on behalf of Israel in Egypt is recollected and his continued role as a liberator in the present is affirmed. The prohibition on lending on interest follows this affirmation and is stated as following on from the invitation to imitate the liberating role of YHWH. Bruckner rightly comments: “Nowhere else in the book of the covenant does God speak about any law so personally and passionately.”²⁴²

In Exod 22,25-26, the prohibition on keeping the pledged garment overnight is, in fact, an invitation to imitate YHWH, who is seen as the protector of the oppressed, and who hears the cry of those in distress and shows compassion (cf. v. 26). God’s own compassion is suggested as model for action in favour of the weak here. The same law flows from the obligation “to be righteous” before YHWH in its Deuteronomic promulgation (cf. Deut 24,10-13).

Lev 25 is presented as part of the theophany on Mount Sinai (cf. v. 1) and forms an *inclusio* with “I am YHWH your God” in Exod 20,2. This declaration reminds Israel of the liberation from Egypt and their duty to their fellow brethren who are in need, or fallen into slavery. Here again, the guiding force behind the principle of redemption is the imitation of YHWH, who redeemed Israel whenever she was enslaved. The nearest relative is supposed to redeem the debtor. If he does not, then God intervenes through the Jubilee Year.

The remembering of the Exodus creates a “*Wir-Identität*” (we-identity) which binds individuals and remembering community together.²⁴³ Remembering here is understood as a process through which history is remembered and made innate as “*identitätsstiftendes und traditionsbildendes Element*”²⁴⁴ (an identity-creating and tradition-building element). Lenzen links the words “re-remembering” and “re-collecting” to the aspect of solidarity while

²⁴⁰ Cf. C. Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, p. 175.

²⁴¹ W. Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 240-41.

²⁴² J.K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, p. 213.

²⁴³ Cf. V. Lenzen, “„Die Zukunft hat ein altes Herz.“”, p. 17.

²⁴⁴ V. Lenzen, “„Die Zukunft hat ein altes Herz.“”, p. 13.

philologically both words contain the idea of re-establishing lost togetherness.²⁴⁵ For Amos and for the biblical social legislation, memory works as a motivation to build up and maintain proper relationships by maintaining justice and righteousness (see 3.1.1 above). As we saw in the second chapter, this prophetic message may have the background of weakening tribal solidarity structures and creeping in of exploitative relationships. Amos made use of historical recollection to re-establish the values of a solidarity community such as care and concern.

This kind of memory is important for ethics too. Margalit says, “Memory is the cement that holds thick relations together, and communities of memory are the obvious habitat for thick relations and thus for ethics.”²⁴⁶ He describes ethics as “the enterprise that tells us how we should conduct our thick relations.”²⁴⁷ He highlights the triangular relationship that exists between memory, caring and ethics.²⁴⁸ As far as recollecting exodus is concerned, it worked as a channel to recollect past emotions, especially by recollecting past servitude and humiliation under the Egyptians. Amos’s call for just conduct is an example to show how past emotions can be used to inspire just and caring actions in the present.

Memory becomes here “*knowledge from the past*”, rather than “*knowledge about the past*”.²⁴⁹ For Amos too, to know the actions of God in the history meant allowing this knowledge to influence the decisions and relationships of his own day. Shared memories and shared past can help in forming a community, as evident from his critique. The recalling of the past is not a static memory that binds one to the past, but conversely, the prophets recollect the events as “*Zeichen und Wunder*”²⁵⁰ (signs and wonders) and give them a new meaning in the reality of their own day. They become a paradigm for actions in the present.²⁵¹ As Waldenfels puts it: “The Jews remember their past in order to live in the present and to hope for a future.”²⁵² Through what Michael Walzer calls, “a system of backward-and-forward-looking interconnections”,²⁵³ the historical event influences the present and

²⁴⁵ Cf. V. Lenzen, “„Die Zukunft hat ein altes Herz.“”, p. 14. Lenzen describes the significance of historical memory: “Aber das Gedenken an die Geschichte ist mehr als ein nur persönlicher, innerlich einsamer Akt, der sich verschlossen in einem stillen Kämmerlein abspielt. Gedenken hat eine geschichtliche, öffentliche, gesellschaftliche und politische Dimension. Das Gedenken besitzt identitätsbildende und traditionsbildende Bedeutung für ein Kollektiv.”

²⁴⁶ A. Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, p. 8.

²⁴⁷ A. Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, p. 8.

²⁴⁸ Cf. A. Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, p. 27.

²⁴⁹ A. Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, p. 14.

²⁵⁰ H. Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, p. 156.

²⁵¹ Israel’s memory of the fundamental saving experiences is presented not as argumentative but narrative, so that the narrated event becomes once again alive. H. Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, p. 157.

²⁵² My translation from “Juden erinnern sich ihrer Vergangenheit, um in der Gegenwart leben und eine Zukunft erhoffen zu können.” H. Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, p. 155.

²⁵³ M. Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, New York: Basic Books, 1985, p. 13.

determines the future. The prophets see the transgressions and backslidings (cf. Amos 2,6; Jer 5,6.) and the recollection of Exodus serve to remind the people of YHWH's liberation.²⁵⁴

The aim of remembering is the imitation of YHWH, the liberator, in dispensing justice and in showing concern to the weak. "Remembering" is related to justice in its Egyptian meaning as Jan Assmann states: "The memory needs someone who commits themselves, who gets involved. Remembering conveys a sense of belonging; you remember in order to belong. That is the reason why memory is the social sense par excellence."²⁵⁵ The Egyptian concept for this normative remembering is "*Ma'at*", a concept that can mean also truth, justice, and order. It is the supreme norm which all have to remember if they are to live in a community. It is the "*Zusammenlebenskunst*" (the art of living together) and a person who is socially inactive and not able to live together with others has no past and no memory.²⁵⁶ What leads one into the future is looking back into the past for the Egyptians and as Assmann describes it, "the past lies before him, the future behind him, on his back."²⁵⁷ There is a relationship between time, identity and responsibility because in the moral memory it is thankfulness for received benefits and fulfilled obligations that binds someone to the promises of the future.²⁵⁸

The recollection of the past has great significance for the prophets because they understood it as inevitably connected to the present. This makes the prophetic thought valuable in our own times too. As Cornel West says, "prophetic thought must have the capacity to provide a broad and deep analytical grasp of the present in the light of the past."²⁵⁹ He calls this "an analytical moment" and further qualifies it as "a moment in which one must accent a nuanced historical sense... [*i.e.*,] an ability to keep track, to remain attuned to the ambiguous legacies and hybrid cultures in history."²⁶⁰

At the conclusion of the 20th century, the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relationship with Jews in its Document, (16 March 1998) "We Remember, a Reflection on

²⁵⁴ Cf. M. Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 14. They remind the people that oppression is not to be considered as destiny, but, as Walzer phrases it, "it flows from particular choices by particular people – a failure of moral alertness, a willful refusal to "remember" the house of bondage and the day of deliverance, a violation of divine commandments."

²⁵⁵ My translation from "Das Gedächtnis braucht, wer sich verpflichten muss, wer sich bindet. Erinnerung vermittelt Zugehörigkeit, man erinnert sich, um dazu gehören zu können. Daher ist das Gedächtnis der Sozialsinn par excellence." J. Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil*, p. 136.

²⁵⁶ J. Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil*, p. 136.

²⁵⁷ My translation from "Die Vergangenheit liegt vor ihm, Die Zukunft hinter ihm, in seinem Rücken." J. Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil*, p. 136.

²⁵⁸ Cf. J. Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil*, p. 136. Consequently, forgetting the past, the destruction of social time, is the worst sin for Egyptians. (P. 137). On the other hand, "Erinnerte Vergangenheit ist immer Teil einer aktuellen, gegenwartsbezogenen Semantik." (P. 248). That the biblical memory is a memory with an accent on the present and the future is also stressed by Lenzen when she says, "Vergangenheit schlägt um in Gegenwart und ragt in die Zukunft". V. Lenzen, "„Die Zukunft hat ein altes Herz.“", p. 13.

²⁵⁹ C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 3.

²⁶⁰ C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, pp. 3-4.

the *Shoah*”, expresses clearly what remembering means in the context of Holocaust: “it is not only a question of recalling the past. The common future of Jews and Christians demands that we remember, for “there is no future without memory”. ... History itself is *memoria futuri*.” The Document adds later on how this history can become a *memoria futuri*: it is when the realization dawns “that the Jews are our dearly beloved brothers, indeed in a certain sense they are “our elder brothers” [Rom 11,21].” Thus remembering can help the community to learn from past experiences and to move forward in solidarity and mutual appreciation.

Finally, a remembering community is called to be a witnessing community. As Margalit says, “Living in an emotionally involved world is living a risky life. The risks are on the whole worth taking, but they are risks nevertheless. An ethical community makes an effort to channel the hazardous emotions of an involved society into emotions of care and caring.”²⁶¹ In doing so, this community is called to be “a moral witness”²⁶², if we borrow the term from Margalit. He qualifies a moral witness as one who is ready to take risk, who does not betray in order “to stay alive and be able to tell one’s story”, and as one who “plays a special role in uncovering the evil he or she encounters”.²⁶³ Margalit tells us how a moral witness can become relevant irrespective of the times when he/she lives: “The authority of the moral witness has to do with his sincerity. That is, it has to do with a strong congruence between his emotions and his avowals, and with his not making concessions to himself.”²⁶⁴ A prophetic community today has to be one which bears authentic witness to the memories of its past by standing for the values and lessons which the past experiences have imparted to the community.

3.3.3. Punishment: Shattering False Confidence and Restoring Identity

It is the theological conviction of the prophets that YHWH is not a mute spectator to the mindless exploitation of the weak and to the profanation of his holy name by his own people. In the perception of the prophets, YHWH makes the forces of history work against them and strikes at the prosperity and strength that they seem to be enjoying by means of

²⁶¹ A. Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, p. 144.

²⁶² A. Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, p. 154. Margalit considers a “moral witness” “not a poor substitute for the religious witness of hope” (p. 154) and denies “that the sense of hope involved with the notion of the moral witness is akin to the eschatological hope for salvation in a messianic era” (p. 155). Nevertheless, he does not deny that “the idea of a moral witness is a historical heir to the idea of the religious martyr as a witness.” (P. 154). Margalit, however, would not identify a martyr witness with a religious witness, who, he thinks, has the false confidence of a “sleepwalker” (p. 155). However, it could be argued against Margalit that an authentic religious witness cannot be different from a martyr witness. Whoever uses religion as an escape from the realities of the world cannot be called a religious witness if we make the critique of Amos a criterion for being religious. An eschatological hope has to be rooted in the this-worldly aspect of the Kingdom of God (see 3.1.5 above) and a religious witness, to be authentic, has to face the realities and challenges of the life here and now.

²⁶³ A. Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, pp. 162.165.

²⁶⁴ A. Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, p. 170.

oppression and exploitation. Here the oracles use the formal element of a judgement speech, viz., *hinnē(h)* (cf. Amos 2,13) to announce the divine judgement. Similar elements are used also in *kī hinnē(h)* “then, behold” (Amos 4,2a); *lākēn* “therefore” in 5,11a and in 6,7.

The announced divine punishment means that their life of prosperity will come to a grinding halt (cf. 2,13), and that the rich and the powerful will realize that their power cannot save them (cf. 2,14), and that all three wings of their military in which they took so much pride will be thoroughly defeated and will be forced to flee in disgrace (cf. 2,15-16). The defeat and fall of young men, girls, and those who swear by the Ashima of Samaria (8,13-14) show the grim future that awaits them. That they will not be able to enjoy the fruit of their building and farming activities is mentioned in 5,11bc. The complete destruction of the country from north to south through a nation raised up by YHWH is indicated by in 6,14. There will be an all-pervasive mourning (*mispēd*) on account of the punitive passing-through by YHWH (5,16-17; 8,10), accompanied by the cosmic phenomena of quaking of the land (8,8a), tossing up and sinking of the Nile (8,8b), and turning day into darkness (8,9). The punishment takes the concrete form of exile as pointed by the following words and imageries: *šinnōt* and *sirōt dūgā(h)* both meaning “hook” (4,2b); *pārāšim tēše'nā(h)* “and you shall come out through the breaches in the wall” (4,3a); and *šlk (hiphil)* “be hurled out” (4,3a). The exile is also affirmed by the terms *yiḡlū* “shall go into exile”, *gōlīm* “exiles” (6,7a), and by prophesying the absence of the guiding word of God (8,11-12).

Thus the prophet is convinced that the practice of injustice, against the will of YHWH, will cause the downfall of the people. Just as his hands were active in liberating them from oppression in Egypt, and in giving them the land, so also he will make sure that they lose their freedom and their land, if they allow the practice of oppression in their own community.

The biblical social laws too dwell upon YHWH's ability to take corrective measures. The dtr warning that when just conduct is absent in the community, God will intervene, just as he did in Egypt to castigate Pharaoh, to punish the oppressors among his own people, is the coercing factor behind the biblical social laws. The total extermination of their nation and its population is predicted if they oppress the needy in Exod 22,22-23. That the blessing of YHWH depends on the solidarity of Israel with the poor is affirmed also in Deut 14,29; 15,10.18; 23,21; 24,13.19. In contrast, the refusal to lend to the needy is considered to be a sin in the community of Israel (cf. Deut 15,9). “Generosity evokes generosity”²⁶⁵ seems to be the dictum that guides YHWH's dealing with the Israelites in this regard. Thus the biblical social laws stress the common truth that ignoring the vulnerable in society is self-destructive.

²⁶⁵ W. Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, p. 166.

The fear of God is invoked in five places in the Holiness Code to persuade Israel to comply with the obligations of the social laws:²⁶⁶ against cursing the deaf and putting a stumbling block to the blind (Lev 19,14); against dishonoring the elderly (19,32); against oppressing fellow human beings (25,17.43); and against lending on interest (Lev 25,36). Invoking the fear of God in this context means that compassion towards the poor is an integral part of faith in YHWH. The phrase ‘laying a stumbling block before the blind’ in later Jewish interpretations is understood as embodying a common norm of behavior that “one should not tempt another person by preying on his weakness”²⁶⁷. The idiom “fear of God” here is used to condemn the injustice done to those who are defenseless, and offences that cannot be detected and to demonstrate God as someone who sees their plight and come to vindicate their causes. This sanction behind the social laws lends weight to the call to social justice because in the words of H.F. Fuhs “they cease to be merely general ethical norms but enshrine instead the declared will of the covenant God and thus demand obedience.”²⁶⁸

Socio-ethical Implications

The intervention of God at the failure on the part of Israelites to practice justice in the community is vividly expressed through the idea of the punishment of YHWH, which meant catastrophe for the community as a whole.²⁶⁹ Amos understands that the punishment is effected by YHWH though he might use human instruments. It may be surprising that Amos does not exclude the victims of injustice and the just people in the community from the punitive actions of YHWH. The punishment as well as the inclusion of the innocent in it is symbolic of the pathos or the tragedy of human predicament where injustice in the world causes calamities and catastrophe and everyone has to pay the price. Violence has been part of human history and Amos’ way of accounting for it is by considering it as punishment for the practice of injustice in the society. In doing so, he is able to find a deeper meaning in the punitive actions of God as we shall see below.

At the outset it must be pointed out that the general picture of God in the Bible is not as a God of violence or as a God who delights in punishing, but as someone who is “slow to anger” and “abundant in loving kindness” (cf. Exod 34,6; Num 14,18; Neh 9,17; Ps 86,15;

²⁶⁶ Fear of God is provision behind the law elsewhere in the legal codes of the Bible: Exod 20,20; Deut 17,19; 25,18, though not used in the context of social laws. Similarly, the phrase “hear and fear” (cf. Deut 17,13; 19,20; 21,21) also is never used in the context of social aberrations.

²⁶⁷ B.A. Levine, *Leviticus*, p. 128.

²⁶⁸ H.F. Fuhs, אָרַךְ *yārē*, *TDOT VI*, (1980-82; English trans. 1990), p. 313.

²⁶⁹ It is characteristic of the deities of the ancient Near East to be violent. According to Mary Mills, this characteristic “reflects a very human perspective of life events and is tied into the entire cultural base of the ancient Near East.” M. Mills, “Divine Violence in the Book of Amos”, in C. Franke / J.M. O’Brien (eds.), *Aesthetic of Violence in Prophets*, New York / London: T&T Clark, 2010, p. 158.

103,8; 145,8; Joel 2,13; Jonah 4,2). The image of God as “merciful” (*rahûm*), “gracious” (*hannûn*) and as bestowing “kindness” (*hesed*) and “faithfulness” (*’emet*), is so overwhelming in the Bible that Hermann Spieckermann has pointed out that “it seems reasonable to consider God’s anger an exception to his grace.”²⁷⁰

Amos’ pronouncement about the punishment of God has to be understood in the general background of the ancient Near East, where there is a tendency to use the violence of the deities, as Mary Mills points out, “as a viable tool for giving religious meaning to civil affairs”.²⁷¹ In this context, Amos’ usage of the motif of the punishment of God serves two purposes: first, to shatter the false hope set on the Day of the Lord by the self-serving and proud aristocracy in Samaria and Zion (cf. 5,18-20; 6,1-3); second, to restore the identity of the people of God as a community doing the will of God and practicing justice.

Shattering the False Confidence

The images of the prosperity of Israel coming to a halt and immovability gripping its military forces in the critique of Amos, as mentioned above, strike at the root of the false hope entertained by the Samaritan and Jerusalemite elites that security and prosperity are guaranteed to them, however unjustly they might conduct themselves towards the weaker sections in the community. As Mills points out, “The prophet seeks to undermine a sense of confidence in divine support for the Establishment, turning the Day of the Lord from a sign of victory over enemies into a sign of the invalidity of the home society.”²⁷² The biblical scepticism about monarchy as “the oppressive and exploitative human rule over humans” (see 3.3 above) comes to play a role here. The prophet is convinced that God is able to rein in oppression and exploitation. The accent here is not so much on destruction of the exploitative structures, as on liberation of the victims of these structures from dehumanizing exploitation and oppression.

Dealing with the present crisis is the concern of the prophet while declaring the punishment of YHWH. Mills says, “God as chaos monster in the book of Amos terrifies with destructive energy while fascinating with its capacity to manage life at the edge of

²⁷⁰ H. Spieckermann, “Wrath and Mercy as Crucial Terms of Theological Hermeneutics”, in R.G. Kratz / H. Spieckermann (eds.), *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe 33, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008, p. 9.

²⁷¹ M. Mills, “Divine Violence”, p. 158.

²⁷² M. Mills, “Divine Violence”, p. 155. In her opinion the reversals are oriented “to unsettle the reader’s previous religious viewpoint, in which the continuing existence of society is assured by an immanent deity.” (P. 166).

annihilation.”²⁷³ The futility of the false confidence which the nobles of Israel placed in their own strength and in YHWH in believing that the “day of evil” will not affect them (cf. 6,1-3) has a significant message for the exploitative structures even today. The following comment of Berger about the situation in present day America can paraphrase the meaning of Amos’ words for our times:

He [*God*] cannot be invoked as a safe political ally – not even by Israel. The confidence that He will not abandon Israel to defeat and disaster is an illusion. Indeed, it may even be that the Assyrians or Babylonians are the instruments of his purpose in history. Living in a country [*America*] that faces a particularly frightening kind of Assyrians today, and very fond of comforting itself with a variety of “days of prayer”, we would do well to begin our thoughts with what Amos has to say about the nature of the “day of the Lord.”²⁷⁴

Amos believed that his God could make a difference in the situation, but not through the false self- assurances offered by the economic or military security or easy consolations offered by religious rituals, but through authenticity in life and relationships.

The absence of the theme of hope in the socio-critical sayings of Amos shows that he saw the reality as it is and does not promise that God will put everything in order. The only instance where graciousness (*hnn*) from YHWH is foretold is in the context of a genuine conversion on the part of Israel in 5,15: “Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious (*yeḥēnan*) to the remnant of Joseph.” Amos calls for conversion involving a transformation in life in terms of justice and righteousness (cf. Amos 5,24). This conversion is anything but a false expression of piety through “feasting”, “solemn assembly”, sacrifices on the altar, or religious music (cf. 5,21-23). This conversion which is expected by Amos is no way similar to, if we use the words of Berger, “the emotional orgies of the gospel tent, nor the refined editions of these around chilly campfires, nor the fluorescent-lighted mass rallies.”²⁷⁵ He argued that the conversion should have a social dimension as we see below.

Restoring True Social Identity

Mills points out the second characteristic of the presentation of violence by biblical prophets as “open-ended, [*i.e.*,] presented without the closure of death and life’s ending”, which, according to her, is deliberately meant “to re-create social self-identity”.²⁷⁶ Amos presents his community as unjust, as having disdain for the will of God and as oppressing the

²⁷³ M. Mills, “Divine Violence”, p. 172. Mills describes the motive behind the divine violence: “Divine violence provides a mechanism for managing the political tensions of a fragmented world in such a way that God is imaged as using political chaos to control urban economic chaos.” (P. 171)

²⁷⁴ P.L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, p. 131.

²⁷⁵ P.L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, p. 114.

²⁷⁶ M. Mills, “Divine Violence”, p. 163.

weak. His critique and the dramatic presentation of divine violence aim at transformation of this society and a new social understanding.²⁷⁷ Here it is relevant to note that Amos does not believe that YHWH would “completely destroy” or “exterminate” (*šmd*) Israel. He uses this word to refer to the annihilation of Amorites in the hands of God in 2,9. Even when it is used to indicate the fate of Israel, the survival of the “House of Jacob” is assured (cf. 9,8). This promise reverberates also in Jer 30,8-11: “For I am with you, says the LORD, to save you; I will make an end of all the nations among which I scattered you, but of you I will not make an end. I will chastise you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished.” (V. 11 NRSV). Commenting on this verse, Spieckermann says:

Rightful punishment is Yhwh’s reaction toward his people. ... as not anger, but punishment provides insight in the way of Yhwh’s retribution. The punishment is not an end in itself. Rather, it attempts to enlighten God’s acting toward Israel. The message is identified as divine revelation, so as to ensure that nobody be left in the dark as to the importance of the new lore.²⁷⁸

The subversive role of the prophet in using the image of the ‘violence of God’, in which the false confidence that YHWH’s support to Israel will remain unchanged is shattered, and the creation of a new social identity is evident in Amos.²⁷⁹ Contrary to their hope, Israel will become the object of YHWH’s punishment and destruction. This violence against Israel is justified on account of the social injustice practiced by the Israelite elite and this is a clear subversion of the existing power structure by placing YHWH and the king in opposition to one another.²⁸⁰ Mills suggests that at three different phases of its redactional history, the book of Amos might have served the subversive function:²⁸¹

- i. At the stage of historical Amos, when social injustice was rampant and the upper classes used their power to exploit the weaker sections of society.
- ii. At the phase of the rise of the Neo-Assyrian power in 8th and 7th century BCE, when Samaria had to undergo political turmoil being a buffer zone between Assyria and the independent kingdoms.
- iii. Finally, at a post exilic phase, as the new political regime tried to establish its authority as agent of imperial power.

In all these phases the prophetic critique tried to cater to the fears and anxieties of the marginalized sections of the society, who were at a disadvantage due to the socio-political changes. However, the new identity envisioned by them does not exclude the hopes and

²⁷⁷ Cf. M. Mills, “Divine Violence”, p. 164.

²⁷⁸ H. Spieckermann, “Wrath and Mercy”, p. 14.

²⁷⁹ Cf. M. Mills, “Divine Violence”, p. 164.

²⁸⁰ Cf. M. Mills, “Divine Violence”, p. 164.

²⁸¹ M. Mills, “Divine Violence”, pp. 166-67.

aspirations of the elite classes, who were ready to change their ways. According to Mills, Amos expresses this idea through the image of the absence of the deity and the unsuccessful search for him. The realization that YHWH is not any more with them (cf. Amos 8,11-12; cf. 1.6.3.2 above) creates a kind of “unease”²⁸². There is a possibility open for those who repent in spite of the violent punishment and temporary absence.

The absence of the deity creates a desire to search for him, but the fact that he is not to be found opens another possibility to encounter him, as Mills points out: “Here the vast aimless search for a deity who is no longer to be found represents an existential desire to encounter the other as means of finding one’s own identity.”²⁸³ For Amos the actualization of this possibility is possible only through opening up to others in justice and righteousness. This new encounter is capable of re-establishing the identity of the community as liberated by YHWH and as a community of mutual care.

In the seemingly hopeless condition of their fellow men and women, where they had lost their identity as the liberated people of YHWH, the prophets were able to feel with them. They identified themselves with the sad plight of the victims of injustice and called upon the upper classes to act responsibly, and thereby to re-establish the lost identity. Accordingly, the Church, which represents the prophets in the present society, is called, as Berger puts it, “to plant itself especially in situations of human conflict, misery and degradation.”²⁸⁴ The implication of this prophetic realization for Christian life today is that in spite of the pathos and tragedies people must work for a better world, even when they know perfectly well that a perfect society is impossible. In the present experience of punishment a prophet should be able to see future possibilities, where just actions would make a difference.²⁸⁵

The theological framework of the prophetic social critique and the biblical social laws with the element of the punishment of YHWH is a rational attempt by the prophets and the biblical law-makers to have clarity in what happens around them, while remaining within their historical and religious conditioning. The following statement of Mills can sum up this function of the prophetic use of the idea of the punishment of God:

It may be better to view the text as providing one, albeit very significant, image of God. Its task is that of social performance in times of particular political need. It is an image which successfully provides the view that when human affairs no longer offer a clear social identity, when meaning turns ambivalent, poised between certainty and loss, the image of a transcendent Other, comforting in that very

²⁸² M. Mills, “Divine Violence”, p. 174.

²⁸³ M. Mills, “Divine Violence”, p. 177.

²⁸⁴ P.L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, p. 148.

²⁸⁵ Cf. C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 42. West quotes John Dewey, who has asked, “what should experience be but a future implicated in a present?” in order to connect the present with the future.

Otherness, can produce a means for managing grief. Even the association of the origins of that sorrow with the transcendent provides hope that the human being is not totally alone in an impersonal world, lost endlessly in the “bitter day”.²⁸⁶

The prophetic preoccupation with re-establishing the identity could have been the reason why even the victims of injustice are included among those who are punished. Amos called for sincere repentance as we saw above. As Alger points out, “The whole future of this elect nation would depend upon its future relationship with God, and God’s desire was not at first the death of the sinful nation but that it might be converted to Yahweh...”²⁸⁷ The just and the unjust were included in both those who fell in war and those who were led into exile. According to the prophetic understanding, the people of Israel as a whole are collectively responsible for their wellbeing as well as for their downfall. Their identity and destiny are bound together.

The prophetic concern was to rectify the injustice. We may assume that the inclusion of the victims in the punishment could mean that the unjust conduct of a few in society can bring about catastrophes for which the whole society will have to pay. In today’s world, the burden of war and consumerist living falls on the poor, on the rich and on nature without distinction. It is the predicament of the world that the just and unjust have to suffer for injustice. The prophetic call in this context is to rectify injustice so that these calamities can be avoided.

To conclude it must be said that Amos does not advocate conversion through violence on the part of human beings. This prophetic stand is an invitation to the Church to make use of her spiritual power to effect conversion in the world. Her very presence in the world should challenge the forces of oppression and exploitation by her identity as a witness to Christ, who challenged the structures of evil through his suffering and death, rather than sword and power. His resurrection is God’s affirmation that even though there may be situations, in which one may feel powerless and insufficient faced with injustice, the ultimate victory lies with one who follows God in justice and love. As Berger puts it, “the simple presence of those testifying to the fact that Christ continues to walk through the lives of all men, however hopeless or degraded or wicked their condition may be, is itself a relevant engagement with the world.”²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ M. Mills, “Divine Violence”, p. 179.

²⁸⁷ B. Alger, “The Theology and Social Ethics of Amos”, *Scripture* 17 (1965), p. 114.

²⁸⁸ P.L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, p. 148.

3.3.4. YHWH-Willed Justice and Human Freedom

In the recent decades, the socio-critical sayings of the book of Amos have been often cited in support of the promotion of human rights and one may fully justify such an interpretation in the light of Amos' stand for justice and dignity. However, the precautionary note of Deissler that Amos is a passionate disciple of faith in YHWH and not a mere social reformer cause us to reflect more deeply about the motive of Amos behind his stand for the cause of social justice.²⁸⁹ There is no doubt that the emphasis on human dignity marks Amos' approach to justice, but he finds that this dignity and its implying human freedom, autonomy and responsibility have to be understood in the light of the demands of God. We could say that Amos understands human rights as involving for God's rights and he considers both as inseparably connected. The discussion below shows that there could be no incongruence between God's rights and human rights.

The analysis of the theological framework of the prophetic social critique showed that Amos understands justice as willed by God. He remains its source and sanctioning authority. Does this conviction affect the individual freedom and the right of every person to assert his/her rights? The often quoted critique of Karl Marx on religion is that it is the opium of the people, tranquillizing the people so that they are resigned to their fate as the will of God, to the extent of abdicating their own rights and duties. Margalit's "Uncle Tom story" touches upon some of these aspects:

Uncle Tom doesn't have a concept of rights, but he has deep religious convictions which tell him that all people, whether black or white are descended from Adam, who was created in God's image. Thus Tom's human dignity lies in his family tree going back to Adam. Tom does not translate this fact into terms of rights, such as his inheritance as one of Adam's children. But he is fully aware that his honor as a child of Adam is no less than the honor that must be accorded any human being. At the same time, Uncle Tom submissively accepts whatever his masters require of him, believing that it is God's will and that he is being tested. Questioning the established order would be a manifestation of pride, which is greater sin than that of his abusers. Rebellion is wrong, because only God can redeem the oppressed.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ A. Deissler, *Zwölf Profeten*, p. 92. Deissler has said: "In der Geschichte der christlichen Exegese hat das sozialkritische Anliegen der Amospredigt wenig Beachtung gefunden, bis seit der Mitte unseres Jahrhunderts (hauptsächlich unter dem Einfluss von E. Bloch) das Buch Amos zu einem der häufigst zitierten Bücher des AT geworden ist. Freilich wurde dabei allzu häufig übersehen, dass Amos leidenschaftlicher Anhänger des Jahweglaubens ist und kein „Sozialrevolutionär“. Sein Eintreten für die „Menschenrechte“ ist ein einziges Engagement für Gott und das „Gottesrecht“.“ I would say that with this comment Deissler points out the inseparable nature of human rights and God's rights in Amos' social critique. Those who stand up for God's rights cannot ignore the God-willed dignity of human persons being violated. The right of God is not respected, when human rights are not respected and vice versa.

²⁹⁰ A. Margalit, *The Decent Society*, p. 36.

Amos has a definite answer to the above critique in his social critique. He shows clearly that following the will of God in favour of justice is not a *Quietismus* or a passive acceptance of injustice as the will of God. It supports the assertion of one's rights and that of others and is in no way a call to resignation to one's fate. All of Amos' socio-critical remarks are addressed to the perpetrators of injustice (see 3.1.4 above) and they are warned of consequences of their unjust behavior. Amos was convinced that YHWH has liberated his people and they are meant to remain liberated. Any violation of rights and freedom is to be condemned and it is the will of YHWH that the injustice is brought to an end through amendment of sinful ways. The role of religion here is not that of "a social or an individual opiate" but of a force to "shatter the "O.K. worlds", in which people seek shelter from the terrors of existence"²⁹¹, as Berger puts it. The encounter with the living God makes this possible because, according to the prophetic understanding, YHWH himself is the model par excellence of liberation. This conviction in faith could in no way diminish the self-respect of a person, but on the other hand, can enhance it because he/she has every reason to assert his/her rights, not only on human grounds, but also in his/her religious faith as willed by God.

As Hilpert points out, faith is an act of human freedom, meaning a "human act" and therefore it has to embody and express itself in the corporeal dimension.²⁹² In faith actions in favour of justice and the good of others are an expression of the inner convictions. Therefore it would be a gross injustice to say that adherence to the will of God or dependence on God, understood as committing oneself to the saving will of God for oneself and others, is a diminution of an individual's rights and freedom. Amos' clarion call was to "Seek the Lord and live" (5,4). To seek the Lord – "the desired result of it is to establish justice at the gate"²⁹³ as Amos further explains it in 5,15. Amos, in fact, sees seeking the Lord as a means of living out justice, assuring the freedom and rights of every individual.

We have already seen the biblical background of the theological concept of "the reign of God" over human persons above. The idea means actually the removal of all oppression and exploitation, thus opening the door to a life without bondage. In this context, the notion of the freedom of a person who trusts in the Lord, as described by Edward Schillebeeckx, is once again illuminating. He says that we find in Yahwistic theology yet another approach to the kings of Israel, differing from the *dtr* (see 3.3 above). David is a model of someone who trusts in YHWH for the Yahwistic redactors, and as such he has tremendous freedom even to override the precepts regarding the sacred rituals of Israel. When he was hungry, he ate the

²⁹¹ P.L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, p. 128.

²⁹² Cf. K. Hilpert, "Die Rolle der Theologie in der Ethik", p. 225.

²⁹³ D.J. Simundson, *Hosea, Joel, Amos*, p. 197.

sacred bread (1 Sam 21,3-6). He once again demonstrates his freedom in discerning the will of God, as we see in his behaviour at the death of his son (2 Sam 12,16-23) and in his pouring out the Bethlehem-water to show solidarity with his men against the purity laws (2 Sam 23,13-17).²⁹⁴ In the opinion of Schillebeeckx the behaviour of David should be the key to understanding our own *condition humaine* as it mirrors the history of each one of us in using our own freedom in discerning the will of God in the concrete situations of life.²⁹⁵

Such an experience of freedom is also fundamental to the approach of Jesus towards the laws when he says, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” (Mk 2,27). God has entrusted human beings with the freedom and responsibility to take care of his earthly dwelling and he and only he is responsible for earthly history.²⁹⁶ Amos’ position in this regard is unequivocally expressed by Berger when he says,

any effort of genuine obedience to the will of God carries with it a promise of redemption. It opens up the possibility of vocation, where before there was only the burden of servitude. We then are no longer imprisoned in the “solemn assemblies” (Amos 5,21) of our religious establishment and, by that same token, we become free to seek that justice that rolls “down like waters” (Amos 5,24).²⁹⁷

Amos’ social critique is also a call for transformation involving better human relationships and the practice of justice in the community. The revolutionary potential of this prophetic call lies in its ability to effect individual and communitarian conversion in response to the will of YHWH. The mission of the Church in this context is one of internal conversion, making herself an instrument of justice and freedom. She is also sent into the world with a mission to challenge the structures and ideologies that perpetrate injustice by being a contrast society. She could never be indifferent to injustice in the society. We could aptly describe this mission of the Church with Berger: “The Christians who seek justice in obedience to God’s will should see through the vested interests, the collective egotism, and the bad faith of the ideologies that claim “O.K.ness” of the *status quo*.”²⁹⁸ The Church, by its very nature, is prophetic and as such an instrument of freedom and liberation. Without this prophetic mission the Church is a Church without Amos.

Human Dignity and the Recognition of the Other – Socio-ethical Reflections

What is specific to Amos’ understanding of human dignity is its interpersonal character. Human dignity is realized in the living out of a just relationship with God and one another, recognizing the rights of each other. Amos understood that humans have to live as

²⁹⁴ Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Menschen. Die Geschichte von Gott*, pp. 184-85.

²⁹⁵ Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Menschen. Die Geschichte von Gott*, p. 185.

²⁹⁶ Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Menschen. Die Geschichte von Gott*, p. 186.

²⁹⁷ P.L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, p. 177.

²⁹⁸ P.L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, p. 179.

social beings, recognizing the rights of others. The prophetic teachings lay at the foundation of the human rights perspective of Kant (though he does not base it on religion) and others, that human beings should never be treated as means but as ends. The condemnation of various types of ill-treatment (cf. see 3.1.3 above) underlines this fact. Unlike most of the theories of justice which consider mutual advantage and reciprocity as the foundation of mutual co-operation, the prophetic critique, in fact, stresses mutual recognition of rights. They believe that only equals can offer mutual benefit²⁹⁹ and the weaker ones in the society cannot be left out of this mutual co-operation. The vision of the community here is not one where each one is pursuing own happiness, but each one finding his/her well-being in assuring the welfare of the other.

The prophetic understanding of justice as maintaining proper relationships in the community lies at the root of the understanding of the human person as a ζῷον πολιτικόν “political being” in the classical political thinking of Aristotle and in the Christian natural rights understanding of the Middle Ages. They understood a human person as a social animal, “who in order to realize its inner nature was dependent on the social framework of a political community.”³⁰⁰ The prophets realized in themselves the call of their God to a just life that would secure meaningful existence for all by establishing a righteous relationship with God and by letting justice flow in one’s relationships with other people.

The reason behind the recognition of the other for the prophets is the acknowledgement that others have the same dignity. The following secular understanding of Hegel, summed up by Honneth, about mutual recognition of human rights can, in some of its aspects, paraphrase for us the spirit of the prophetic concept of dignity and just relationships in the community. In his “Philosophy of Spirit” Hegel refers to

the process of the realization of spirit, which takes place within the consciousness of a person, which has to be seen first from the relationship of the individual subject with self, then from the institutionalized relationship of the subjects among themselves, and finally from the reflective relationship of the communitarian subject to the world as a whole.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ Cf. M.C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, p. 90.

³⁰⁰ My translation from “das zur Verwirklichung seiner inneren Natur auf den sozialen Rahmen eines politischen Gemeinwesens angewiesen war.” A. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992, p. 13. Politics was traditionally understood also as instruction in a good and just way of life. Cf. p. 14.

³⁰¹ My translation from “jener Prozess der Realisation des Geistes, der sich innerhalb der Sphäre des menschlichen Bewusstseins abspielt, soll hier in der Stufenfolge dargestellt werden, die sich methodisch ergibt, wenn zunächst die Beziehung des individuellen Subjekts auf sich selber, dann die institutionalisierten Beziehungen der Subjekte untereinander und schließlich die reflexiven Beziehungen der vergemeinschafteten Subjekte zur Welt im ganzen betrachtet werden.” A. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, pp. 57-58.

For Hegel, the driving force behind this process could not be the product of the absolute spirit but the development of an ethical community.³⁰² Amos' understanding differs from that of Hegel in that he sees the personal involvement of God as crucial to the establishment and maintenance of relationships in the community. Or rather, one can also say that the being whom Amos understood as YHWH takes the place of "absolute spirit" in Hegel. However, individual responsibility for the maintenance of this relationship is affirmed both by Amos and Hegel.

In maintaining a dignified relationship in the community, the experience and recollection of the faithful actions of God in history are the source of inspiration for Amos. This recollection is the 'loving force' which he uses to foster healthy relationships. How it works can, once again, be explained through Honneth's review of Hegel: In his "System of Ethics" Hegel understands "love as a situation of mutual recognition in which the natural individuality of the subject finds its attestation."³⁰³ Communication opens the possibility for mutual recognition in which another subject is, to some extent, 'forced without violence' to recognize the social existence of the other.³⁰⁴ Only if one recognizes the partner as a kind of person can one see oneself as the same kind of person in his reactions, because he possesses the same characteristics and abilities through which one can feel attested.³⁰⁵

Amos understands that the freedom of a person has to have some limits and there are consequences if one person's freedom gets in the way of the dignified existence of another. Similarly Hegel too understands the right in its interpersonal context as a limiting of one's "empty freedom". This limiting is not self-imposed, but is a product of the right itself, i.e., "recognized relationship".³⁰⁶ Very much like Amos, Hegel too understands love as behaviour of interaction, in which reciprocal recognition is fundamental.³⁰⁷

Honneth describes also the experiment of psycho-analysts Donald W. Winnicott and Jessica Benjamin, who interpret the love-relationship through psycho-analytical means as a process of mutual recognition.³⁰⁸ This can help us to understand the divine-human relationships envisaged by the prophets. The framework of the mother-child relationship which the authors use as an example of mutual recognition is a suitable example of it in society. The child and the mother realize that they are independent beings through a process

³⁰² Cf. A. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, p. 58.

³⁰³ My translation from "die Liebe als ein Verhältnis der wechselseitigen Anerkennung, in dem zunächst die natürliche Individualität der Subjekte Bestätigung findet." A. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, p. 64.

³⁰⁴ Cf. A. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, p. 64.

³⁰⁵ Cf. A. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, pp. 64-65.

³⁰⁶ Cf. A. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, pp. 71-72.

³⁰⁷ Cf. A. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, p. 154.

³⁰⁸ Cf. A. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, pp. 157-58.

of aggressive behavioural expressions on the part of the child. All the while, the child recognizes that it is in the presence of a loving person in whom it can trust, but a person who exists with her own claims. The mother realizes the independence of the child through acceptance of the desire of the child to be free so that it can become a self-reliant person. This is a process in which the mother and the child accept the mutual dependence in love without being fused into each other.³⁰⁹

As the prophetic social critique shows, the mutual recognition of dignity and rights are innate to being the People of God, though some phases in the history of the Church failed to recognize and uphold it. It is true that almost till the middle of the 20th century CE, the Church held the neo-scholastic view of human rights as the foundation and goal of being a social being, and saw human dignity and human rights as originating only from the eternal natural law, rooted in the order of God's creation.³¹⁰ It had an image of human persons closely in association with the institutional Church. It was a long time before the Church recognized the human person as the subject of rights because of the Church's fear of identifying this concept with secularization.

It was Pope John XXIII who gave a clear formulation acknowledging human rights in the context of the Church through the Encyclical *Pacem in terris* in 1963 (cf. Nos. 9-27). However the encyclical is, once again, "a document founded thoroughly on natural rights", as Uertz points out, "which modifies the natural rights in view of personal responsibility".³¹¹ Nevertheless, the foundation that the Pope lays for the autonomy of the human person is remarkable:

Any well-regulated and productive association of men in society demands the acceptance of one fundamental principle: that each individual man is truly a person. His is a nature ... endowed with intelligence and free will. As such he has rights and duties, both of which flow as a direct consequence from his nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable. (*Pacem in terris*, No. 9).

The Pope tries to build up an attitude of subsidiarity in the same encyclical by emphasizing personal responsibility (cf. No. 34), and the duty of the state to recognize it (cf. No. 60). He makes a clear difference between the theological foundation of laws that regulate human conduct and a person's relationship to the state:

Many people think that the laws which govern man's relations with the State are the same as those which regulate the blind, elemental forces of the universe. But it

³⁰⁹ Cf. A. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, p. 164.

³¹⁰ Cf. R. Uertz, *Vom Gottesrecht zum Menschenrecht*, p. 370.

³¹¹ My translation from "ein durch und durch naturrechtlich fundiertes Dokument, wobei das Naturrecht nunmehr hinsichtlich einer personalen Verantwortung modifiziert wird." R. Uertz, *Vom Gottesrecht zum Menschenrecht*, p. 463.

is not so; the laws which govern men are quite different. The Father of the universe has inscribed them in man's nature, and that is where we must look for them; there and nowhere else. (*Pacem in terris*, No. 6).

Gaudium et spes stresses the aspect of freedom of conscience, "the most secret core and sanctuary of a man" where one "is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths." (No. 16) It also recognizes the autonomy of human reason: "For by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order." (No. 36) This recognition is an affirmation of the fact that the idea of human dignity, so dear to the biblical and Church thinking, implies the autonomy of human conscience. The acknowledgement of human dignity and freedom of conscience in the Church documents is an affirmation of the prophetic conviction that God intervenes not to regulate the rights of human persons, but in order to secure and protect these rights.

3.4. Concluding Summary

The realization-focused idea of justice in Amos is designed to prevent manifest injustice in the community. The observance of the sad plight of his fellow human beings is the starting point of Amos' condemnation of injustice. The living out of faith in YHWH is impossible, according to him, when there is injustice in the community, which he understood as the absence of proper relationships in the community. Amos' idea of justice includes all sections of the community and gives room for free decisions on their part to maintain a responsible relationship. He sees relationships in the community as the place to encounter God and lays the foundation for reading the signs of the time in the light of the word of God.

Amos used a subtle social analysis in which the developments in society were evaluated from the point of view of the weaker sections of the society. He took a stand in favour of the dignified treatment of persons in society and called for the removal of obstacles to their growth. This he achieved by demanding justice for the deprived sections, who included not only those who are materially poor, but also all those to whom justice was denied, and who were victims of various other sorts of deprivations in the society.

In taking up the cause of the economically and socially weaker sections of society, Amos refused to identify the prosperity of his country with the well-being of its people and condemned the stark inequalities that existed in the society. As part of his realization-focused justice, Amos points out the manifest injustice in his society through the manipulative use of money, exploitation of the weaker sections of the community and the luxurious life style of the rich at the expense of the poor. His critique invites us to use money with a sense of social responsibility, without putting disadvantaged people at risk. It questions judicial malpractices to the disadvantage of the weaker sections and the treatment of women in many cultures and

religions even today. Above all, the prophetic critique is a reminder of one's social responsibility.

Amos criticizes the upper classes in the society consisting of the rich living in the capital cities of Israel and Judah including the judges, nobles and officers. Relationships which had become exploitative on the basis of power are the specific object of the prophetic critique. He reminds the people of their responsibility to protect the weaker sections by desisting from exploitation and oppression. The prophetic stand is an invitation to the Church to opt for the poor, and to condemn the power relations that are disadvantageous to the weak. Internally too, the Church needs to discourage the emergence of classes on ethnic, economic and confessional lines in the modern societies. Amos envisions an inclusive society, a forerunner of Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God. Both these visions promote mutually affirming relationships, aim at liberation from bondage, and offer a privileged place for the socially and economically weak.

Though the prophetic call to social justice forms part of her holy scriptures, the reception of these prophetic traditions in the Church has been not very overwhelming. In fact, none of the major social encyclicals or official documents of the Catholic Church refers directly to Amos. By ignoring the prophecy, Church loses a clear-sighted perspective on social reality, and misses the opportunity to contribute a very relevant framework and perspective for socio-ethical discussions today. By ignoring prophecy the Church also risks not being self-critical and invites the danger of being self-righteous.

The Bible itself shows how an institutional response can be formulated to rectify injustice in society through its social legislation. The law and prophets form a unified presentation of tradition and faith and constitute the reality of the revelation of God in the history of Israel. The social laws make special provision to protect the interest of slaves, the economically weak, and women, and lay down regulations on lending on interest and pledging where the poor are involved. These laws could be re-interpreted today to evaluate cultural and religious prejudices against the dignity of women, the use of money to exploit the economically vulnerable and the glorification of the egocentric pursuit of wealth and success. The seventh year rest and Jubilee regulations show how sociological motives can be combined with ecological to preserve the universe in its integrity. They also demonstrate how periodical remissions of debts of the poor and restitution of land can help us to make the riches of creation a common good for the whole of humanity, reduce conflicts in the world and repair strained relationships.

The theological framework of the socio-critical sayings of Amos, with accent on the punishment of YHWH, poses a hermeneutical challenge for social ethics. The role of God in the life of Israel – in its historical liberation, its present history and in determining its future mode of existence – reveals him as deeply involved in human history. The practice of justice in the community is of utmost importance to this God. The negative experiences with the monarchy in its history might have prompted the biblical authors to replace king with God as the source of law and just conduct in the community. However God's rule in Israel is not identified with an oppressive theocracy. Rather, his involvement is an inspiration to live free of external and internal bondage.

The prophets recall the liberating actions of God in order to remind the people of their responsibility for one another, and especially to be concerned about weaker sections in community. The recollection of the past helps to build up an emotional relationship with it and to re-establish the "we-identity" of the community. Memory holds intimate relations together and is thus important for ethics. Remembering the past in this context provides interconnections for the community by letting the past event influence the present and determine the future.

As regards the punitive actions of YHWH announced by Amos, they serve to shatter the false confidence of Israel that in spite of their unjust behaviour the prosperity and security they enjoyed would last. They also serve to restore the true identity of Israel as a people liberated by YHWH and practicing justice in the community. The encounter of the other in justice and righteousness is the way to re-establish the true identity of Israel. The punishment of YHWH also shows the collective responsibility of the people for each other's well-being as well as downfall. The punishments have the didactic function of teaching Israel that no amount of religious rituals or political or military security can be a substitute for true conversion, which lies in establishing justice in the community.

The prophetic call to listen to the will of YHWH is not a call for passive acceptance of dehumanizing situations. Amos presents YHWH as a liberator par excellence, and for him the will of God was for the liberation and freedom of human persons. Seeking the will of God meant establishing justice at the gate and letting it flow in the relationship of each person with others. Thus mutual recognition of each other's dignity and right to be free is affirmed by one's faith in YHWH. Amos' critique shows that God intervenes in order to secure and to foster rights and not in order to hinder them.

Chapter 4: An Actualization of the Message Using the Principles of Social Ethics

The current chapter is an attempt to actualize the concept of justice in the book of Amos in a present-day context. From the exegetical point of view, this is an attempt to establish solidarity with the people of God, their social and political situations, their cultural and ethnological backgrounds and their hopes and anxieties in the task of exegesis. The interpretation of the word of God has to take place in dialogue with these realities. The conviction of the Church that “the proclamation of the word of God calls for the testimony of one’s life” (*Verbum Domini*, No. 98) which involves “a commitment to justice and to changing our world” (*Verbum Domini*, No. 100) is understood as an essential element of biblical interpretation here.

In the analysis of the message of social justice of the prophet Amos in the previous chapter we saw that he insisted on just relationships in the community which would foster human rights and dignity. I intend to phrase this message using the scientific methodology proposed by the discipline of Christian social ethics in the current chapter. Markus Vogt has pointed out: “Christian social ethics is an attempt to find an answer to the developmental problems of modern society in the light of the gospels, using a scientific methodology.”¹ Moreover, the principles of Christian social ethics translate biblical ethics for the social order of postmodern society. The aim of this association is to apply the prophetic message to a contemporary social situation, as described in the latter part of this chapter.

In the first part of this chapter we shall try to see how the principles of social ethics, viz., personality, solidarity, subsidiarity and sustainability can state Amos’ idea of justice for the present. It includes a methodological reflection, an analysis of the socio-ethical principles aimed at finding out what Amos’ social critique can contribute to them and what biblical exegesis can learn from this kind of an association. The biblical social laws, which are institutional responses to protect the interests of weaker sections of the community, deal with the same issues addressed in the social critique of the prophets. They formulate concrete norms to regulate the life of the community in accordance with justice as we saw in the previous chapter. We shall also see what these laws could contribute to socio-ethical principles. The second part of this chapter is an application of Amos’ idea of justice through principles of social ethics to a concrete tribal context in India today. We shall see how particular aspects of the life of this community shall be enlightened by the biblical exegesis

¹ My translation from “Christliche Sozialethik ist der Versuch, auf die Entwicklungsprobleme moderner Gesellschaft mit wissenschaftlicher Methode im Licht des Evangeliums zu antworten.” M. Vogt, “Christliche Sozialethik: Warum und wie soll Kirche „politisch“ sein?“, in K. Hilpert / S. Leimgruber, (eds.), *Theologie im Durchblick. Ein Grundkurs*, Freiburg / Basel / Wien: Herder, 2008, p. 149.

and how the message of the text can help us to draw out elements capable of advancing the present situation according to the principles of justice. A third part proposes how the theological framework of Amos' social critique can offer a model for the social engagement of the Church in this community.

4.1. Amos' Response and its Implications for Socio-ethical Principles

The four defining principles of Christian social ethics, viz., personality, solidarity, subsidiarity and sustainability, are socio-ethical maxims for a just social order and guidelines for the structure of a modern society² and they offer room for identifying norms of behaviour in life situations. As we saw in the previous chapter, the realization-focused idea of justice aims to prevent manifestly severe injustice. Amos' idea of justice can be associated with the four principles of social ethics in the following way:

- i. The four principles of social justice help us to realize justice in society by preventing injustice at the personal, communitarian, and ecological spheres of life in present-day society.
- ii. Amos understood justice as a way of maintaining proper relationships in the community. The principles help us to describe how this relationship needs to be manifested in the community today.
- iii. Amos presents his God as someone who is active in the signs of the times in working for justice. The principles help us to read the signs of our own times.
- iv. Solidarity with the weaker sections and removing the obstacles to their growth are the hallmarks of the relationship envisioned by Amos. Biblical social legislation was aimed at restoring community solidarity in Israelite society as the prohibition against lending on interest and restrictions on taking pledges show. The principles set us guidelines for a life of solidarity and justice.
- v. The prophets condemned the exploitation of the weaker classes in a stratified society and tried to protect the interests of this group by advocating removal of obstacles to their growth. They envisioned an inclusive society in which social and economic differences do not work to the disadvantage of the weaker sections. The principles aim at making a dignified existence possible for all.
- vi. The prophetic stand for human rights and dignity of human persons can be translated for our days through the principles of social ethics.

² Markus Vogt compares their function to that of grammar in a language. Cf. M. Vogt, *Globale Nachbarschaft. Christliche Sozialethik vor neuen Herausforderungen*, München: Don Bosco Verlag, 2000, p. 17.

vii. The biblical social laws translated the biblical idea of justice into concrete norms of behaviour in the community. The principles lay down how the biblical idea of justice can be applied in concrete ways to society today.

4.1.1. Methodological Reflection

There is mutual gain from an association of the prophetic idea of justice with the principles of Christian social ethics.³ On the one hand, the Bible is the living word of God which has a special meaning in every context in which it is re-read and re-lived. The principles offer a framework suitable for today's world for the re-reading and re-living of the biblical message. On the other hand, Christian socio-ethical principles in history have always been founded on the natural right categories. The solid human rights foundations that can be found in the biblical prophetic and legal traditions have often been forgotten. This needs to change, so that the socio-ethical principles can also have a greater relevance for thought and action within the Church today. Therefore, we need to analyze what Christian social ethics can gain from the biblical idea of justice, especially in the prophetic and legal traditions of the Bible.

The categorization of Amos' idea of justice under the principles of social ethics is necessary because it would be superfluous to look for themes in the present society which are exactly the same as or are similar to the themes mentioned by the prophets. Similarly, one cannot close one's eyes to a particular social evil just because this category did not exist in the social milieu of the prophets or just because the particular situation did not come under their scrutiny. An understanding of the biblical approach to social injustice using the general principles of social ethics today will help us to actualize them in an effective way in the present. They can show us how the prophetic idea of justice can reflect on the life situations of people today.

Exegesis as an inter-disciplinary task in association with Christian social ethics can help us to make the word of God relevant to our times. It is not possible to find reference texts or similar theological thinking in the Bible as a foundation for all the precepts of applied ethics, because "though the Bible comprises ample ethical material and concrete instructions for how to act in a particular situation, it is not a compendium of morals"⁴, as Konrad Hiplert has pointed out. He recommends: "Its relevance for the concrete questions of today must be established only after detailed interpretation and reworking of the principal thoughts and

³ See the General Introduction for more on the mutually enhancing relationship between Biblical Hermeneutics and Christian social ethics.

⁴ My translation from "Auch die Bibel taugt trotz der zahlreichen ethischen Stoffe und konkreten Handlungsanweisungen, die sich in ihr finden lassen, nicht zum Kompendium der Moral." K. Hiplert, "Die Rolle der Theologie in der Ethik", p. 241.

perspectives (e.g. love, discipleship, justice, truthfulness).”⁵ The relationship between applied ethical reflection and theological hermeneutics can exist in two directions, according to Hilpert:⁶

- i. By making the central love commandment reflect on different life situations.
- ii. By looking back from a problem situation for perspectives and insights that can be relevant for the hermeneutical operation.

Translating these guidelines to our context would mean making the idea of justice expressed in the prophetic social critique reflect on the present situations of life. The latter method refers to looking up from one’s living situation to gain perspectives that could be useful to advance the situation in the light of the idea of justice. These approaches are not mutually exclusive, but are dependent on each other and are complementary.⁷ The following actualization of the message of Amos attempts this hermeneutical endeavor in both directions.

4.1.2. Principle of Personality

Christian social ethics understand human dignity as springing up from the basic biblical understanding that a human person is an image of God (Gen 1,27), with a responsibility to both make use of and to protect the rest of creation (cf. Gen 1,28-29). The traditional understanding of personality had a tendency to be too anthropocentric, considering humankind as the crown of creation with dominion over the rest of creation. This led to uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources and an egocentric approach to co-creation. As a result, the world stands today on the verge of an ecological disaster (see 4.2.2.4 below). Christian social ethics has tried to correct this misconception of the human role in creation, showing that the biblical picture reveals the universe as a communion of all beings, who owe their existence to the creative power of God. Being thankful to the creator implies respect and care for the created. The creation is entrusted to human beings to care for it on behalf of the creator and to make responsible use of it.⁸ Human beings realize their God-given responsibility when this task, i.e., the task of taking care of the co-creation, is fulfilled. Thus the preservation of the integrity of creation is inseparable from the dignity of human beings. In other words, to preserve creation in its integrity is necessary for humans to realize their

⁵ My translation from “Ihre Relevanz für die konkreten Fragen heute muss meistens erst durch aufwändige Interpretation und die Herausarbeitung von leitenden Gedanken und prinzipiellen Perspektiven (beispielweise Liebe, Nachfolge, Gerechtigkeit, Wahrhaftigkeit) hergestellt werden.” K. Hilpert, “Die Rolle der Theologie in der Ethik”, p. 241.

⁶ Cf. K. Hilpert, “Die Rolle der Theologie in der Ethik”, pp. 241-42.

⁷ Cf. K. Hilpert, “Die Rolle der Theologie in der Ethik”, p. 242.

⁸ Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik. Einführung und Prinzipien*, Paderborn / München / Wien et al: Schöningh, 1997, p. 194.

own dignity. In short, the biblical idea of personality means that in communion with God and the created universe, humans possess invaluable dignity.

Amos' understanding of human dignity can add to the above perception. For him the foundation of human dignity is the liberating actions of God in history, of which liberation from Egypt and taking possession of the land are the foundational experiences (see 3.3 above). He understands the role of human persons as advancing in their own personal history the liberating role played by YHWH in their communal history. Protecting the co-creation from everything that denies its dignity is part of the liberating task of every human person.

It is fundamental to the prophetic message to practice justice in the community to protect the right of every person and it flows from the prophetic understanding that each person possesses dignity as a result of liberation by YHWH and is an inheritor of his gift, the land, a sign of a secure and dignified existence in ancient times. YHWH assured his people's freedom, both individual and political (cf. Amos 2,9-10). The prophetic understanding can help us here, once again, to formulate an understanding of personality which is interrelated, more intimately connected to other human persons and co-creation. Land is seen here as a gift of God and has to be taken care of responsibly. It cannot be treated merely as an object of human consumption and means for an indulgent lifestyle. This stance can lead us to a much more eco-friendly approach to nature.

The basic understanding behind the social teaching of the Church on personality is the recognition that "individual human beings are the foundation, the cause and the end of every social institution" (*Mater et magistra*, No. 219). This teaching imbibes the spirit of St. Paul's exhortation in Rom 8,21 that "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (NRSV). As children of God they have the freedom to decide for themselves and to take responsibility for their actions. This responsible freedom makes them autonomous subjects, who have the ability to lead a meaningful life, though always it has to be lived in communication and co-operation with others.⁹ The prophetic preaching equates injustice with a denial of the freedom YHWH intended for mankind from exploitation, oppression and corruption. Amos' critique insists that Israelites shall not deprive their own brethren of the dignity and freedom given by YHWH.

The call of the Church to social justice is at the same time characterized by its conviction that even if a wholehearted attempt is made to establish a just society, where the personality of every individual can develop to its fullness, the fullness of salvation of a human person cannot be seen as this-worldly, but as eschatological, to be realized in the coming of

⁹ Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, p. 181.

the kingdom of God.¹⁰ A transcendental view of individual salvation has led sometimes to viewing the justice envisioned by the notion of Jesus' Kingdom of God as an other-worldly endeavor. This often forced Christians to resign themselves purely to their fate and put up with injustice in the hope of other-worldly reward. This led to the passive acceptance of injustice, and so the fight for human rights and dignity, so precious to the prophetic message, took a backseat. The prophets are concerned, on the other hand, with the aspect of salvation related to this world. They understand "God's reign" over the people as God's will for the liberation of human beings and so as an affirmation of their dignity (see 3.3 above). Thus Amos sees God as actively involved in their present history and predicts his interactions and interventions for condemning and punishing injustice in society. The recollections of YHWH's struggle for justice on behalf of his people help Israel to realize their identity and to take responsibility for one another.

Amos sees the will of God in his involvement in the cause of justice and human rights (cf. 3.3.3 above). Pointing out the inseparable connection between involving oneself for the rights of God and human rights, or in other words, linking one's faith convictions with the recognition of human rights, is Amos' most important contribution to the affirmation of human dignity. The consideration of human beings as subjects possessing freedom and dignity is fundamental to Christian social ethics too. In line with the above prophetic idea, Christian social ethics proposes that every human person created in God's image is destined for freedom and dignity. Translating this principle into the interpersonal and social realm, Christian social ethics views any development in society in terms of its ability to serve the growth and flowering of human personality. According to its precepts, every institution has, in fact, an indispensable duty to create social, political, economic and cultural conditions for the development of human personality. In other words, creating an atmosphere conducive to the meaningful existence of human persons should be the motivating principle of every institution, from a Christian socio-ethical perspective.

Amos calls for an uncompromising stand on human rights. The biblical concept of dignity is identical with the concept of self-respect, which has to be realized through mutual recognition, for which YHWH is the source of inspiration (see 3.3.4 above). Amos thus condemns the unjust practices in his society which humiliated a section of the community and denied people the worth due to them (see 3.1.3 above) as part of YHWH's liberating will for his people. He condemns the use of money to subvert justice, preventing the participation of an individual in normal social and economic activity, and ignoring the interests of the poor in

¹⁰ Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, p. 182.

trade and business. He cites the denial of justice to the weaker sections and the exploitation of women as instances of denial of individual dignity, even going to the extent of associating the dignity of women with the honour of God (see 1.2.2.5 above).

Though the biblical laws implicitly accept slavery and a lower status for women, in keeping with the historical limitations of the time, they lay down regulations respecting the dignity of each individual (see 3.2.3.1 above). The legal response to the crisis, as we saw in the biblical social laws, makes special provision to protect the dignity of slaves. Permanent slavery is abolished (cf. Exod 21,5) and the free choice of the slave was respected in continuing his services to the master (cf. Exod 21,6). A slave had to be offered economic assistance to begin anew (cf. Deut 15,13-14) and the right of a slave to take refuge and to get protected was to be assured (cf. Deut 23,16-17). There are also provisions which are designed to secure the dignity of female slaves and to protect the interests of a wife in cases of polygamy (Exod 21,7-11; Deut 15,12). They were also to be protected against sexual assaults and exploitation (cf. Deut 22,25-29; Lev 19,29). These were laws specifically aimed at the protection of the dignity of slaves, rather than provisions to control them, as we saw in the third chapter.

The realization and fulfillment of a person's potential is possible only in communication and co-operation with other human persons.¹¹ Human beings can attain the existential goals of their lives only through social interaction. Therefore, they need to regulate their conduct in such a way that each person is in a position to participate in social communication and cooperation, which offers them a chance to lead a good life according to their existential goals.¹² Every human person should have the basic conditions for realization of their existential goals and should at the same time recognize that this same right for others is the foundation of human rights.¹³ The concepts of "worth" and "dignity" semantically have the same root meaning in Latin and in German and as Kirchhof points out, "they both acknowledge and appreciate that which makes persons responsible in the community, in their individuality, in their ability to enjoy freedom, and in their personality."¹⁴

¹¹ Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, p. 184. He says, "Die vielfältigen Güter und Werte, an die er im System seiner existentiellen Zwecke verwiesen ist und in denen sich sein Menschsein entfaltet, entstehen und entwickeln sich in zwischenmenschlich-sozialer Interaktion."

¹² Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, p. 184.

¹³ Recognized universally as the protection of human rights, the value of the worth and dignity of human person has attracted global political attention today. For e.g., The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations Organization, 1948.

¹⁴ My translation from "anerkennen und schätzen das, was dem Menschen in seiner Individualität, seiner Fähigkeit zur Freiheit, seiner Persönlichkeit als verantwortlicher Mensch in der Gemeinschaft zukommt." P. Kirchhof, "Menschenrecht und Freiheit", in A. Rauscher (ed.), *Handbuch der Katholischen Soziallehre*, Berlin: Dunker & Humblot, 2008, p. 43.

It is fundamental to the social teaching of the Catholic Church that personal goals have to be regulated and informed by the concerns of justice. As an image of God, every person possesses the freedom to make autonomous decisions for his/her own well-being. He/she should be able to make express his/her inner freedom in his/her external conduct and thereby connect it to the natural and social world.¹⁵ According to Kantian understanding the human rights status of a person is a status of freedom. This fact leads Anzenbacher to conclude the following:

- i. The right has to be so exercised that it offers the maximum subjective freedom of conduct.
- ii. The restriction of freedom is legitimate only in view of the right to freedom of other persons.¹⁶

Rather than advocating equal distribution, Amos insisted on the recognition of the worth of persons (see 3.1.1 above) as the foundation of justice in the society. He understands justice as maintenance of proper relationships in the community based on the mutual recognition of rights, where one person's freedom should not be used to the disadvantage of another (see 3.3.4 above).

At the level of practical social interactions, with which the biblical prophets were most concerned, the principle of personality implies the following:

- i. It is part of the human right of every person that his/her right to plan and lead a meaningful life in the society is respected and upheld. The fundamental socio-economic and cultural rights embrace the right to social security, food, health, house, work and fair working conditions; likewise also the right to rest, education and participation in cultural life.¹⁷ Special consideration has to be given to the protection of the rights of the weaker sections in society, especially the right of women and youth to equal social opportunities and secure working conditions.
- ii. The affirmation of the dignity of human persons and of their rights makes one aware of injustice in society. Every violation of human dignity and denial of rights should prompt one to act to protect them.¹⁸ In this context, the state as the guarantor of these rights has the foremost duty to protect the people who are denied dignity in society.
- iii. It is the basic right of every person to have a healthy environment as part of the material basis for social cooperation. The question of personality and human rights is in no way to be seen as merely anthropocentric. Nature, animals and the environment have their own dignity

¹⁵ Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, p. 189.

¹⁶ Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, p. 189.

¹⁷ Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, p. 189.

¹⁸ Cf. P. Kirchhof, "Menschenrecht und Freiheit", p. 49.

which must be respected. Human beings, being the only organism with the ability to make moral and ethical decisions pertaining to social cooperation, are in fact in a privileged position to take care of the rest of creation.

Thus to conclude we could say that the social critique of Amos offers the following perspectives for the principle of personality as we saw above:

- i. Every human person possesses unalienable dignity and self-respect as liberated by YHWH. It is to be noted that for the prophet the biblical idea of creation is not the source of human dignity and worth, but being part of a liberated community. The foundation just conduct is neither a contract, nor the notion of mutual benefit, but the fact of being liberated by YHWH.
- ii. The dignity of a human person is to be realized in its interrelatedness, especially in the responsible handling of land, which is a gift of God that represents the entire created world.
- iii. The salvation of persons has also a this-worldly dimension, where the creation of a just world order assuring dignified existence for every person is very important.
- iv. The mutual recognition of rights and condemnation of injustice belong to the identity of the people of God.
- v. Human freedom is not unlimited and it has to be realized in a mutually enhancing and just interpersonal relationship.
- vi. A purely anthropological understanding of the concept of human personality is to be avoided. It has to be complemented with the more eco-friendly understanding of the reality.

The exegesis of the social critique of Amos is enriched by its association with the socio-ethical understanding of personality in the following ways:

- i. Exegesis cannot be merely an exercise in textual criticism. It involves an interaction between one's context and the word of God.
- ii. The promotion of mutual recognition of dignity and rights and the condemnation of injustice become the task of biblical exegesis.
- iii. Social ethics helps us to bring out the radical nature of the prophetic message as relevant in the context of today.

Theology today is essentially connected to the issues of human rights and the dignity of human persons. The revelation of God is to be understood as taking place in order to condemn its violations and to promote conditions where a dignified life is possible for every person. Evangelization, then means to "work for the true common good in respecting and promoting the dignity of every person" as *Verbum Domini*, No. 101 states it. The message of the prophets and the social laws can inspire those who involve themselves in social and political life to persevere in their efforts for the recognition of the dignity of human persons

and the integrity of creation. Quoting the social teachings of the Church, the Pope has further affirmed the connection between evangelization and the struggle for human rights:

The Church expresses the hope that by the recognition of these rights human dignity will be more effectively acknowledged and universally promoted, inasmuch as it is a distinctive mark imprinted by the Creator on his creatures, taken up and redeemed by Jesus Christ through his incarnation, death and resurrection. The spread of the word of God cannot fail to strengthen the recognition of, and respect for, the human rights of every person. (*Verbum Domini*, No. 101)

4.1.3. Principle of Solidarity

As our study in the second chapter showed, the disintegration of the sense of solidarity due to socio-political and economic factors was one of the major causes of the crisis addressed by the biblical prophets. The administrative and military machinery of the monarchy created a stratified society. The life of the lower strata became increasingly precarious due to their disadvantageous social position and due to the new mode of production introduced by the monarchy. Their burden of debt increased and they became increasingly alienated in their own society. In the absence of solidarity and any redeeming mechanisms, they were rendered helpless and left alone to plough their lonely furrows. This precarious situation is reflected in the social critique of Amos. He and the other prophets of the time reminded the Israelites of their responsibilities to their fellow Israelites. The prophets exhorted the Israelites to turn to YHWH and to imitate his model of concern for the weak.

While the prophets do not speak directly about the causes for the decline of the solidarity structure of the Israelites, the study of the background to their critique dealt with in the second chapter reveals the following factors:

- i. The increase in population and the emergence of the monarchy caused urbanization and settlements of people without mutually binding genealogical or clan relationships, where individual interests reigned (see 2.2.1 above)
- ii. The traditional redeeming institutions like הֶזְנָה became impracticable in the urbanized and geographically scattered society. In the absence of the mutual supporting systems, the weaker sections of the society, such as the poor and women, became objects of exploitation and manipulation (see 2.2.3 above).
- iii. The administrative and military organization of the monarchy transformed leadership roles and created new offices which lead to a stratified society. The higher classes included officers (*śārîm*), military, servants of the royal court (*'ăḥādîm*), elders (*zəqēnîm*), priests (*kōhānîm*), judges (*šōp̄tîm*) and so on (see 2.2.4 above).

iv. The traditional clan organization with a communal mode of production changed to a tributary mode of production. In the absence of mutual supporting systems, increased borrowing and debt slavery were the order of the day (see 2.2.5 above).

v. The upper class, comprising the ruling class, officers, royal servants and the other upper echelons of the society, were supported by the monarchy for financial and political reasons and were left with a free hand to exploit the lower classes, especially the marginal farmers (see 2.2.1 above).

The prophets found this situation totally contrary to the one intended by YHWH, the founder of their community. It went against his plan of making Israel a liberated community, for which he freed and settled them in the Promised Land. A response to this situation of failing solidarity is found in the response of the prophets and in the biblical social laws.

The call for justice by the prophets in response to this crisis could be presented to the present day society through the socio-ethical principle of solidarity. Such a presentation can effectively convey God's love for the poor, the Church's solidarity with the poor and her will to combat poverty (cf. *Verbum Domini*, No. 107). The spirit of the prophetic critique is fundamental to the socio-ethical principle of solidarity today. The word solidarity comes from the Latin "*solide*" and means the mutual bond and being together of a group. It means the readiness of each member in a community to step in for one another. The word "*solidum*" in fact means "ground" and the concept denotes the awareness of being with others on the same ground or in the same situation and demands a mode of thinking and behaviour that accord with the community.¹⁹ An individual identifies himself/herself with the destiny of the group and accepts responsibility for the other members of the group.

For Amos justice meant the establishment and maintenance of a mutually respectful relationship at the divine-human and human-human levels. He stresses the respect for human rights rather than a covenant, if at all he was aware of this later biblical idea, as the basis of the relationship, and places mutual respect and respect for God as the foundation of it (see 3.1.1 above). Thus Amos' idea of justice shows that like the principle of personality, the principle of solidarity has a global human rights perspective and it makes social cooperation for human rights a duty of every person.²⁰ It means that each person has a duty to protect the interests of those persons and groups in society who are denied justice and just conduct.

Solidarity in ethical terms means that the human beings are personified spirit and body, and require the help of others in order to achieve the possibilities for which the creator

¹⁹ Cf. A. Baumgartner, "Solidarität", in M. Heimbach-Steins (ed.), *Christliche Sozialethik. Ein Lehrbuch*, vol. 1, Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2004, p. 283.

²⁰ Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, pp. 196-97.

has made them. Seen as a socio-ethical principle, it refers to the communal aspect of life, which binds individuals in a group with duties to one another. Christian social ethics goes a step forward from the mere communitarian aspect and finds this solidarity on the belief that every person is an image of God in whom the mystery of God is reflected. The community being a group of such persons, the measure of its strength or weakness depends on how the development of each person as the image of God is promoted and sustained. For Amos, the theological foundation of benevolence towards the other members of the community is the saving interventions of YHWH, which should remind the people to be concerned about the weaker sections in the community (see 3.3.2 above).

Amos' criticism of the luxurious lifestyle of a section of the community, who not only are unconcerned about the plight of the poor, but also make use of the vulnerability of the weak to exploit them for their own economic gain (see 3.1.3 above) demonstrates how solidarity was lacking in his society. He identified the members of the upper class as the perpetrators of injustice. His critique of the stratified society was aimed at protecting the lower classes from shame and humiliation and protesting against the unjust distribution of power in the society, and against exploiting the differences in ranks and gender to the disadvantage of the weak (see 3.1.4 above). He understands solidarity as an affirmation of the dignity of persons, and thus is of special relevance for the people to whom a dignified life is denied due to poverty and exploitation. That the preferential option for the poor, using the term "poor" in a broad sense, is a demand of solidarity is also suggested by Alois Baumgartner.²¹ Amos took it upon himself to defend the interests of the weaker sections of the community and called for solidarity with the victims of various types of injustice, viz., the righteous, the needy or destitute, the poor, the afflicted, the debtor and a young servant girl, who was the victim of abuse and exploitation by those entrusted to protect her.

Baumgartner points out that the option for the poor in the new theology has not only a charity dimension but also a structural dimension in its call for just economic structures,²² which is evident in Amos' social critique too (see 3.1.3 above). It follows from the fact that the plight of the poor today is, to a large extent, caused by unjust economic and political structures just as in the days of Amos.²³ The biblical social laws prohibit the practice of taking interest on loans within the Israelite community and the exploitation of the practice of pledging things as they are not supposed to exploit the financial vulnerability of others (see 3.2.3.2 above).

²¹ Cf. A. Baumgartner, "Solidarität", pp. 290-91.

²² Cf. A. Baumgartner, "Solidarität", p. 291.

²³ Cf. M. Vogt, *Globale Nachbarschaft*, p. 23.

The solidarity that aims to maintain the dignity of human persons also seeks to effect lasting change. Solidarity must be established in institutions and organizations of social and political life. It is thus a structural principle and basic to the right constitution of society.²⁴ Just practice within countries with regard to their structures is important. Production oriented towards world markets is a danger to solidarity with the poor in a country.²⁵ The biblical call for interest free loans and restrictions on pledging things invites an innovative approach in today's banking. Lending on interest should not worsen the plight of the poor borrower, but it should be an opportunity to save him/her from the economic crisis (see 3.2.3.2 above). The loan should be an expression of solidarity rather than an occasion of exploitation.

As a socio-ethical concept, solidarity not only deals with the sharing of individuals in the destiny of the group, but also with the changes that take place in the basic necessities of life and the structural deficits which affect common sharing. A just distribution of goods and responsibilities among individuals of the community is an important part of the idea of solidarity. It calls for social justice with social structures of distribution of political rights and socio-economic goods, which are necessary for individual life and for participation in social life.²⁶ The seventh year rest and the Jubilee Year recommended by biblical social laws combined social with ecological imperatives, ensuring both the noble practice of preserving the fertility of the land and the sustenance of the poor and the weak; this required self-control and renunciation from the part of the rich (see 3.2.3.4 above) as an expression of solidarity with their less fortunate brothers and sisters.

To sum up we can say that the idea of justice envisaged by Amos and the biblical social laws have the following bearings on the principle of solidarity:

- i. Amos finds mutually respectful relationship as the foundation of solidarity in society.
- ii. He cites YHWH's saving interventions on behalf of Israel as the basis of concern for the weaker sections.
- iii. He condemns the unjust social structures that worsen the plight of the poor, whom he understands as the victims of various sorts of deprivation.
- iv. The biblical social laws prohibit the exploitation of the vulnerable situation of a member of the community for financial advantages and make the common welfare, rather than profit, the principle of business.

²⁴ Cf. A. Baumgartner, "Solidarität", p. 291.

²⁵ Cf. M. Vogt, *Globale Nachbarschaft*, p. 25.

²⁶ Cf. W. Veith, "Gerechtigkeit", in M. Heimbach-Steins (ed.), *Christliche Sozialethik. Ein Lehrbuch*, vol. 1, Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2004, p. 320.

v. The Sabbath and Jubilee laws are the clearest examples of solidarity, where the Israelites were mutually obliged to redeem debt-ridden members of the community.

Social ethics offers the following possibilities of actualization to the biblical message:

- i. To promote a mode of thinking and behaving that accord with the community.
- ii. To strive to establish just economic and social structures that can better the plight of the poor and weak.
- iii. To organize the financial dealings, especially loans, as expression of solidarity rather than occasion of exploitation.
- iv. To call for just distribution of political rights and socio-economic goods and services to promote participation of all.
- v. To promote self-regulation on the part of the rich as an expression of solidarity with the poor.

4.1.4. Principle of Subsidiarity

One of the characteristics of the social critique of the book of Amos is the recognition of the existence of disadvantaged sections in the community, who are denied opportunities to a decent human existence. They are unable to take responsibility for their own lives because of the oppressive situation in which they find themselves. We saw that the changes that took place in the social and political context of the time were not supportive of individual initiative and development of the weaker sections. The establishment of monarchy brought into existence a centralized administration which affected the clan based organization, which had hitherto promoted small group initiatives with care for each individual. The changes affected the subsidiary structures in the following way:

- i. The urbanization and population growth caused the creation of new settlements and towns, where the people had to settle down without any organizational support from their subsidiary clan organizations. In the absence of this support, they lost their identity and the ability to organize their life culturally, socially and economically (see 2.2.1 above).
- ii. The increased building activities and heavy taxes eroded the financial security of the marginal farmers and led to heavy borrowing and debt slavery (see 2.2.5 above). Some of the kings even employed forced labour (see 2.2.2 above).

In this context, the social critique of Amos make special reference to people who are denied a meaningful existence because their interests were harmed by manipulation in the judicial, economic and social spheres. The following instances find special mention:

- i. The denial of judicial rights by selling of the just and needy or unjust judicial judgements obtained against them by bribing judges or by use of false testimonies. They are sold into debt

slavery for minor debts through judicial manipulation (see 1.2.2.2 above). The poor are trampled upon deliberately by denying what is legitimate to them (see 1.2.2.3 above).

ii. By denying the humble in society opportunities to determine their destiny/way (see 1.2.2.4 above).

iii. The burden of taxation caused increased borrowing by disadvantaged groups and an unjust lending system worked to their disadvantage. Failure to repay loans led to the loss of mortgaged land and properties (cf. 2.2.5 above). The debt trap so created forced the people to sell themselves as slaves, deprived of any further freedom to organize the economic aspect of their lives.

The prophetic message in this context that the weaker sections deserve a healthy environment devoid of exploitation and injustice to develop their own potential and God-given talents and to maintain their traditions is of greater relevance today. The implication of this message for the present day can be better drawn out through the premises and criteria of the socio-ethical principle of subsidiarity.

Fundamental to Christian socio-ethical understanding of subsidiarity is the conviction that human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, have an inseparable worth and dignity. The prophetic understanding adds a key element to this understanding. The innate dignity of every individual in an unjust situation is to be realized through a mutual recognition of freedom. This recognition consists in each person respecting another as someone who enjoys similar characteristics and abilities. Mutual respect and recognition of rights form the foundation of dignity of a person (see 3.3.4 above).

A community is not a faceless mass, but a union of individual persons, who have the responsibility to foster this union and at the same time hold the right to preserve their individuality. They have the right to be supported by the community in this effort. In this sense, the principle of subsidiarity is obviously also a principle of rights.²⁷ In a society where individual interests and community interests counteract each other the principle tries to define what exactly the duties of the individual and the community are. *Gaudium et spes* says that social order and its development must work towards the lasting welfare of persons (cf. No. 26). Here the distinction made by Amos with regard to the prosperity of the land and individual well-being is of great importance. Amos refused to identify the prosperity of a single section of the community with the prosperity of his country and called for an inclusive

²⁷ Cf. O. von Nell-Breuning, *Baugesetze der Gesellschaft. Solidarität und Subsidiarität*, Freiburg: Herder, 1990, p. 116.

concept of justice where the interests of the weaker sections are also represented (see 3.1.2 above).

We are familiar with the word “subsidy”, which is often used to refer to the help offered by a state to support farmers and businesses in times of need. Following the same concept, the principle of subsidiarity means first of all that the community has the duty to help an individual to achieve that which the individual, left to himself/herself, is not in a position to achieve. The principle attempts to allocate the roles of individuals and community in a just way. Secondly, the principle also requires that the community shall not take over the roles which the individual persons, left to themselves, can play;²⁸ at the same time, the community should help individual members of the group to attain what they are not able to achieve on their own. If the community takes over the individual’s roles, it would deprive people of the chance to act on their own initiative. Therefore it is necessary to let them do what they can in the family and in society. Help from the community is not to be a substitute for but to add to the individual initiatives.²⁹ Though Amos invited his fellow Israelites to assume responsibility for themselves and for others, his critique does not have a strong call invoking individual responsibility on the part of the weaker classes.

The Catholic Church, in its first reference to the principle of subsidiarity in *Quadragesimo anno*, No. 80 stresses the importance of the state to restricting its role in areas where smaller units can manage for themselves and calls upon it to decentralize its functions:

The supreme authority of the State ought, therefore, to let subordinate groups handle matters and concerns of lesser importance, which would otherwise dissipate its efforts greatly. Thereby the State will more freely, powerfully, and effectively do all those things that belong to it alone because it alone can do them: directing, watching, urging, restraining, as occasion requires and necessity demands. Therefore, those in power should be sure that the more perfectly a graduated order is kept among the various associations, in observance of the principle of “subsidiary function,” the stronger social authority and effectiveness will be the happier and more prosperous the condition of the State.

The Encyclical thus emphasizes the need to have intermediary social structures between state and individual persons so that the individual person is not directly confronted by the imposing might of the state. Even though the prophetic social critique emerges in the background of the monarchy transforming traditional subsidiary structures into a centralized and impersonal administrative set-up, a clear and definite critique of the oppressive political structures and the

²⁸ Taking away what the person is able to do on his own initiative is equal to robbery. Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, p. 212.

²⁹ Cf. Oswald von Nell-Breuning, *Baugesetze der Gesellschaft*, p. 92.

overarching government structure is missing in the prophetic critique. The social encyclicals of recent decades have made a significant contribution in this regard.

Mater et magistra, No. 117 speaks about whether the state should take a larger role in the name of common welfare, and whether that aim is fulfilled in reality:

The State and other agencies of public law must not extend their ownership beyond what is clearly required by considerations of the common good properly understood, and even then there must be safeguards. Otherwise private ownership could be reduced beyond measure, or, even worse, completely destroyed.

The government has the responsibility of assuring a meaningful and peaceful existence for its citizens, but it has no right to take away the roles which people can fulfil themselves.³⁰ In that way the principle of subsidiarity is used to protect small and local communities from the might of bureaucratic administration.³¹

Though Amos does not mention the state and its role in the exploitation of the people, the biblical thinking on monarchy is against the oppressive rule of man over man. It replaces human rule with the concept of “reign of God” which is an effective subversion of totalitarian regimes (see 3.3 above). The prophets present the relationship between the sovereign YHWH and the people through the metaphor of love and marriage rather than authority and power. YHWH’s claim over the actions of the people is the liberating role that he has played in their history and not military might and economic superiority. His continued rule is manifested among his people in his continued intervention to punish injustice and to protect the interests of the weak. The importance which biblical understanding places on the role of the people of God rather than the king as the only representative of God (see 3.3 above) advocates the decision-making power of the people over a totalitarian monarch. This approach calls for subsidiary administrative structures in all areas of civil and cultural life including the Church’s internal administrative and decision-making structures.

The principle of subsidiarity stresses that the individual should not be deprived of what he/she can do on his/her own initiative and ability for the sake of community initiatives. It is against justice when what small and non-statutory communities are capable of accomplishing is challenged by statutory bodies. It is disadvantageous and confuses the whole social order (cf. *Quadragesimo anno*, No. 79). It has a bearing on the structure of social and governmental institutions as Thomas Bohrmann points out: “The principle of subsidiarity expresses how social structures are ordered with and under one another and how the roles have to be shared. Generally speaking, the subsidiarity principle deals with responsibility and

³⁰ Cf. O. von Nell-Breuning, *Baugesetze der Gesellschaft*, p. 88.

³¹ Cf. M. Vogt, *Globale Nachbarschaft*, pp. 28-29.

organization.”³² As an organizational principle it proposes that the larger and higher structures must stay in the service of the smaller and lower structures. On the other hand, as a principle of self-responsibility, it promotes the competence of the smaller social structures.³³ The Bible recommends institutions and customs that promote the protection of the smaller units in society. Foremost among them is the idea of Jubilee, which was designed to restore the dignity of people who had lost their land and personal freedom. The protection of the subsidiary clan and family organizations, which were the foundation of traditional Israelite tribal society, against globalizing tendencies was another motivating factor behind the Jubilee observations.

By using a multifaceted terminology to refer to the deprived sections, Amos brings not only the economically poor, but also all those who suffer under any kind of deprivations, under the umbrella of those who are denied justice (see 3.1.2 above). He called for an end to ill-treatment of these sections, so that they can take responsibility for their own lives. It follows from this idea of justice that the youth, women and other weaker sections in the community should be helped to help themselves. Initiatives to create more employment opportunities, the empowerment of women and youth and also measures for the protection of nature are to be developed locally by the people involved. This requires creation of sufficient employment opportunities locally and skills development to allow people to qualify for the jobs so that they do not have to depend on outside help. As Nell-Breuning points out, “self-help is better than outside help because the former stimulates abilities and liberates while the outside help can make people inactive and careless”.³⁴

With regard to subsidiary social structures, as Anzenbacher points out, social structures did not exist for themselves, but in order to serve the welfare of individuals and therefore it is necessary to order this sphere so to optimize the conditions of the life for individuals in an efficient and participative way.³⁵ It means that organization of the social and political spheres should provide for participation and shared responsibility in line with the principle of subsidiarity. A decentralized and citizen-friendly political administration is thus an integral part of the subsidiarity principle.

³² My translation from “Der Subsidiaritätsgedanke drückt aus, wie die sozialen Gebilde zueinander bzw. untereinander geordnet und wie die Kompetenzen verteilt werden sollen. Allgemein gesprochen ist das Subsidiaritätsprinzip ein Zuständigkeits- und Organisationsprinzip.” T. Bohmann, “Subsidiarität”, in M. Heimbach-Steins (ed.), *Christliche Sozialethik. Ein Lehrbuch*, vol. 1, Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2004, p. 295.

³³ Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, p. 213.

³⁴ My translation from “... dass Selbsthilfe besser ist als Fremdhilfe, weil die Selbsthilfe Kräfte weckt und entbindet, die bei Fremdhilfe in Untätigkeit bleiben und schließlich verkümmern...” O. von Nell-Breuning, *Baugesetze der Gesellschaft*, p. 87.

³⁵ Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, pp. 217-18.

One of the conditions of the principle of equal justice is to compensate for unequal conditions and to secure people against unforeseen changes in life.³⁶ A welfare state naturally has a better chance of achieving this goal. Nevertheless the support of the state should be so organized that it is not hindered by the bureaucratic and other administrative machinery, and “the ability of the society to decentralized self-organization is not restricted.”³⁷ Therefore a pre-state initiative is recommended because it “has the advantage that it maintain far more face to face contacts, where there is less possibility of cheating compared to centralized regulation and abstract bureaucracy.”³⁸ It is here that the developmental activities of the Church and other voluntary organizations are important. The social laws of the Bible are particularly concerned with protecting the interests of the deprived sections of society. The social laws regarding gleaning aimed at establishing a support system which would not allow the vulnerable and landless members to be poor (see 3.2.3.4 above).

In postmodern times, the over-emphasis on the concept of the welfare state and the overarching umbrella of globalization tend to curb individual initiatives. The globalized economy sounds a death knell to small scale enterprises and small group initiatives. Pope Benedict XVI warns against these tendencies and recommends subsidiarity as a remedy:

By considering reciprocity as the heart of what it is to be a human being, subsidiarity is the most effective antidote against any form of all-encompassing welfare state. It is able to take account both of the manifold articulation of plans – and therefore of the plurality of subjects – as well as the coordination of those plans. Hence the principle of subsidiarity is particularly well-suited to managing globalization and directing it towards authentic human development. In order not to produce a dangerous universal power of a tyrannical nature, *the governance of globalization must be marked by subsidiarity*, articulated into several layers and involving different levels that can work together. (*Caritas in veritate*, No. 57).

For Amos, in fact, the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity are two sides of the same coin. They entail removing oppression and exploitation as an expression of an existence in solidarity, so that individuals can take up responsibility for themselves to grow as dignified human beings. They form a unity and are complementary.³⁹ Von Nell-Breuning calls them “*Seinsprinzipien*”⁴⁰ (principles of being) which means that they are both founded in human nature, of their very being as dignified persons and social beings. These two laws form the

³⁶ Cf. M. Vogt, “Soziale Interaktion und Gerechtigkeit”, in W. Korff et al (eds.), *Handbuch der Wirtschaftsethik*, vol. 1, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009, p. 297.

³⁷ My translation from “... dass die dezentralen Selbstorganisationskräfte der Gesellschaft möglichst wenig blockiert werden.” M. Vogt, “Soziale Interaktion und Gerechtigkeit”, p. 298.

³⁸ My translation from “... hat zugleich den Vorteil, dass diese vielfach face-to-face Beziehungen einschließen, die wesentlich wenig betrugsgefährdet sind als zentralstaatliche Regelungen über „abstrakte“ Bürokrationen.” M. Vogt, “Soziale Interaktion und Gerechtigkeit”, p. 299.

³⁹ Cf. O. von Nell-Breuning, *Baugesetze der Gesellschaft*, p. 114.

⁴⁰ O. von Nell-Breuning, *Baugesetze der Gesellschaft*, p. 114.

fundamental laws of society. Anzenbacher warns of the danger in interpreting the subsidiarity principle merely as a principle of self-responsibility, deregulation, de-socialization, privatization and decentralization, so that the poor are left to help themselves. He says: “The subsidiarity principle has much more *a function of common welfare*, in the service of the social welfare order. It is a direction to the realization of common welfare and it is not by chance that it takes its name from offer of help.”⁴¹ The only general criteria that we can offer to distinguish between social help and self-responsibility is: “as much as possible – as much as necessary”⁴² and in deciding this competence, the affected social units should have a greater say (cf. *Quadragesimo anno*, No. 80).

To conclude we can say that God’s call for justice in an unjust situation meant for Amos taking a stand on the side of the weaker sections, which meant eliminating corruption and perversions, so that justice can be dispensed impartially. Rather than calling for charity, he called for the removal of obstacles placed in the way of development. Nussbaum too depicts injustice as capability deprivation and explains the content of this approach:

The capabilities approach goes straight to the content of the outcome, looks at it, and asks whether it seems compatible with a life in accordance with human (or, later, animal) dignity. This structure permits us to look at a wide range of problems and situations in which issues of justice may be lurking.⁴³

She has described ten central human capabilities⁴⁴ some of which have similarities to Amos’ idea of justice concerning the deprived sections. These categories can help us to understand what Amos’ concept of justice means for the principle of subsidiarity today. I have combined some of the capabilities described by Nussbaum, which I find relevant for an association with the ideas of Amos, into five categories given below:

- i. The foremost capability required today is the ability to live a normal life. It requires practical reasoning or the ability to engage in critical reflection about planning one’s life. In Amos’ idea of justice a normal life is possible when oppression and exploitation are absent and a positive environment is created for a dignified life.
- ii. Being able to have good bodily health and emotional development without fear and anxiety. Amos includes people suffering from physical and mental misery among the deprived sections who needed to be treated with dignity. Persons suffering under various kinds of deprivations are denied a dignified life.

⁴¹ My translation from “Vielmehr steht das Subsidiaritätsprinzip *in Funktion des Gemeinwohls*, im Dienst sozialer Wohlordnung. Es ist eine Richtlinie zur Gemeinwohlverwirklichung und hat seinen Namen nicht zufällig von der Hilfestellung.” A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, p. 214.

⁴² Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, p. 214.

⁴³ M.C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, p. 87.

⁴⁴ Cf. M.C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, pp. 76-78.

iii. A right to bodily integrity, implying protection against violent assaults including sexual assaults and domestic violence. Amos too condemned the sexual exploitation of a defenseless working girl and thereby called for the protection of women and weaker sections against physical violence and other dehumanizing practices.

iv. Freedom to use one's senses, imagination and thoughts to further one's aesthetic, religious and political aspirations and the ability to control one's political and material environment. Amos condemns judicial manipulation and the misuse of money and power to subvert the destiny of the weaker sections. He took on the upper classes of society who humiliated the weaker sections. His protest against the upper classes is a criticism of unequal distribution of power in society. He envisioned a society where the interests of all are protected.

v. Affiliation or the ability to live in respect and dignity with others and the ability to live in harmony with other species. Amos' inclusion of people subjected to various kinds of deprivation opens up an inclusive vision of justice. Amos condemned the misuse of relationships in the community to humiliate some sections of the society.

The above analysis of the socio-ethical principle of subsidiarity can also help to contribute to the interpretation of Amos' social critique, which emerged in the background of centralized monarchy, by proposing ways in which political structures can be organized to provide for participation and shared responsibility in postmodern society. It can also propose how individuals can be protected through small group initiatives against globalizing tendencies.

4.1.5. Principle of Sustainability

It could be said that it is pure imagination to relate the social critique of Amos to the modern socio-ethical concept of sustainability. It is true that the biblical prophets were not faced with the modern problem of sustainability, which is a product of the uncontrolled exploitation of nature through human hands during recent centuries. Some of the associations that could be made with the contemporary problem should be considered more poetic than lexicographic or factual. The central point of connection is the prophetic stand on behalf of the dignity of human beings. In the Bible this dignity is derived from their intrinsic role to protect and preserve the created world in integrity.

Another association that connects the concept of sustainability with the prophetic criticism is the strong prophetic conviction that injustice and unjust systems, which ignore the well-being of fellow human beings, especially that of the weaker sections of the community, cannot last. The punishment, which is referred to as destruction, abandonment and exile, is an integral part of the social critique of Amos. Amos is certain that the irresponsible actions of

the Israelites will have consequences for their future. His convictions on this theme reflect what the Bible says in the context of religious syncretism, but sound very realistic in the context of the functioning of ecology: “I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me.” (Exod 20,5 NRSV) The sins against justice are something for which the present as well as the future generations have to pay. As we saw in the first chapter, the following passages in the book of Amos deal with this aspect:

- i. One of the stylistic aspects of the social oracles dealing with the crisis is a warning regarding the future (cf. 2,13-16; 4,2b-3; 5,11.16-17; 6,7.8e-11.14; 8,8-14). The use of the element of a judgment speech such as *lākēn* “therefore” in 5,11.16 and in 6.7 (see 1.4.4; 1.5.4 above), The *futurum instans hinnē(h)* “behold”/“see” + personal pronoun + participle in 2,13a (see 1.2.4 above) and *kî hinnē(h)* “then behold” in 4,2b or the swearing by YHWH in 4,2a and 8.7a (see 1.3.3; 1.6.3 above) indicate the warning that the unjust actions have consequences and that their land, their cities and the people in them will have to bear the brunt. These will lead to the punitive intervention of YHWH through the forces of this world and utter destruction.
- ii. The Israel oracle uses the powerful image of a heavily loaded cart, a symbol of prosperity, paradoxically getting stuck in the ground and unable to move forward (cf. 2,13). This imagery conveys the message that the oppressive and self-serving structures that deny a meaningful existence to the weaker sections and show contempt for the will of YHWH, cannot be sustained (see 1.2.4 above).
- iii. The predicted military defeat in 2,14-16, once again, is a sign of the undoing of the life of prosperity which ignores the norms of social justice (see 1.2.4 above).
- iv. The prediction of exile in 4,2b-3 and 6,7 shows that God will definitively intervene to punish the people responsible for the oppression and self-indulgent living (see 1.3.4; 1.5.4 above).
- v. The prediction of the futility of construction and agricultural activities in 5,11bc, shows that the rich will not be able to enjoy their wealth accumulated by unlawful means. Instead, an all pervasive mourning will reverse the destiny of the people of Israel as we read in 5,16-17 and 8,10a (see 1.4.4; 1.6.3 above).
- vi. The necessary consequence of a life spent without trusting in God and without caring for fellow human beings is devastation of their city, famines, and oppression by another nation as we read in 6,8e-11.14 (see 1.5.4 above).

vii. The oracles and sayings predict also terrestrial and celestial catastrophe with “trembling of the earth”, “quaking of the land”, “tossing up and sinking of the River of Egypt” and “the turning of light into darkness” as means used by YHWH to punish the people for their unjust conduct in 8,8-10 (see 1.6.3 above).

viii. The defeat and fall of Israel brought about by YHWH on account of its unjust conduct reaches its climax in the fall of “the young men” and “beautiful young girls” thus severely affecting the future of its young generation in 8,13-14 (see 1.6.3 above).

An anthropocentric approach towards creation springing from the creation story in Gen 1,28-29 with the three privileges offered to human beings “to subdue”, “to have dominion” and “to have/possess them” with regard to the rest of created universe has led to a rather negative approach to nature. Mindless exploitation of natural resources in a greedy pursuit of more profits and absolute disregard for the preservation of the ecology in pursuit of luxury living have characterized man’s approach to the environment. Of late, biblical interpreters have tried to explain the role of mankind in terms of guarding and caring for the rest of creation rather than dominating and exploiting. The official teachings of the Church too have made efforts to change the previous approach in the light of impending dangers to the sustainability of the universe.

It is here that the social critique of the prophets has an indirect bearing on the principle of sustainability. Amos’ critique witnesses to the fact that over-exploitation of the land and its produce to support the luxurious life-style is not going to help them. He criticizes those who build houses of hewn stones and those who cultivate vineyards (5,11; see 1.4.2.3 above). He predicts the destruction of winter houses, summer houses and houses of ivory (cf. 3,15). One finds a similar critique also in Isa 5,8-10:

Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land! The LORD of hosts has sworn in my hearing: Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield a mere ephah. (NRSV)

Now both Amos and Isaiah are criticizing the social injustice related to exploitation of the poor and leading extravagant lives in the above mentioned instances. They were not faced with ecological problems in their days as the population was much less than in modern times. However if we use the above instances analytically we can draw a parallel with the luxurious lifestyle of our own days where the over-exploitation of the natural resources to support a consumerist lifestyle poses a threat to the continued existence of the universe.

Added to above, as Hüttermanns point out, the prophetic critique may also reflect here the traditional wisdom of the Israelite farmers and point out the consequences of ecologically harmful practices: the lining up of houses on houses by a few persons deprives large numbers of people of a dwelling place and aggressive building activity causes reactions in nature that would be very harmful to their own existence;⁴⁵ similarly, overproduction is harmful to the vineyard as the productivity of the vineyard would be drastically reduced. Here the first argument of Hüttermanns that the lining up of houses on houses by a few persons deprived others of a dwelling place is highly improbable as the population was too small during the time of the prophets to cause any ecological concern. However, in the second instance, by bringing into our notice the healthy ecological practices of the ancient Israelites of not exhausting the vineyard by overproduction, the authors point out, once again, how the prophets combine ecological issues with social problems (see 3.2.3.4 above). To preserve nature in integrity and to solve the problem of poverty, the prophetic solution is self-regulation and moderation. In their opinion it is the greed of the rich and their luxurious life that causes the maximum harm to the others. The implication of their stance for the present with regard to agricultural and business activities today is that only such investments should be encouraged that have a social and ecological usefulness.⁴⁶

The call for sustainable development took an important turn with the exhortation of the “Earth Summit” of the United Nations Conference for Development and Environment, 1992 for the integration of ecological, economic and social factors in political decisions. Modern society has thought for the recent centuries that development meant maximization of positive knowledge, economic production and individual freedom. The industrial society therefore, has striven only for increase in production of goods. This led to a tremendous swell in production and to consumer oriented and need oriented trade practices and Markus Vogt points out: “Due to the limited capacity of the ecology to support such development, it has no future in the long run.”⁴⁷ Questions of social justice and ecological sustenance have taken a back seat, but the glaring inequalities in society and the recognition of the ecological crisis have shown that this outlook is defective and needs to be corrected. There is now a realization that future development must integrate and order in a new way economic efficiency, ecological sustenance and the questions of social justice.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Cf. A.P. Hüttermann / A.H. Hüttermann, *Am Anfang war die Ökologie*, p. 60.

⁴⁶ Cf. C. Felber, *Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie*, p. 36.

⁴⁷ My translation from “Aufgrund der begrenzten Tragekapazität der ökologischen Systeme ist diese Entwicklung aber auf Dauer nicht zukunftsfähig.”, M. Vogt, “Soziale Interaktion und Gerechtigkeit”, p. 300.

⁴⁸ Cf. M. Vogt, “Institutionen als Organisationsformen menschlichen Handelns”, in W. Korff et al (eds.), *Handbuch der Wirtschaftsethik*, vol. 1, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009, p. 276.

The prophetic warnings against the selfish and egoistic lifestyle of the people and its direct impact on their future, on the sustainability of their nation and their nature could be associated to the socio-ethical principle of sustainability. This principle was used originally in association with a model of agriculture which aimed for an equitable production and for the preservation of forests.⁴⁹ The native American proverb which says, “We have not inherited the earth from our fathers; we have hired it from our children” expresses the fundamental understanding of this concept. Accordingly, this principle respects the claim of the future generations to the earth and her resources and aims at a sustainable and thus enduring development that secures the future (cf. *For a Future Founded on Solidarity and Justice*,⁵⁰ No. 122). The prophetic understanding of a lasting existence is based more on a mutually caring existence. They predicted that the exploitation of the weak to satisfy the exaggerated needs of the powerful is catastrophic for their future. In line with their critique, sustainable development calls for solidarity against egoism and puts the goods of nature at the service of all. The German bishops have stressed considering sustainability of nature and preserving the integrity of creation as the urgent concerns of Christian social ethics in their recommendation:

Christian social ethics must do more to raise awareness of the interconnectedness of social, economic and ecological problems than it has in the past. It must combine the basic idea of preserving the integrity of creation with that of shaping the world, thereby situating all social processes within the all-embracing network of nature. Only in this way can humanity be accountable to subsequent generations. This is what the key concept of sustainable development is about. (*For a Future Founded on Solidarity and Justice*, No. 122)

In the practice of Sabbatical Year the social laws of the Bible recognized the importance of retaining the sacred custom of not cultivating the land periodically in order to regain its productivity as a sustainable practice of agriculture (see 3.2.3.4 above). The biblical law has joined this with the concern for the deprived sections of the society. The law of Sabbath is thus a twofold fight against egoism: against the excessive exploitation of the land and against lack of concern for the poor. These sustainable practices could maintain high fertility of the land in this region, one of the best in the world, in those days and even after 2000 years as Hüttermanns claim.⁵¹ The Jubilee release announced by the social laws views land as belonging to God in eternity and given to human beings as stewards, who have no right to deny others ownership or to seize land permanently from another Israelite. The

⁴⁹ Cf. W. Veith, “Nachhaltigkeit”, in M. Heimbach-Steins (ed.), *Christliche Sozialethik: Ein Lehrbuch*, vol. 1, Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2004, p. 302.

⁵⁰ Full title: *For a Future Founded on Solidarity and Justice, A Statement of the Evangelical Church in Germany and the German Bishops' Conference on the Economic and Social Situation in Germany*, 1997.

⁵¹ Cf. A.P. Hüttermann / A.H. Hüttermann, *Am Anfang war die Ökologie*, p. 65.

consideration of the land as a gift of God required from the Israelites that they handle it with respect and that the right of others to this gift be respected.

A meaningful participation of local people in business is possible only when an environment is created where native communities are able to realize and promote their own capabilities. This will help the deprived sections to have better possibilities of a meaningful existence by concentrating on social and cultural factors, so that they are able to discover and develop their own potentialities: Markus Vogt has made this point clear when he says:

The success of the modern economy should not be primarily measured by how much it produces and what profit it makes, but by whether it offers jobs for all and strives to integrate in a better way the abilities of many hundred millions of people who are unemployed and are extremely poor.⁵²

A proclamation of the prophetic message of justice, which warns mankind of the terrible consequences of egoism and greed, can serve as a powerful reminder of their responsibility to preserve the integrity of creation today.

The contribution of the prophetic idea of justice and the social laws to the principle of sustainability could be summed up as follows:

- i. The motive behind the principle of sustainability is treating the fellow creation with respect as having a God-given dignity, and recognizing this dignity.
- ii. The prophets reject an excessively anthropocentric approach to the created universe and condemn the undue exploitation of natural resources to support profit making and luxury life.
- iii. The prophetic idea of sustainability calls for a fight against egoism, and sees the principle as more than just a means to preserve natural resources for future generations, though the latter, in itself, is a noble motive.
- iv. They value the spirit of self-regulation and abstinence in dealing with over-exploitation of the resources of the nature.
- v. Their critique reminds us that developmental activities should be evaluated not only from the point of view of the ability to make profit, but also from their ecological viability.
- vi. The preservation of a mutually sustaining existence that was a noble tradition of the tribal solidarity is reflected in the prophetic critique.
- vii. The biblical laws recommended a respectful treatment of the land through periodical rest and prohibited permanent alienation of land.

⁵² My translation from “Der Erfolg moderner Wirtschaft sollte nicht primär daran gemessen werden, wie viele Güter sie produziert und welche Gewinne sie abwirft, sondern daran, ob sie gute Arbeit für alle bietet und die Fähigkeiten der vielen hundert Millionen Menschen, die arbeitslos und extrem arm sind, besser zu integrieren vermag.” M. Vogt, “Die Stärke der Schwachen. Vorstudien zu einem sozialetischen Programm”, *MThZ* 60 (2009), p. 8.

The socio-ethical principle of sustainability helps us to make the prophetic critique on egoism and luxurious lifestyle relevant in postmodern times also by pointing out the ecological catastrophe such a lifestyle has brought upon mankind. The principle calls for sustainable ways of taking care of the land and doing business so that the earth can be preserved in its integrity and the sustenance of the millions of the poor in the world can be better assured. The principle also reminds one of the claims of future generations on the resources of the earth and calls for a form of development which ensures its future.

4.2. Actualization of the Message for the Tribal People of Chotanagpur, India

At this final stage of a contextualized interpretation the implications go far beyond the literal meaning or even the intended meaning of the biblical texts. The Biblical Commission's Document on "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" has also proposed the idea of actualizing the biblical text in the life of the Church. The Document mentions the fact that "... very early texts have been re-read in the light of new circumstances and applied to the contemporary situation of the People of God."⁵³ The Commission finds such an actualization indispensable

because, although their message is of lasting value, the biblical texts have been composed with respect to circumstances of the past and in language conditioned by a variety of times and seasons. To reveal their significance for men and women of today, it is necessary to apply their message to contemporary circumstances and to express it in language adapted to the present time. This presupposes a hermeneutical endeavour, the aim of which is to go beyond the historical conditioning so as to determine the essential points of the message.⁵⁴

In this attempt it would be unimaginative and, to a great extent, futile if we try to take the words spoken hundreds of years ago and apply them word for word to a community that lives in an entirely different situation. It is necessary to understand here the patterns running through the prophetic words expressing the saving will of God for the practice of justice and the dignified treatment of others, and apply the same patterns for conduct in the community today.

The actualization of the prophetic idea of justice has also significance for Christian social ethics. Theological ethics is oriented towards application⁵⁵ and what the social critique of the prophets and the biblical social laws can offer to us is a way to achieve that. Hipert remarks:

Applied ethics as part of theological ethics is indispensable from active hermeneutics and it adds a creative element. But the "theology-ness" of the

⁵³ *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, pp. 170-71.

⁵⁴ *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 171.

⁵⁵ Cf. K. Hilpert, "Die Rolle der Theologie in der Ethik", p. 229.

theological ethics does not proceed here from specific biblical or Christian norms alone but from its ability to observe those involved – individual with own biographies and development, specific experiences and capacity for ethical insight.⁵⁶

Therefore, the actualization is a creative endeavour springing from the biblical text, but whose message is embodied in the concrete life of the community.

I would propose to proceed according to the following guidelines proposed by the Biblical Commission:⁵⁷

- i. “To hear the Word of God from within one’s own concrete situation”: the actualization is made for a concrete community. The exegete has to make himself/herself familiar with the various aspects of the life of this community.
- ii. “To identify the aspects of the present situation highlighted or put in question by the biblical text”: it involves identifying the aspects of the present situation of the community, which are enlightened by the biblical text or are challenged by it.
- iii. “To draw from the fullness of meaning contained in the biblical text those elements capable of advancing the present situation in a way that is productive and consonant with the saving will of God in Christ”.⁵⁸

4.2.1. Description of the Destination Community for Actualization

As said above, for an actualization of a biblical text, the first requirement is to hear the text in the context of a specific community. The community for which I intend to actualize the socio-critical message of Amos is a tribal community, living in the region of Chotanagpur in the central and eastern parts of India. I limit my analysis to the tribal situation in this region because I am more familiar with the tribes in this area. Moreover, the situation of the tribes is not much different elsewhere in India and therefore, the implications of the following interpretation have relevance for most of the tribal population of India. It will be useful first to describe in more detail the nature and formation of this community.

The constitution of India, Article 342, designates some 212 communities as “Scheduled Tribes” in different parts of India. According to the 2001 census they account for

⁵⁶ My translation from “Angewandte Ethik als Bestandteil der theologischen Ethik hat in Folge dieser Unentbehrlichkeit aktiver Hermeneutik ein kreatives Element. Und sie stellt klar, dass die Theologizität der theologischen Ethik nicht auf die Gewinnung einzelner spezifisch christlicher Normen fixiert sein darf, sondern der Befähigung zur Wahrnehmung der von diesen Innovationsprozessen betroffenen Menschen zu gelten hat – Individuen mit eigenen Biographien und Entwicklungen, spezifischen Erfahrungen und der Fähigkeit zu sichtlicher Einsicht.” K. Hilpert, “Die Rolle der Theologie in der Ethik”, p. 242.

⁵⁷ *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 174.

⁵⁸ Here one should be attentive to two things. The Biblical Commission has rightly proposed that it is from the “meaningfulness” of the biblical text that the elements are to be identified and not from a literal understanding of the words and phrases as the latter could lead to the danger of fundamentalism. Secondly, to manifest the saving will of God is the motive of the actualization, which is to serve to transform lives in a positive way.

8.2 percent (ca. 84 million) of the total population. They were probably the original dwellers of India, before the migrations from North West and North East took place.⁵⁹ Many of the tribes live in rural areas and in interior forests (ca. 90 percent) isolated from the rest of Indian society. They had their own cultural and social set up till the British arrived in the 17th century CE. They stood clearly outside the Hindu civilization and outside the traditional caste system.⁶⁰ The Hindi word for tribal is “*adivasi*”, meaning an aboriginal or an original dweller of the land. Though the majority of them have now converted to religions such as Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, they have a common socio-cultural identity of being *adivasis*.

Chotanagpur is a name coined by the British administration to denote the region in Eastern India consisting of the districts of Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Palmau, Manbhum and Singbhum. This pristine forest region, known for its rich mineral wealth, diamonds and elephants, is home to some of the oldest tribal population of India comprising more than 30 different tribal groups.⁶¹ The major groups among them are Santal, Oraon, Munda, Ho, Kharwar, Lohra and Kharia. Though technically Chotanagpur is restricted to the federal state of Jharkhand⁶² in the Indian Union today, the tribal population of this region are settled also in various other parts of India, especially in the neighbouring states of Odisha, Chathisgarh, West Bengal and in the metropolises of Mumbai and Delhi.

This region is very rich in raw materials – bauxite, iron, uranium, mica and large reserves of coal. The small state of Jharkhand alone accounts for 26% of the coal reserves in India.⁶³ The other mineral reserves in this area include, copper, manganese, chromite, gold, limestone and silica. The following data described by Jaiman Xalxo show the importance of the areas inhabited by tribes for the industrial world: “The Adivasis territories are rich in resources with some 90 per cent of India’s coal mines, 80 per cent of its minerals and 72 per

⁵⁹ The vast majority of the Indian population (ca. 92 percent) is thought to be immigrants who came from the North Western and North Eastern regions.

⁶⁰ Jhon K. Thomas writes about the separate identity of this group and says that while some of the subjugated groups in India became lower castes and were forced to perform less desirable menial jobs and became untouchables, some of the earliest small-scale societies dependent on hunting and gathering, and traditional agriculture remained outside this process of agglomeration. The latter are the *adivasis* or tribals of today. He further notes: “Their autonomous existence outside the mainstream led to the preservation of their socio-religious and cultural practices, most of them retaining also their distinctive languages. Widow burning, enslavement, occupational differentiation, hierarchical social ordering etc are generally not there.” J.K. Thomas (ed.), *Human Rights of Tribals*, vol. 1, Delhi: Isha Books, 2005, p. 132.

⁶¹ See C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, Faridabad: OM Publications, 1999, p. 36.

⁶² The separate state “Jharkhand” came into existence on 15 November 2007, a name which philologically means a region of forest.

⁶³ Cf. P. Louis, “Tribals of Jharkhand at Crossroads”, in J.M. Kujur / S. Minz (eds.), *Indigenous People of India, Problems and Prospects: Essays in Honour of Bishop Dr. Nirmal Minz, an Adivasi Intellectual*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2007, p. 145.

cent of its forests and other natural resources. Over 3000 hydel projects are located in these areas.⁶⁴

4.2.2. Identifying the Present Situation and Implications of the Message

Here we combine the second and third steps of actualization mentioned above. We identify the aspects of the life of this community where the biblical message of social justice has relevance and reflect on how a particular unjust human situation can be transformed and advanced through this message. We use the principles of Christian social ethics to reformulate the biblical message of justice as relevant today. The principles, as we saw in the first part of this chapter, encompass the biblical message and can help us to identify the various aspects of the life of the community where it has bearing.

A re-reading of the biblical message for the indigenous people has to be culturally sensitive, respecting their meaning systems, and incarnate the message incorporating the positive elements in their culture. Therefore, we begin the actualization first by describing the various aspects of the tribal understanding of a specific principle. It shall be followed by the crisis or obstacles that the community faces today, and then we shall proceed to draw out the implications of the biblical message.

4.2.2.1. Aspect of Personality

Alongside with the Christian socio-ethical concept of personality, already seen above, I would like to make the following observations about the tribal idea of personality before looking into the implications of the prophetic teaching in the tribal context.

Interrelated Personality

The tribal people see humans as interrelated. Individuals derive their identity from their clan, from being part of a culture with norms of behavior and its own value systems. Being part of a community which speaks a common language and living together in a particular geographical area were very important for the realization of this identity. Their traditional religion, known as *Sarna*, with its unique affirmation of a union with the ancestors and a respectful relationship with nature, contributed to a holistic understanding of themselves as part of an environment, which sustains and determines their identity. The positive relationship of equality in and among the clan groups and the feeling of being integrated with nature were very important conditions to enjoy a dignified existence alongside the caste ridden Hindu society, where birth could determine the place and dignity of an individual on the scale of domination and submission. Though the tribal worldview is essentially concerned

⁶⁴ J. Xalxo, "Economic Organization of Tribals", in J.M. Kujur / S. Minz (eds.), *Indigenous People of India, Problems and Prospects: Essays in Honour of Bishop Dr. Nirmal Minz, an Adivasi Intellectual*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2007, pp. 187-88.

with the present life and does not have a fully developed eschatology, their belief in the bond of the living and the dead, and the power of the ancestors to bless and influence the course of their present life points to an understanding that life is not seen as only of this world.

Egalitarian Gender Relationship

It has been also pointed out that gender relations in tribal society have been far more egalitarian and dignified compared to the non-tribal caste society. The higher ratio of women to men in the tribal society against the negative national ratio reflects the higher status of women in the tribal society.⁶⁵ The women in tribal societies have enjoyed more independent decision-making power. They are used to a trustful environment in which the clan is responsible for their protection. A woman had considerable freedom in choosing her life partner and dowry was unheard-of. Though pre-marital sex used to take place, the consent of the woman was respected in sexual advances and sex was, as Jeevan Alam phrases it, “sought to be freed from the male prerogative”.⁶⁶ Any violation of the honour and dignity of women would not be tolerated in the tribal society.⁶⁷ Though women did not enjoy the right to inherit property, a widow had to be given a rightful share of the property until she remarried. Similarly, an unmarried daughter had the right to own land until her marriage.⁶⁸ The tribal women actively participated in the traditional occupation, i.e., agriculture. The remarriage of widows was widely practised among the tribal people, while it was strictly forbidden in the traditional Hindu society.⁶⁹

Dignity of Work

Securing a dignified work environment and respecting the basic right of the individual are essential to the formation of personality and this was respected in the tribal cultures. The shared agriculture within the clan group and exchange of labour to support the agricultural and other tasks of the neighbours avoided exploitation and members would not feel forced to sell their labour in order to earn their daily bread. Even where one had to work as a servant to another, in what is called a *Dhangarai* System, there were clear-cut labour contracts. The engagement of a person as a servant was regulated by contract in which the willingness of the

⁶⁵ Cf. J.K. Thomas (ed.), *Human Rights of Tribals*, vol. 1, 46.

⁶⁶ J. Alam, “Fragmented Culture and Strangled Existence: Jharkhand’s Cultural Encounter with the Modern” in M. Miri (ed.), *Continuity and Change in Tribal Society*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1993, p. 15.

⁶⁷ Cf. S. Lourduswamy, *Jharkhandi’s Claim for Self-Rule – Its Historical Foundations and Present Legitimacy*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1997, p. 57.

⁶⁸ They would have to part with the share of their family property when they married/ remarried, in order to let the family property remain with the clan. Cf. A.K. Pandey, *Kinship and Tribal Polity*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1989, p. 136.

⁶⁹ Ajit Kumar Pandey points out that as rule among the Oraons the widow of the diseased brother becomes the wife of the younger brother. Cf. A.K. Pandey, *Kinship and Tribal Polity*, p. 141.

person was consulted and periodical review of the contract was carried out in the presence of the relatives in order to find out if the labourer was satisfied with the conditions of work and stay.⁷⁰

4.2.2.1.1. Challenges to the Tribal Concept of Personality Today

The dignified and self-affirming concept of personality and the practices that promoted it are increasingly under threat in the tribal societies due to the following factors:

Displacement and Migration

One of the biggest threats faced by the tribal people to a dignified life is the problem of displacement and migration which has a long history in the tribal areas. The system of granting land to landlords for the purpose of administration and collection of tax by the British regime during the 18th and 19th centuries led to the acquisition of much land by landlords. Many tribals lost their land due to the greed of landlords and migrated to work in tea estates in Assam, in North Bengal and in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. They provided here cheap and unskilled labour to the estate owners. The second phase of migration started with the heavy industrialisation in this area in the 20th century. This caused large scale land alienation and degradation of their land and a large number of people, especially young boys and girls, were forced to migrate to the cities. There are four important reasons for migration:

i. The eviction of a large number of tribals from their lands in the name of development projects and industries led to a large scale exodus to cities and smaller towns. These forced evictions, on the other hand, provided the evictors with cheap unskilled labour. By keeping them destitute, the government and the industrialists assure themselves of cheap labour.⁷¹ The

⁷⁰ Subhash Shrama describes the functioning of *Dhangarai System*: “An Oraon who wants to engage an Oraon youth as labourer – ‘dhangar’ – requests in Magh (February) the latter’s parents for use of his labour. If they agree, terms are decided – usually the remuneration (‘Pogri’) is fixed at from six ‘kats’ to twelve kats of paddy in a year but now in some places it is paid in cash. The ‘dhangar’ gets boarding and lodging free. But work is preceded by a ceremony, where the dhangar along with his parents are invited to the employer’s home, and the employer’s wife anoints mustard oil on dhangar’s body and combs his hair and the dhangar expresses ‘Johar’ (obeisance) to all present. Then the dhangar and his parents are served ‘handia’ (rice beer) and food. After a year on ‘Magh’ Purnima (full moon) dhangar’s parents are again invited and after oiling and combing, they are served ‘handia’ and food. If dhangar says that handia is sweet, it is meant that he is willing to work for the next year but if he tells it tastes sour, it is understood that he is not willing to work further. Thus the labour contract is based on mutual trust, voluntary, respectful and as well as a mixed relationship of intra-tribe, inter-family and employer-employee ties – thus it disregards the narrow limits of pure economic tie of free hired labour paid in cash.” S. Sharma, “Dynamics of Tribal Market in India: With Special Reference to Jharkhand”, *JJDMS*, vol. 4, No. 1 (2006), p. 1750.

⁷¹ It is a pity that the poor and the weaker sections of society have to bear the brunt of development. V.K. Desai points out that while a vast majority of the rural tribal households do not still have electricity, the coal mined from their region is used to light cities and industries all over India. Cf. V.K. Desai, “Alternative Solution to Industrialization”, A Paper presented at the International Seminar on “Sustainable Development in the Context of Project Induced Development: Human Rights Perspectives and Best Practices”, 1-2 August 2009 at Xavier Institute of Social Service, Ranchi, India (unpublished), p. 1.

land alienation for industries and residential areas has left the tribals with much less land and meagre means to support their families.

ii. Most migrations occur because of the absolute poverty in the villages and this migration in order to survive is more painstaking and uncertain. The tribals traditionally are agriculturalists, but when they migrate to towns in search of work, their agricultural skills are of no more use.⁷² Many of them work in brick kilns or as domestic helps⁷³ in middle-class and rich families in the towns and cities, in conditions that are very dehumanising.

iii. Another reason for the migration to urban areas is the increase of non-tribal population in the tribal areas. The population of India is constantly on the increase, but it is matter of great concern that the tribal population in Chotanagpur has been declining in comparison to the total population of the area. In the state of Jharkhand, where a large number of tribals live, their percentage has decreased from 33 percent in 1961 to 26 percent in 1991.⁷⁴ The influx of non-tribals into this area is caused by the number of development projects and industries in this area. Jhon K. Thomas remarks: "In the rich mineral belt of Jharkhand, the Adivasi population has dropped from around 60% in 1911 to 27.67% in 1991."⁷⁵ The developments mentioned above have rendered a large number of tribals landless and forced them to look for work in the towns and to find accommodation in slums, where the conditions are miserable.

iv. The search for employment and better educational opportunities are two other major motives behind large scale migrations. According to the survey by Christopher Lakra, they account for 46.89% and 24.14% respectively among the Oraon tribals now living in the city of Ranchi.⁷⁶ Since the migrating tribals are not skilled labourers, most of them end up doing jobs which earn them very low wages.⁷⁷ Even those migrating to cities in search of better educational opportunities find themselves at a loss as they are unable to afford the exorbitant fees. As a result they have to opt for professional training that costs less and subsequently end up in jobs that affect their positive self-image and dignity.

⁷² Cf. R.P. Toppo, "Understanding the Oraon Migration", in J.M. Kujur / S. Minz (eds.), *Indigenous People of India, Problems and Prospects: Essays in Honour of Bishop Dr. Nirmal Minz, an Adivasi Intellectual*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2007, p. 161.

⁷³ There is a general taboo against domestic work in India. It is still considered a lowly job and those who do it are often accorded low dignity in society.

⁷⁴ Cf. C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, p. 38.

⁷⁵ J.K. Thomas (ed.), *Human Rights of Tribals*, vol. 1, p. 136.

⁷⁶ Cf. C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, p. 111.

⁷⁷ Christopher Lakra narrates: "They have to fend for themselves by daily wages, rickshaw-pulling. Womenfolk do maid-servants' work in rich people's households. Only about eight percent were employed in government service, and that too as lower clerks and Grade IV employees. Another nine percent engaged themselves in skilled works but on daily basis. Such people were carpenters, photo framers, small merchants, rickshaw-repairers etc. The occupations were varied and irregular. Most of the younger women go to work as *rejas* (female labourers) in construction works, and elderly ones do part-time domestic works as paid servants." C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, p. 87.

The problem of migration strikes at the root of the tribal interrelatedness with land and culture, an important aspect of their self-identity. Separated from their land, they become alienated from their ancestors and culture, which gave them a self-affirming spiritual bond. Uprooted from their fraternal solidarity environment, they feel lost in towns and cities where human relationships are exploitative and oppressive. Migration is thus one of the most dehumanising factors in the life of the present day tribals.

Increasing Indebtedness and Bonded Labour

Basic economic security and freedom to work, which are absolutely necessary for a dignified human existence, are denied to most of the tribals today. Since they depend on agriculture and by nature do not care much about saving for the future, even minor crop failures can cause financial difficulties. Educational and medical expenses in modern society are unaffordable to the tribals, who depend on agriculture or low paid jobs for their livelihood. They often take loans for unproductive purposes like celebrations attached to marriage, death, festivals etc. In the absence of adequate banking facilities and due to the hurdles involved in accessing bank loans they are forced to borrow from the private money lenders at exorbitant rates of interest. Many have to mortgage their lands to obtain loans. Though they consider it their sacred duty to repay the debts, often their low earnings are insufficient to repay the loans and the accumulated interest. They have to pay a major portion of their earnings to money lenders only to repay the interest. On failure to repay the debts, they are forced to serve the money lenders as bonded labourers until the loan with interest is repaid, which sometimes takes generations.⁷⁸ Similarly also the landless tribals, who work now in brick kilns, garages, dairies and in hotels and so on, are forced to borrow from their employers in times of economic difficulties. On failing to repay the debts, they have to render bonded labour, which is in fact the modern version of slave labour. This denial of security in economic conduct of their lives, even reducing them to bonded labourers, is a clear denial of human dignity of the tribals. Their freedom is curtailed and their aspirations to live a decent human life are hindered.

The Tragic Situation of the Tribal Women Migrant Workers

Most of those who migrate to the cities in search of work are illiterate women. In the city of Delhi alone, there are ca. 400,000 tribal women domestic workers, according to Sr. Gemma Toppo, who works with Jharkhand Domestic Workers Welfare Trust (JDWWT). Most of them are child labourers, denied basic rights such as education, recreation and even a

⁷⁸ Though the bonded labour was abolished by the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976, the practice exists in many parts of the country, especially where the tribals and poorer classes of people live.

normal childhood. They are totally isolated from their relatives, overworked, underpaid and often victims of physical and sexual violence.⁷⁹ JDWWT Profile Book rightly labels the migrant domestic workers, many of them minors, as “modern slaves trapped within the house”⁸⁰.

Another affront to the dignity of tribal women today is human trafficking. The men, who are supposed to protect them, exploit their innocence, promise them jobs in the towns and lure them out to sell them in human markets.⁸¹ Human trafficking takes place mostly in bigger cities and among those tribal women who go there to work as domestic workers. The domestic workers are victims of sexual abuse, torture and even death as the Annual Report, 2008 of JDWWT narrates.⁸² JDWWT plays a major role in rescuing and rehabilitating the victims of human trafficking in this area and their report mentioned above gives the names of 16 tribal girls who were rescued during the year, all of them minors.⁸³ According to this report, the majority of the migrant domestic workers belong to the age group of 10-15. Migration and human trafficking is also closely connected to the problem of HIV. According to Dr. Shiv Shankar, Institute of Social Medicine and Research, New Delhi, among the migrants 25 – 30 percent of the minors affected by HIV in India contract the disease due to sexual exploitation.⁸⁴

There are also other factors which negatively affect the status of women in the modern tribal society as a result of the changing environments. The introduction of the practice of dowry in some of the tribal communities is a suitable example.⁸⁵ The tribal women are today forced to live in an atmosphere of insecurity and fear especially in their places of work. Jhon K. Thomas further narrates: “A serious problem faced by tribal women is the sexual exploitation by contractors, landlords, bureaucrats and those who hold power in mainstream society.”⁸⁶ The sexual exploitation of women is psychologically dehumanising not only to the victims, but also to the whole tribal community, as they have a strong bond of clan community feeling, in which each of the exploited women is considered as their own sister.

⁷⁹ Cf. JDWWT Profile Book (unpublished).

⁸⁰ Cf. JDWWT Profile Book.

⁸¹ Cf. JDWWT Annual Report 2008 (unpublished), p. 23. JDWWT is a daughter organization of National Domestic Workers Movement (NDWM). They work for justice and dignity of domestic workers and child domestic workers. Cf. JDWWT Profile Book (unpublished).

⁸² Cf. JDWWT Annual Report, 2008, p. 37.

⁸³ Cf. JDWWT Annual Report, 2008, p. 26. The girls who are fortunate to be rescued by humanitarian agencies are a very small minority compared to the hundreds of them who still continue to be exploited.

⁸⁴ Cf. JDWWT Annual Report, 2008, p. 25.

⁸⁵ Cf. J.K. Thomas (ed.), *Human Rights of Tribals*, vol. 1, p. 47.

⁸⁶ J.K. Thomas (ed.), *Human Rights of Tribals*, vol. 1, p. 47.

4.2.2.1.2. Implications of the Prophetic Call to Rights and Dignity

Here I shall attempt to suggest a few steps needed to secure the rights and dignity of the tribals following the spirit of the prophetic teachings:

- i. Restoring a positive and mutually supporting relationship between human beings, land and nature is important to affirm the self esteem of the tribals. An integrated development, where the people do not have to be evacuated en masse, and shared ownership of the developmental projects and industries will prevent land alienation and the mass evacuation of tribals from their habitat. We need also adequate resettlement arrangements where an equal amount of cultivable land is offered within their own cultural and geographical area. The tribals need to be helped to develop their own agricultural techniques and offered economic help to adapt their agriculture to the demands of climate change and new challenges.
- ii. Along with the freedom to cultivate their lands and make use of natural resources in order to preserve their lives, it is also important that they are allowed to preserve their cultural traditions and social systems, which formed an important factor of their identity.⁸⁷ A revival of the tribal languages, customs and culture is a must to achieve this goal. The factors of culture and education are often ignored in drive towards poverty elimination and ecological security.⁸⁸ The correction of this failure is an important step in the direction of guaranteeing a dignified existence. Recognition of the major tribal languages in the eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution⁸⁹ will help the development and preservation of them. Language is the umbilical cord that unites a person to his culture. If the tribal cultures are to survive, it is imperative that their languages are taught at least as a second language in the schools and universities in their areas.
- iii. A better appreciation of the culture and religious practices of the tribals is important. Before being converted to Christianity and Hinduism, there existed a religious unity with all of them following the *Sarna* natural religion. The natural religion is devoid of much ritual, and is concerned with the day-to-day life of the people. The plurality of religions being an accepted and irreversible factor now, it is important that the new religions be open and respectful to the ancient religious practices of the tribals, which gave meaning and orientation in their lives. The new religions have to become down to earth and touch the lives of the people, if they are to be relevant in the tribal culture. Christianity too has to adapt and learn from the tribal religions what is good, just and noble in them, especially their approach to

⁸⁷ Cf. M. Vogt, *Prinzip Nachhaltigkeit*, p. 141.

⁸⁸ Cf. M. Vogt, *Prinzip Nachhaltigkeit*, p. 142.

⁸⁹ The eighth schedule of the Constitution of India recognizes and gives official status to 22 languages as languages to be used for official purposes at the federal and at the state levels.

nature with respect as the dwelling place of God. Probably what the tribal religions can offer to Christianity is the human-nature symbiosis as a notion of mutual subsistence. Here human beings are not seen as the masters of the created world, but as Alex Ekka puts it, as “a part of God’s creation and a very important one at that to sustain the creation or the nature and the resources.”⁹⁰

iv. Taking a lead from the concern of the prophets for the dignity of women and the weaker section of society and the biblical social legislation in favor of them, it is necessary that the Church in Chotanagpur must strive for security for women and other weaker sections in their work places. They need to be protected against sexual harassment in their workplaces. Proper legislation at the national and regional levels to protect working women, especially domestic workers, is absolutely necessary. The human traffic in the cities has to be stopped and the abolition of child labor has to be strictly enforced. Women should be accorded equal rights to land and other communal resources. The infiltration of practices that degrade women, such as dowry, into the tribal society must be countered by awareness building.⁹¹ Training and creating adequate employment opportunities for tribal women is equally important for their empowerment. To save them from human trafficking in the cities it is important to discourage them from migrating to cities as unskilled domestic workers and to create employment opportunities in the tribal areas or to equip them to acquire secure jobs.

v. Accepting the fact that there are a large number of domestic workers among the tribals, steps must be taken to assure them a dignified existence in society. The Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, No. 62 sets us a useful guideline in this regard:

Obviously, these labourers cannot be considered as a commodity or a mere workforce. They must not, therefore, be treated like any other factor of production. Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance.

The following goals of the National Domestic Worker’s Movement are steps in the right direction:⁹²

- a. To give basic awareness in society of the dignity of the domestic work as it is an indirect participation in production and contributes to quality of life.
- b. To stand for the personal dignity of each domestic worker and to prepare them to fight against injustices.
- c. To bring about awareness about their just wages, holidays and other benefits.
- d. To provide training for their personality development.

⁹⁰ A. Ekka, “Indigenous People and Development in India”, in J.M. Kujur / S. Minz (eds.), *Indigenous People of India, Problems and Prospects: Essays in Honour of Bishop Dr. Nirmal Minz, an Adivasi Intellectual*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2007, p. 276.

⁹¹ Cf. J.K. Thomas (ed.), *Human Rights of Tribals*, vol. 1, p. 52.

⁹² As described in JDWWT Annual Report 2008, p. 33.

Thus creating a conducive atmosphere for people to live in dignity, which helps the full development of their personalities and facilitate their sharing in the fulfilled promises of YHWH, namely, the land and security, is the first implication of the prophetic call for social justice. The prophetic call is to counter all the dehumanizing factors in the society that blocks the full realization of this God-given dignity, whether in the field of human/nature relationship or in interpersonal communication and cooperation. Relationships that are exploitative and oppressive must be replaced with relationships that promote mutual growth and dignity.

4.2.2.2. The Aspect of Solidarity

The solidarity network in the tribal societies was most visible in their kinship relationship. The tribals of Chotanagpur had their own social and cultural network, which kept them united.⁹³ The strong bond of solidarity bound them together as a community with common interests and responsibilities. The feeling of being related to one another through the bond of kinship inspired each member to think not only about what is good for herself or himself, but also for the whole community. This concern developed into a system of social solidarity and mutual help. The factors which primarily fostered tribal solidarity included their common origin, territory, traditions, language, religion and culture.⁹⁴ Holding the land in common added to the value of community living⁹⁵ and sharing among the tribals. Their community placed greater value on equality and consensus decision making.⁹⁶ However, the solidarity relationship among the tribals is on the decline today due to the factors mentioned below.

4.2.2.2.1. The Challenges to the Solidarity Network of the Tribals

The Stratifications in the Society Affecting the Tribal Solidarity

The emergence of a new society with classes has reduced the intensity of their feeling of belonging to the same group. The factors of development and modernisation have given an entirely new dimension to the problem of social stratification compared to the class/caste system of olden times. The economic disparities are not the only criterion for social

⁹³ Cf. C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, p. 10.

⁹⁴ Cf. C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, p. 16.

⁹⁵ Cf. A. Ekka, "Indigenous People", p. 267. He also points out, "Even their houses are usually made of mud and roofed with bamboos, rafters and tiles and their feasts and festival are woven in the agricultural cycle of preparing the fields, sowing the seeds and harvesting the crops."

⁹⁶ And it is said that even the idea of democracy, which in fact promotes the idea of competition, is strange to the tribal traditions. The promotion of competition is an undesired by-product of democracy, where it is not quality which matters but quantity and self-projections.

stratification today.⁹⁷ In this changed situation, social differentiation can be said to exist when some members of the community achieve a socially and economically better status than the rest, based on their better placement in the society on account of acquired qualifications or positions. In other words, the criterion for status in the society is also decided by their academic and professional qualifications.

Even though there were economic inequalities and varying functional roles in tribal society, the stratification was not hierarchical and it differed completely from the caste categories in traditional Indian society. One can say that this differentiation was not “humiliating” using the term of Margalit, mentioned in the previous chapter.⁹⁸ The caste distinction is a humiliating differentiation because it attributes a lower dignity to a person, considers him/her untouchable and restricts his/her chances in society based on birth. The differentiations in tribal society also varied from the Marxist concept of class, which is determined by the relationship of a person to the means of production. The social differentiation in tribal society has affected the solidarity in a significant way. The factors which kept them united such as language, culture, religion and occupation as shared agriculturists are disintegrating today as we see below.

The conversion to non-tribal religions like Hinduism, Christianity and Islam has not helped them in attaining special social status in Indian society.⁹⁹ Today there is an organised attempt on the part of fundamentalist religious forces to create communal division and hatred among the tribals based on religion in almost all the major cities and towns of the region. This has a very negative impact on tribal solidarity. Social differentiation due to religion is seen at various levels in the tribal community itself. The “*Hinduised*” tribals keep themselves apart from the rest because they consider themselves belonging to a higher level on the ladder of the caste system.¹⁰⁰ However, even they find themselves at the bottom level of the hierarchy in the caste-ridden Hindu society along with the lowest castes.¹⁰¹ Thus the creeping in of the

⁹⁷ It is not fully correct to think that social stratification emerged in history or continues in society today merely on account of private property as Dahrendorf remarks: “Although the differentiation of social positions – the division of labor, or more generally the multiplicity of roles – may be one such universal feature of all societies, it lacks the element of evaluation necessary to explain distinctions of rank.” R. Dahrendorf, “On the Origin of Inequality among Men”, in A. Beteille (ed.), *Social Inequality*, Harmondsworth / Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969, p. 36.

⁹⁸ Margalit says that a decent society is a society, in which there is no humiliating institutional inequality, even though it might tolerate inequality as long as it is not humiliating. Cf. A. Margalit, “Menschenwürdige Gleichheit”, p. 108.

⁹⁹ Cf. A. Ekka, “Indigenous People”, p. 266.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, p. 80.

¹⁰¹ Christopher Lakra narrates his experience with the Hinduised Oraons: “I attended the marriage ceremony of the Hinduised Oraons. Brahmins were called to officiate there. When I asked about their castes, I was told that they were lower castes, because no high caste Brahmin would come down to a tribal marriage ceremony.” C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, p.70.

caste system has a negative impact on the solidarity feeling of the tribals. It is an irony that while the influence of the caste-system is reducing in the rest of Indian society, it is increasing in tribal society where it did not exist formerly.

The differentiation in modern tribal society is also based on educational status. The literacy rate is generally low in this region. Only 67.06 percent are literate against the national average of 74.04 percent, according to provisional data of the 2011 census. Among the women only 56.02 percent are literate. Professional courses are very costly in India and are unaffordable to the economically weak tribals who depend on agriculture and low paid jobs for their livelihood. It is a paradox that education, which is the most important instrument of positive social change, has become a factor of differentiation in modern tribal communities, negatively affecting their solidarity.¹⁰²

Occupation is another factor of social differentiation because it is the normal basis of gradation in a society which has been for centuries long caste-based, with occupation determining social status. This occupational gradation is deep rooted in the Indian psyche and has also crept into the tribal psyche as Christopher Lakra describes about the “white-collar” and “blue-collar” workers among the tribals working in the city of Ranchi. The choice of occupation today is guided by the status of occupation. In general, non-agricultural and “white-collar” jobs are preferred and there is much competition to acquire them.¹⁰³

Urbanisation promises better opportunities for the educated and professionals. They are easily employed by the booming industries and by the government. The tribals, especially those living in rural areas, are at a disadvantage in competing with the others because of their limited resources and backwardness.¹⁰⁴ Though industries and the civil administration create a lot of job opportunities in tribal areas, the tribal youth are not able to profit from it because of their lack of professional qualification. These jobs therefore usually go to the better qualified non-tribal applicants coming from outside the region. At the same time there is not much effort from the employed tribals to help their own less fortunate sisters and brothers.

From the factors seen above, it is evident that tribal society is divided like any other modern society today into various status level groups. The traditional tribal society, which was egalitarian, now stands divided based on education, occupation and income. The

¹⁰² Education is the key to employment, income, social status and access to the higher echelons of society. Education, needless to say, has given a feeling of superiority to sections of the tribal society, which has, unfortunately, once again, negatively affected tribal solidarity.

¹⁰³ His category of “white-collar workers” includes professionals, technicians, public administrators, executives, managers, clerks and sales workers. The category of “blue-collar workers” includes on the other hand craftsmen, production workers, operatives and labourers. Cf. C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, pp. 119-20.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, p. 11.

participation of members in the social and economic development of the region is restricted to those who are educated and those belonging to the higher status groups. The phenomenon of class has already affected the communal aspect of life. These classes have similarities of interests and they adopt a particular way of life. They restrict their interaction to within the group¹⁰⁵ and the contacts of the higher classes with the lower ones become less and less. The lower classes no longer feel comfortable inviting their own kinsmen from the higher status group to their social functions and as a result differentiation is widened.¹⁰⁶ With the emergence of a society with differentiation, the idea of tribal solidarity has diminished because those belonging to the higher strata fail to identify themselves with the miserable situation of the lower strata.

The different forms of inequalities mentioned above in tribal society create social divisions. The lower strata of society feel themselves challenged by the high living standards of their fellow tribals. Added to this, there is a strong desire among a group of the educated and employed tribals to be like the non-tribals, as Javed Alam puts it, “at least as far as making it in the world is concerned.”¹⁰⁷ Another negative aspect of this system is that the backwardness and desperation causes also deviant behaviour among the unemployed tribal youth of the lower strata in cities as well as in villages. It leads to resentment when they see that the non-tribals and a section of their own community are thriving and have all modern amenities of life and they themselves are left with no straw of hope. Their frustration is seen in the increased violence against the state and against well-to-do individuals.

Loss of Symbiotic Relationship with Nature

Being in a solidarity relationship not only with fellow human beings but also with nature is part of the tribal way of living. A fundamental tenet of tribal solidarity is their belief that the entire *jal, jungle aur zamin* (water, forest and land) are part of their community¹⁰⁸ and they feel united with their ancestors and with one another through these elements of nature. Not surprisingly, natural resources especially land, are basic to their socio-cultural and

¹⁰⁵ Christopher Lakra says, “Apart from their equality of status, their interests are often similar which provide a galvanizing effect to themselves. Similarities of interest usually give rise to increase of interaction, unity and solidarity. Each status group therefore may develop into a social class hardening its limits of interaction, on the one hand and expanding them to non-tribals of similar interests, on the other. The latter may take time, but the former is growing rapidly. Even the social interaction on occasions like marriages, feasts, parties, giving and receiving favour, will more and more be confined within the same social status groups, and inter-status interactions would be more and more restricted.” C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, p. 148.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, p. 154.

¹⁰⁷ J. Alam, “Fragmented Culture”, p. 21.

¹⁰⁸ The tribal surnames reflecting animals and natural objects like Ekka (tortoise), Lakra (tiger), Xess (rice or paddy), Kujur (a creeper) and so on show their relationship to nature and the animal world.

religious identity.¹⁰⁹ The land is also the basis of their socio-economic and political system. With the development of towns and cities and with increased intervention from the state and non-tribals, the solidarity network which kept them together has weakened. The primary factor of tribal solidarity, i.e. their symbiotic relationship with nature, is under threat today as we see below.

Land Alienation and Water Scarcity

The most important reason for the loss of symbiotic relationship with nature is land alienation due to immigration of non-tribals, urbanisation, industrialisation and construction of large water reservoirs. The inflow of non-tribals into their area began in fact with the establishment of monarchy. The kings brought a lot of outsiders as priests, soldiers, traders, court attendants and so on, and they were granted lands and villages in forms of maintenance service (*jagir*).¹¹⁰ The British, who established their rule in India later on, also interfered with the isolated life of the tribals from the eighteenth century CE onwards and caused further rift in their symbiotic relationship with nature.¹¹¹ In 1818 the region of Chotanagpur came under direct British rule. The British were interested in revenues from the forest products and land taxes. For the collection of taxes they depended on the *Jagirdars* (tenure holders) and *Zamindars* (landlords). Both these titleholders functioned as feudal lords and exploited the tribals. This affected their previously unquestioned right to own and operate the land in common and dealt a severe blow to their traditional agrarian system.¹¹²

Those responsible for collecting the maintenance service and other taxes, such as landowners and local administrative officers, collected exorbitant sums from the tribals and also demanded extra services from them.¹¹³ On non-payment of the taxes and other services, tribal land was confiscated and this led to large scale land alienation, something which was hitherto unknown in the tribal areas. This coupled with natural calamities led to extensive emigration of the tribals to work in the states of Assam, West Bengal and so on.

Though the transfer of tribal land to a non-tribal is prohibited by the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act of 1908, there are a lot of loopholes in the law, through which the tribals

¹⁰⁹ Cf. A. Ekka, 'Indigenous People', p. 267. According to him, nature was especially the basis of their religious identity because they "encounter God in the groves, and their guardian spirits are in the whole creation – hills, rocks, forest, water bodies and fields etc."

¹¹⁰ Cf. C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, p. 31.

¹¹¹ The British annexed the area from the Nagbanshi Maharaja of Chotanagpur in 1765 CE. Cf. A.K. Pandey, *Kinship and Tribal Polity*, p. 100.

¹¹² As Ajit Kumar Pandey notes: "The system of granting villages as Jagirs, service grants or maintenance grants in case of members of royal family, was gradually evolved to fill up the rapidly depleting royal treasury. ... These Jagirdars or tenure holders brought in Thekedars [*supervisors*] and exacted taxes and free service from their tribal tenants. Consequently, the original settlers lost their proprietorship over their villages and were reduced to ordinary *raiya*t or tenants." A.K. Pandey, *Kinship and Tribal Polity*, p. 101.

¹¹³ Cf. C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, p. 32.

continue to lose the land. One such instance is marriage. When a non-tribal marries a tribal, the land can be bought in the name of the tribal spouse. There are many tribals who lease their land for longer periods either because agriculture is no longer lucrative or because of financial difficulties. Their land is also taken away using fraudulent methods with the connivance of the revenue officials.¹¹⁴ Even the laws enacted in the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution to prevent the alienation of tribal lands have not brought the desired result.

The land alienation among the tribals reached its peak with the heavy industrialisation in modern India. The Chotanagpur and the Santal Parganas, two neighbouring territories with a huge accumulation of tribal population, account for 1/40 of India's land area, but they are today home to 1/5 of India's public sector industries and an equally large number of private sector industries.¹¹⁵ The Independent India's large steel plants such as Bhilai, Bokaro, Jamshedpur, Rourkela etc. are situated in this region. The major steel plants required power supply, which meant construction of huge dams inundating large areas of the tribal habitat. Many of the displaced have not been offered alternative lands. The New Economic Policy of the Indian Government has further thrown open the tribal areas to what Stan Lourduwamy calls "plunder and loot by *Multi National Companies*"¹¹⁶, gifting 100 percent equity participation to foreign countries in mining.

The following statistics from the Ekka and Asif study bring some startling data to light:

... the total number of the displaced between 1951-1995 in the state of Jharkahnd from all projects were estimated to be 15,03,017 [1.503.017] of which 41.27 per cent were tribals. It is also significant to note in the Jharkhand study that of the total 2,64,353 [264.353] project affected people by defence establishment, about 90 per cent were tribals. In 1995 the total number of the displaced in India was estimated to be about 55 million after independence. Hence we can easily estimate that today it would be about 60 million, of which 40 per cent are tribals and indigenous people, 20 per cent Dalits [*people belonging to the lower castes*] and another 20 per cent other weaker sections and 20 per cent caste groups.¹¹⁷

A total of 1.545.947 acres of land is acquired for various development projects in this area, which accounts for 7.96 percent of the total landmass of the region. 32.86 percent of the acquired land has been used for water resource schemes and 11.37 percent directly for

¹¹⁴ Cf. J.K. Thomas (ed.), *Human Rights of Tribals*, vol. 1, p. 44.

¹¹⁵ Cf. C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, p. 38.

¹¹⁶ S. Lourduwamy, *Jharkhandi's Claim for Self-Rule*, p. 19.

¹¹⁷ A. Ekka, "Indigenous People", pp. 268-69.

industries.¹¹⁸ It has been estimated that about 15 percent of the tribals in India have been displaced or are affected by developmental projects.¹¹⁹

The bigger and smaller water reservoirs are another major reason for land alienation in the tribal areas. The big reservoirs are needed by industries for power and they deprive the tribals of even small irrigation benefits which they previously enjoyed. Jhon K. Thomas remarks that though most of the dams in India are constructed in areas heavily populated by tribals, only 19.9 per cent of tribal land holdings are irrigated as against 45.9 per cent of all holdings of the general population.¹²⁰ What Balgovind Baboo says about the condition of the displaced people from areas used for the construction of the Hirakud dam in Orissa can sum up the condition of displaced people from fertile river basins for the construction of large dams all over the Chotanagpur plateau:

The tribals who shifted from the fertile river basin and were used to a lot of water could not always adjust to the new locality. Some of them suffered from mental agony and unknown diseases. Even their cattle died in the new locality. People who went to reside in the rehabilitation colony suffered the most in the initial years. The land they bought, if at all, was forest-cleared and took about fifteen years to yield reasonably well. Most of them had consumed the little compensation they had received by the time they started living in the new set-up. They could not reclaim the new land, nor did they get any employment, because hardly anybody was in a position to hire labour. Hence they simply depended on the doles of the Government which were infrequent and insufficient. They were compelled to depend on nature for their very survival. However, where nature was not bountiful they had to do both agricultural and non-agricultural labour of different sorts in distant established villages. Many of them pawned their assets and later on forfeited them to usurious moneylenders. Poverty led marriages to be postponed, religious functions to be unattended, and life was on the brink of agony. Most of them summarized their plight in one sentence *redi chaluthibar tak thundi chaluchhe*, i.e. “we can survive only as long as we are able to move around and work; the day we cease to work we will have nothing to eat.”¹²¹

¹¹⁸ All the figures are according to the Ekka and Asif Study 2000. Cf. A. Ekka, “Displacement of Tribal People in Jharkhand: A Violation of Human Rights”, A Paper Presented at the International Seminar “Sustainable Development in the Context of Project Induced Development: Human Rights Perspectives and Best Practices” at Xavier Institute of Social Service, Ranchi, India, August 2009, p. 3. (unpublished).

¹¹⁹ Cf. J.K. Thomas (ed.), *Human Rights of Tribals*, vol. 1, p. 46. The author also brings into our notice a striking statistics: “Of the 4,175 working mines reported by the Indian Bureau of Mines in 1991-92, approximately 3,500 could be assumed to be in Adivasi areas.” p. 136.

¹²⁰ Cf. J.K. Thomas (ed.), *Human Rights of Tribals*, vol. 1, p. 136.

¹²¹ B. Baboo, “Big Dams and the Tribals: The Case of the Hirakud Dam Oustees in Orissa”, in D.K. Behera / G. Pfeffer (eds.), *Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies*, vol. 2, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2009, p. 102. The land allotted to the tribals who are displaced due to industries is much less than what they previously owned. During the First and Second Five Year plans, when a lot of heavy industries were built in this area, ca 60,619 acres of tribal lands were acquired in the states of Bihar and Orissa, forming parts of Chotanagpur region. The land allotted to rehabilitate these same people was just 12,969 acres. Cf. J.J.R. Burman / B. Das, “Development Projects and Tribal Exploitation”, in B. Chaudhuri (ed.), *Tribal Transformation in India*, vol. 2, New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1992, p. 197 (see Table 18.5). This shows that the compensation given was inadequate.

Losing Access to Forests and Forest Products

A large section of the tribal population traditionally lived in the forests, which was known as their habitat, and their life and work was intimately connected with the forests. They collectively owned the forests and used its resources responsibly. Their interaction with the forest was mutually supportive. The indigenous people's right to own and utilize the forests was removed forcibly by the British through the Indian Forest Act 1878. It categorized the forests under reserve, private and protected types and gave immense power to the state to control and exploit the forest resources. They reserved the forests and took over the non-cultivated lands as state property.¹²² The tribals were left with the small amount of land which they actively cultivated, but which, in fact, had accounted only for a fraction of their living.¹²³

The tribals' plea to maintain the ownership of forests has fallen on deaf ears in the independent India. The Forest Department virtually took away the forests from the tribals on the pretext of managing them 'scientifically'. Even though they promised sharing of profit, this was never kept.¹²⁴ The forests were systematically destroyed by greedy forest officers in collusion with businessmen. Mullick describes the drastic consequences of these acts: "In 1984 the Roy Burman Commission visited these villages and found to its utter disbelief that miles after miles were denuded mercilessly by the forest department."¹²⁵

The reservation of forests and the creation of the forest department proved to be detrimental to the tribal economy in other ways too. It deprived the tribals of their customary rights over forests and forest products. Many villages were displaced and people who lived here were deprived of their traditional means of livelihood. Their traditional crafts, which depended on the forests, declined. They lost the pastures for the free grazing of their cattle. The forest officers commercialised the forests in collusion with the politicians. They cut down the trees which were providing sustenance to the tribals and planted trees which were economically viable. Thus the natural forests were replaced with economic plantations and as a consequence, the forest dwellers or the tribals do not gain anything from the forests today.¹²⁶

¹²² The British were greatly interested in directly controlling these areas because of the large deposits of natural resources such as iron, bauxite, and manganese in this region.

¹²³ Cf. S. Lourduwamy, *Jharkhandi's Claim for Self-Rule*, p. 21.

¹²⁴ Cf. S.B. Mullick, "State Forest Policy and Adivasi Self-Rule in Jharkhand", in C.K. Paty (ed.), *Forest, Government and Tribe*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2007, p. 25.

¹²⁵ S.B. Mullick, "State Forest Policy", p. 25.

¹²⁶ Cf. J. Xalxo, "Economic Organisation of Tribals", p. 198.

Conversely, they turned out to be cheap labourers for the forest department. They are no longer considered to be an integral part of the forests.¹²⁷

Non-tribal immigration into this area also reduced the forest cover and pushed the tribals into interior forests, thus depriving them of the forest resources. The Chotanagpur region was a big attraction to non-tribals for two reasons: the peaceful environment and healthy climate with plenty of thick forests, the rich mineral resources and cheap labour. With industrialisation, the inflow of non-tribals into this area greatly increased. Vast green forests turned into mining and industrial areas, to which the tribal do not have any access.

Thus the loss of symbiotic relationship with the nature due to land alienation and losing access to water and forests have affected the basic solidarity structure of the tribals. They feel uprooted from their mutually sustaining cultural milieu and are deprived of their basic means of survival. Here again, it is those who are poor and who have less access to education, who are more affected as they fail to take advantage of the new opportunities created in the industrial and administrative fields.

4.2.2.2.2. Implications of the Prophetic Call of Justice

The outcry of the prophets against social injustice and in support of community solidarity with the weaker ones resonates with the aspirations of the indigenous people of Chotanagpur to preserve the solidarity institutions which kept them as a mutually caring community in their history. The following implications can be drawn from the prophetic message for this community:

To be a Catalyst for the Interest of the Weaker Sections

The prophetic protest against the mistreatment of weaker sections of the community should encourage the Church to take the side of the marginalised today. Here, however, the Church must act as an instrument of reconciliation and must strive to fill gaps between different status groups in the new tribal society. Each tribal group should have its own identity and value the traditional solidarity relationship. There should be more interaction between the upper and lower echelons of tribal society. In modern towns, where the different tribal groups live together, the Church has the role of a mentor to increase interaction among these groups.

Another step that needs to be taken in order to promote solidarity among the tribals is the building of support systems. The living together and the unity among the three major tribal groups of Oraons, Mundas and Khraias were always the hallmarks of their tribal history. In modern society, as interaction outside the tribal groups is absolutely necessary, it is

¹²⁷ Jhon K. Thomas reports about the consequence: "The Forest Act and its latest version, the Forest Conservation (Amendment) Act of 1988 treats the adivasis as interlopers and encroachers in the forests, rather than as an integral part of forest environment." J.K. Thomas (ed.), *Human Rights of Tribals*, vol. 1, p. 45.

important to look for ways and means through which the mutually supporting institutions can be revived, reconstituted and made a part of their social structure. This can go a long way towards protecting the interests of the weaker sections in the tribal communities.

To Restore the Symbiotic Relationship with Nature

One has to think today about new forms of solidarity in tune with the changing circumstances. It is necessary to stop the alienation of the tribals from the three constituents of their solidarity—water, land and forest. It has been shown that taking away these resources from them in the name of developmental projects with the promise of employment opportunities is only a pretence. The draining of resources from tribal ownership must be brought to an end. It is imperative that when displacement occurs, there should be comprehensive and sustainable rehabilitation measures. In the face of increased industrialization, the solidarity idea needs to be adapted to the new challenges in order to protect the interests of the weaker sections. Instead of alienating the land from the local people for the sake of industries, ways have to be found to make them partners in development, and measures introduced to share the profit with them. The government and the funding agencies should reject projects that do not have adequate rehabilitation programmes.

The passing of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, 1869 was aimed at the settlement of land and to prevent further loss of tribal lands to non-tribals. The Act also regulated the payment of rent and made it mandatory to do this through a Deputy Commissioner (cf. No. 61) to make the process more transparent. Thus the Act tried to prevent tribals from falling into debt traps and losing further lands. The spirit of this Act, now articulated well in the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, adapting to the realities of the present day, needs to be implemented in letter and spirit. Central to the execution of it is to ensure the implementation of land reforms and to redistribute the surplus land to the landless tribals.

The Indian National Forest Policy of 1988 provides for the involvement of local communities in forest managing and for sharing 33 percent of the total net profit with them.¹²⁸ Similarly, the Community Forestry Programme is aimed at growing traditional trees, which give forest coverage and at the same time sustain the lives of the people. The execution of such programmes and allowing the tribals to have access to forest products such as fruits and herbal medicines with permission to market these through village co-operatives, keeping the middle-men away, will help restoring the solidarity relationship of tribals with the forests.

The prophetic protest against injustice and exploitation of the weak is the task of a prophetic Church today. This protest has to assume new forms in tune with the socio-political

¹²⁸ S.B. Mullick, "State Forest Policy", p. 26.

situation of the day. The prophets used words that would pierce the hearts of those who practised injustice and called them to change their ways. The reminder of God's benevolence and the obligation of the Israelites to fraternal solidarity were the means they used to invoke Israel's obedience. Following this example, the Church should use her spiritual power and influence to remind everyone of the duty to fraternal solidarity and invite the perpetrators of injustice to conversion and reconciliation.

The remission of the debts of the nations advocated by Pope John Paul II in *Tertio millennio adveniente* No. 51 (see 3.2.3.4 above) accords well with the biblical response to the context of many becoming debt slaves and landless laborers. This exhortation is to be implemented not only in the case of nations, but also in the case of farmers and indigenous people, who have lost their land and natural resources in the wake of industrialization and globalization. With industrialization in the tribal areas the state and the big industrial houses have amassed great profits. It is imperative for them to use at least a part of this wealth to help the tribals. It would go a long way if they waived the debts of the poor tribals, including what they have borrowed from private lending institutions.

4.2.2.3. Aspect of Subsidiarity

The aspects of the principle of subsidiarity analyzed in the first part of this chapter have direct consequences for the life of the tribal people of Chotanagpur. We shall restrict ourselves to two aspects of their lives: First, we shall consider the implications of considering human beings as subjects, as we deal with the empowerment of weaker sections of society and financial self-reliance. Second, we shall look at the relationship between persons and the state, namely, the concept of tribal self-rule.

4.2.2.3.1. Strengthening Help for Self-Help

The concept of persons as subjects, their freedom and welfare is central to the Christian social ethics. A healthy environment to lead a life in freedom and human dignity is required in every society. The principle of subsidiarity obligates individuals as much as possible to take up self-responsibility and at the same time requires society to create the necessary conditions in solidarity.¹²⁹ The main reason for inequalities and poverty in tribal society is the lack of opportunities.¹³⁰ Therefore, it is important to give equal and adequate social opportunities to the tribal people. Only by offering education, professional skills and employment opportunities to all can a chance be offered for a meaningful existence in the

¹²⁹ Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, p. 216.

¹³⁰ Markus Vogt has rightly pointed out: "Wichtig für eine stabile Überwindung von Armut ist der soziokulturelle Aspekt der gesellschaftlichen Partizipation und Freiheit, der nicht, wie oft zu lesen, ein sekundäres Merkmal von Armut bzw. Armutsüberwindung, sondern ein Definitionsmerkmal ist: Armut ist ein Mangel an Verwirklichungschancen." M. Vogt, *Prinzip Nachhaltigkeit*, p. 67.

present situation. One of the ways of doing it is by organizing “help for self-help” as we see below.

Organising Help for Self-Help to Women and Youth

The principle of subsidiarity means that smaller units are able to organize themselves and function as self-help groups. They should be able to strengthen their own resources and the organizing of help should be largely in these terms and as Thomas Bohrmann says: “The help should be directed primarily at reestablishing their own abilities.”¹³¹ One of the grave problems facing the tribal youth today is lack of education and professional training to acquire jobs in the civil services and industries. Many of them drop out of school at early stages and only very few attend universities. An average tribal family holds ca. 2.5 acres of land, which is often not irrigated, and cannot afford the educational expenses of their children.¹³² Offering them professional education and skill training will be the best help to self-help that could be offered. This would empower them and help the rural communities to progress. Considering the fact that the vast majority of the unemployed youth are in rural areas, the aim of skill training has to be to help them earn a sustainable income in their own rural communities by providing goods and services needed for the local people.¹³³ The Church has to take an active role in promoting the interests of women and youth by organizing help for their development.¹³⁴

Organizing Micro Credit Societies for Financial Empowerment

The prophets were especially concerned about the sections of the society who on account of scant financial resources were denied opportunities in life. They minced no words in condemning those who exploited debtors and treated them with disdain. Here we have a defence of those who are sold into debt slavery on account of petty debts (cf. Amos 2,6c), and of those who are forced to pledge things, even when they have defaulted the law in their desperate struggle to make the ends meet (cf. 2,8a), and a plea against depriving the poor even of the meagre amount of grain they have by way of a gift or a levy (cf. 5,11a).

¹³¹ My translation from “Die Hilfestellung richtet sich demnach vorrangig auf die Wiederherstellung der eigenen Kräfte.” T. Bohrmann, “Subsidiarität”, p. 297.

¹³² Cf. J. Xalxo, “Role of Catholic Organizations”, pp. 46-47.

¹³³ J. Xalxo suggests: “Technical manpower for production, installation and maintenance is required in rural areas. Presently most of this is provided by urban or semi-urban based technicians, making them expensive as well as difficult to access. Rural youth are being trained in skills and helped to set up their enterprise to cover a group of villages. This will provide income to the individuals who are micro-entrepreneurs and goods and services to strengthen the rural economy as well as develop the area.” J. Xalxo, “Role of Catholic Organizations”, p. 47.

¹³⁴ Von Nell-Breuning rightly says that the role the Church assumes in youth work will determine its role in the future society. Cf. O. von Nell-Breuning, *Baugesetze der Gesellschaft*, p. 107.

The above prophetic ideals are significant in tribal society today, where poverty and the gulf between the poor and the rich play an important role in hampering opportunities for self-help. The political and economic changes in society have affected the traditional economic stability and caused indebtedness in society. Exploitation by money lenders and inadequate knowledge about the modern banking system have entrapped many tribal farmers. In the light of the precarious situation in which the tribals of Chotanagpur find themselves it is imperative for them to be empowered to become self-reliant in meeting their economic, educational and health needs. The Church has a role to play here to offer help for self-help, especially where the state has failed or is inadequately present. One concrete example is micro-credit societies to help the tribals save their money for times of need so that they do not have to borrow from greedy money lenders and purely profit-oriented banks, which will lead them into debt-traps.¹³⁵

A concrete example for rural financial empowerment in Chotanagpur is the Credit Cooperative Society, organized by a German Jesuit missionary, Fr. John-Baptist Hoffmann, modeled after the Raiffeisen in Germany.¹³⁶ Hoffmann has made the European model suitable for the tribal farmers of Chotanagpur at the beginning of the 20th century.¹³⁷ This noble initiative towards financial solidarity sprang from his realization that along with saving the land rights of the tribals, it was absolutely necessary to make them financially self-reliant, so that they do not fall back into the trap of the money lenders. He organized autonomous rural credit societies, who generated and circulated funds in the form of loans. The larger units helped the smaller units with guidance and financial support.¹³⁸ This allowed the tribals to

¹³⁵ Though the state has tried to initiate Community Development Programmes through Cooperative Movements, it has miserably failed in the tribal areas because it did not succeed in establishing grass roots contact with the tribals. Moreover, the bureaucrats, who belonged to the higher castes, were not always motivated to uplift the poor tribals. They were corrupt and cheated the illiterate tribals to increase their own gains. Cf. P.N.S. Surin, "Co-Operative Societies in Tribal Areas of Jharkhand", *JJDMS*, vol. 4, No. 1 (2006), pp 1801-02.

¹³⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen (1818-1888), an Evangelical Christian from Germany, was moved by the miserable plight of the rural folk who on account of harvest failures were dependent on usurers. Raiffeisen founded the Heddesdorfer Darlehensverein in 1864, which became a model for around 330,000 co-operative banks all over the world. Cf. M. Vogt, "Mit Armut Geld verdienen", p. 10. Another example of Micro-Credit Society is the Grameen Bank, founded by Muhammed Yunus in Bangladesh, as per his motto of "social business". He describes the functioning of the Bank as follows: "Owned by poor people, mostly women, who are its depositors and borrowers, it pays part of its profits back to the owners in the form of dividends, and invests the rest in expanding services to more villages and families throughout the country." M. Yunus, "Economic Security", pp. 9-10.

¹³⁷ Cf. M.V.d. Bogaert, "Hoffmann's Credit Cooperative Society: Its Originality", in P. Ponette (ed.), *The Munda World*, Ranchi: Catholic Press, 1978, p. 54.

¹³⁸ Michael Bogaert describes the functioning of the Credit Cooperative: "The Raiffeisen system of rural credit visualizes the *autonomous rural unit*, administered and managed entirely by local farmers, as the basic building block for setting up a cooperative movement. Credit is generated and circulated in the form of loans within this rural unit. The basic motivating factor that keeps people together and 'forces' them to repay the loans

have funds at their disposal for cultivation, for the education of their children, and for all other economic needs.

The Credit Cooperative as visualised by Hoffmann not only helped the tribals financially, but also revived some of the values of their traditional tribal solidarity. The meetings of the Credit Society served “the utilitarian purposes”, as well as the need for the tribal people “to sit together and to stand together” and for “an occasional feast to be paid for by a member punished for breaking a rule of the community”, as Bogaert phrases it.¹³⁹ Following this daring instance, the Church, to be faithful to the prophetic mission it has received, has the responsibility to found and foster such institutions for humanitarian purposes in order to provide a dignified life for the disadvantaged. Pope Benedict XVI has also affirmed the need for such initiatives to help the vulnerable sections of society:

This is all the more necessary in these days when financial difficulties can become severe for many of the more vulnerable sectors of the population, who should be protected from the risk of usury and from despair. The weakest members of society should be helped to defend themselves against usury, just as poor people should be helped to derive real benefit from micro-credit, in order to discourage the exploitation that is possible in these two areas. (*Caritas in veritate*, No. 65).

The Pope also praises micro-financing and micro-credit as “ethical financing” and supports the initiative especially in the less developed parts of the world (cf. *Caritas in veritate*, No. 45). The biblical social laws prohibiting interest can make the humanitarian side of the Micro-credit Societies brighter and make a difference in doing banking today. The micro-credit societies organized by Church agencies should set an example for banking without interest (see 3.2.3.2 above) by offering loans without interest to the poor, in keeping with the old biblical tradition which prevents taking advantage of a fellow human being in need.

4.2.2.3.2. Strengthening Institutions of Self-Rule

The second area where the principle of subsidiarity has a direct bearing on the life of the tribals of Chotanagpur is the sphere of civil administration. As our study of the context of the prophetic social critique revealed, the changes brought about by the monarchy, though provided with a centralized administration with administrative and military mechanisms, worked to the disadvantage of the smaller clan groups and individuals, whose freedom and

is honesty, the fact that each one knows everybody else in the group, and self-interest which dictates that others should pay off their loans, so that everybody can take a loan, when the need arises.

Such autonomous units are then federated in a wider organisation so that members can act corporately and on a larger scale. The relation of the autonomous and federal set up is similar to the one of the individual vis-à-vis his own rural unit. The advantages of federation are that stronger units can help weaker ones, not only by advice and direction but also by means of their financial surpluses. The body so constituted increases the economic power of each rural unit and therefore of each individual in every village.” M.V.d. Bogaert, “Hoffmann’s Credit Cooperative Society”, p. 60.

¹³⁹ M.V.d. Bogaert, “Hoffmann’s Credit Cooperative Society”, p. 64.

responsibility diminished in many ways. As far as the tribals in Chotanagpur are concerned, a similar transformation is visible in the aspect of tribal self rule, with the introduction of the mechanism of modern civil government.

The Traditional Self-Rule among the Tribals

All the major tribes of Chotanagpur like the Santals, the Oraons, the Kharias and the Hos had well-developed decentralized traditional leadership headed by secular and sacred leaders, though they were known by different names in each tribe. Even the British, who introduced a centralized civil administration in India, left this local self-governing system untouched.¹⁴⁰ Each village had a headman known as *Kartaha* (Kharia), *Pragnait* (Santal), 'Munda' (Mundas and Hos).¹⁴¹ Usually the village council or a village Panchayat consisted of the heads of all lineages and because of its representative nature, the heads were not able to act despotically. The Hindi word '*panchayat*' literally means a council of five. However, in practice it was a corporate body and could contain more than five members.

A number of villages formed an organisation called '*Parha*', a social and political body which settled disputes between villages and people of different villages.¹⁴² It was "a loose confederacy of a number of neighbouring villages with a central organisation known as the Parha Panch".¹⁴³ They met usually once a year and decided cases of infringements of certain taboos that affected the whole *Parha* or the tribe.¹⁴⁴ They were supposed to work for the good of the tribe as a whole. Decisions in Panchayats were mostly taken by consensus and sometimes by majority. Traditional Panchayats carried out also judicial functions. Stephen Fuchs comments on traditional tribal local administration: "Under this constitutional authority, the traditional village life proceeds smoothly, and the villagers feel that from birth to death they are under the proper leadership ordered by their forefathers. This gives them a certain sense of security and stability."¹⁴⁵ Among the Oraons, Fuchs narrates further, "every year a *parha* meeting is held, called *parha jatra*, when communities of a *parha* settle all outstanding disputes and confirm their tribal solidarity by a big feast."¹⁴⁶ Thus the tribal self-

¹⁴⁰ Cf. J.K. Thomas (ed.), *Human Rights of Tribals*, vol. 1, p. 133.

¹⁴¹ Cf. A.K. Pandey, *Kinship and Tribal Polity*, pp. 88-90.

¹⁴² Cf. A.K. Pandey, *Kinship and Tribal Polity*, p. 88.

¹⁴³ A.K. Pandey, *Kinship and Tribal Polity*, p. 90.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. A.K. Pandey, *Kinship and Tribal Polity*, p. 132.

¹⁴⁵ S. Fuchs, *The Aboriginal Tribes of India*, Delhi: Macmillan India, 1973, p. 152.

¹⁴⁶ S. Fuchs, *The Aboriginal Tribes of India*, pp. 152-53. Alex Ekka sums up the well established traditional community based self-governing system of the tribals: "The polity and authority is vested in the whole community through the council of elders. The administration of the villages, village federations and confederations is through the *panchayats* (councils) at different levels. Similarly, the management of resources and the dispensing of justice are done by the *panchayats* at different levels. Their norms of governance, laws of inheritance as well as land rights, etc. are customary and are handed down by word of mouth. And finally

rule promoted “a government by discussion”¹⁴⁷ which, though not elected through ballots, had a broader understanding of democracy. This way of governing takes care of the central issues of democracy, which in the opinion of Amartya Sen, are “political participation, dialogue and public interaction”¹⁴⁸.

The Loss of Self Rule

Though India became independent from the British in 1947, for the vast majority of the tribals in India it meant only rule by a democratically elected government, but fully controlled by the non-tribals. This government represented the interests of the non-tribals and was alien to the tribals who were used to their traditional self-governing institutions.¹⁴⁹ The introduction of the local administrative set up of the modern state, with the community development block, the statutory Panchayat, and the police station, altered the traditional local self-rule.¹⁵⁰ The intervention of the police in matters of inter-village feuds has weakened the level of solidarity within the villages by making individuals less dependent on one another.¹⁵¹ Thus issues previously the concern of the whole village are taken over by the government today. This has left the traditional village functionaries powerless. The judicial system too has undergone transformations to the disadvantage of the tribals.¹⁵² The government courts, which today administer justice in place of the village council, are highly expensive and corrupt. The bureaucracy and red tape delay justice indefinitely for the tribals.¹⁵³

Thus what happened in independent India was not an integration of different cultures, but an assimilation, as far as the tribal cultures and their traditional administrative set-ups are concerned. They have been incorporated into a political system where their own traditional systems were set aside, and they have been integrated into a social system where they lost their identity as tribals and were submerged into a caste-based society. Although a separate state, Jharkhand, was created on 15 November 2007 to fulfill the aspirations of the large

consensus is the system of decision making by the community, which is different from the majority and minority system of decision making of the formal system.” A. Ekka, “Indigenous People”, p. 273.

¹⁴⁷ This term is coined by Walter Bagehot and developed by John Stuart Mill. Cf. A. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, p. 324.

¹⁴⁸ A. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, p. 326.

¹⁴⁹ They identified the government with the *dikkus*, a term used by the tribals to refer to the non-tribals, which for them was a symbol of inhumanity and unfair dealings.

¹⁵⁰ The statutory Panchayats include also non-tribals, whose ways of thinking and behaving are very different from the tribals.

¹⁵¹ A.K. Pandey, *Kinship and Tribal Polity*, p. 232.

¹⁵² Except in matters that are linked to the customary norms, rules and regulations of tribal society, adjudication is done by the courts today. Cf. C. Lakra, *The New Home of Tribals*, p. 48.

¹⁵³ Even where the system is not corrupt, the primary concern is only about proving the veracity of an accusation. If convicted, the thief is sent to jail, but no attention is paid to the relationship between the thief and his victim, which was well addressed in the traditional judicial system of the tribals. Cf. A.K. Pandey, *Kinship and Tribal Polity*, p. 233.

number of tribals in this area, the preservation of self-rule and of the traditional local administrative systems remains still a distant dream.¹⁵⁴ Though some tribals are elected as representatives, they have failed to prove their mettle and the accusation is often made that they are merely pawns in the political game of the non-tribals.¹⁵⁵

Strengthening Tribal Self-Rule

As is clear from many instances mentioned above, the tribals as a whole could be considered as a section of the Indian state which is deprived of its legitimate possibilities in life. In particular, they are robbed of their self-governing system and therewith their power to decide for themselves. The criticism of the prophets which took up the cause of the weaker sections of the community has a special relevance in this context. Empowering the self-governing institutions among the tribals could be seen as one of the ways in which the weaker sections of the community are strengthened and given the possibility to make decisions for themselves.¹⁵⁶

The Church has here an important role in making the voice of these groups heard in civil society and in making the democracy a participative one.¹⁵⁷ Here it is worth to note the affirmation of the German bishops of the need to organize social structures in such a way that the individual and small communities have the free space to develop responsibly as demanded by the principle of subsidiarity (cf. *For a Future Founded on Solidarity and Justice*, Nos. 27.120). Markus Vogt points out:

Institutional ethics has to assure the decision-making competence of the individual and the freedom to make decision according to one's convictions and wishes. ... The ethical criterion for the political conduct of all institutions has to be directed towards the freedom of individuals and the creation of an environment for the responsible use of this freedom.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ On the other hand, the division of the tribal areas of central India into two smaller states, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh, making them minority groups in both the states, served the purpose of divide and rule and gave the state unquestioned authority to exploit natural resources.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. P. Louis, "Tribals of Jharkhand at Crossroads", p. 138. Added to this, the tribals are not very enthusiastic about participating in general elections, because it does not belong to their cultural ethos, which is based on consensus rather than election by secret ballot. Cf. N.K. Ambasht, "Tribal Panchayats: A Case for Rejuvenation (With Special Reference to Oraon)", in D.K. Behera / G. Pfeffer (eds.), *Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies*, vol. 2, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2009, p. 137.

¹⁵⁶ The smaller units lose their power of decision-making in a globalized world and it is very important to encourage participatory decision-making in this context.

¹⁵⁷ As Markus Vogt points out, when we speak about national and global governments, which can assure the implementation of just and non-discriminatory policies for the good of all, we should not forget about the principle of subsidiarity, which calls for the empowerment of local and smaller civil societies with openness to the global horizons. He says, "Nach Maßgabe des Subsidiaritätsprinzips geht es dabei nicht primär um eine Ethik mit global verallgemeinerten Standards, sondern vor allem um das Ethos einer Politik und Zivilgesellschaft mit globalem Problemhorizont." M. Vogt, *Prinzip Nachhaltigkeit*, pp. 420-21.

¹⁵⁸ My translation from "Institutionenethik ... ist in erster Linie auf Verfahren zur Aufrechterhaltung individueller Entscheidungskompetenz auszurichten. ... Der ethische Leitmaßstab für die politische Gestaltung

In the tribal context today this means the right to self-determination, which means, in the words of Alex Ekka,

... to be left to themselves to decide the pace and pattern of development and to govern their areas according to their political ethos with autonomy. For them the right to self-determination also implies the recognition of their rights over resources like land, water and forests.¹⁵⁹

The fostering of *Panchayatiraj* or the rule by local self-governing institutions is a worthy step in this direction.

At the level of governing institutions, we see that there is a conflict between the state administration, with its uniform policies, well established bureaucracy, police, judiciary etc. on the one hand, and the traditional, pluralistic, and less bureaucratic tribal self-rule system. In this conflict situation between the larger and smaller social units, the smaller unit should be given preference, according to the principle of subsidiarity.¹⁶⁰ A just social order should not be a body constituted from outside to regulate the life of the society, but it should spring anthropologically from the basic structures of communities' own cultural history. Here it is not just the authority and the sanctions behind it that inspire right conduct but the realisation that one has responsibility for others. Accordingly, Agenda 21 of the United Nations' Environment Programme, No. 26.4b calls for adopting or strengthening "appropriate policies and/or legal instruments that will protect indigenous intellectual and cultural property and the right to preserve customary administrative systems and practices".

It is sad that with the establishment of the Indian Union and with the constitution of statutory Panchayats traditional tribal self-rule has received a set-back. However a golden opportunity is offered, though late, with the passing of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1993¹⁶¹ and with the consequent legislation of Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, 1996 (PESA). These Acts make an attempt to reaffirm the importance of the traditional institutions of self-rule. They attempt to accommodate these into a constitutional mechanism without losing their identity and value systems. A gradual transformation incorporating the spirit of both, tribal as well as democratic self-government, is being worked out. The PESA

aller Institutionen ist dementsprechend die Achtung der Selbstzwecklichkeit und damit der Freiheit und Eigenverantwortung jedes Menschen." M. Vogt, "Institutionen als Organisationsformen", p. 278.

¹⁵⁹ A. Ekka, "Indigenous People", p. 265.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. T. Bohrmann, "Subsidiarität", p. 296. This principle involves also protecting smaller local, regional and national communities against the power of bureaucratic administration. Cf. M. Vogt, *Prinzip Nachhaltigkeit*, pp. 423-24.

¹⁶¹ The Constitution provides, especially with the Seventy-third Amendment, for a three-tier decentralised local administrative set-up (at the district, intermediate and at the village levels). Though in itself a significant legislation in decentralized administration, this set-up proposed by the Constitution disturbs the traditional local self-governing institutions and therefore, the government has wisely left out the tribal areas from the purview of this legislation.

aims at stating categorically the provisions to restore the right to self-rule for the tribals, though they remain unimplemented until now.¹⁶²

By supporting traditional self-governing institutions we do not argue for the promotion of parochialism, but rather for a system of governing that is culturally rooted and locally sound but at the same time fully integrated in the mainstream administrative system. The prophetic Church has the role to make these micro-administrative units open to the wider society, the state and the world at large. Markus Vogt elaborates on the significant role the Church can play as a socially active, locally rooted but globally connected community and says: “Only when politics is subsidiarily understood as supporting various intermediary social factors between individuals and state can the human face of society be protected.”¹⁶³

4.2.2.4. Aspect of Sustainability

As part of the contextualized interpretation, I would like to draw a parallel between ecological destruction that results from discarding tribal handling of the ecology and the rise of a consumerist approach towards nature and its resources, and the prophetic conviction that unjust practices in the community will lead to the end of the nation and its prosperity.

A Respectful Approach to Nature

The idea of solidarity with nature promoted respect and a responsible handling of the natural resources by the tribals. They took from nature only what they needed for their daily

¹⁶² If this noble purpose is to be achieved, the following provisions of the Act should be made fully operative:

- i. Any State legislation on the Panchayats shall be consonant with the customary law, social and religious practices of community resources. (4a)
- ii. Every Gram Sabha [*an administrative unit containing a number of Panchayats*] shall be competent to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, their cultural identity, community resources and the customary mode of dispute resolution. (4d)
- iii. Every Gram Sabha shall approve the plans, programmes and projects for social and economic development before such plans, programmes and projects are taken up for implementation by the Panchayat at the village level. (4,e,i)
- iv. The government shall consult local administrative bodies before acquiring land in the Scheduled areas for development projects and before re-settling or rehabilitating persons affected by such projects in the Scheduled Areas. (PESA 4,i)
- v. The recommendations of Gram Sabha or the Panchayats at the appropriate level shall be made mandatory for grant of any prospecting licence or mining lease for minor minerals in the Scheduled Areas. (4k)
- vi The prior recommendation of the Gram Sabha or the Panchayats at the appropriate level shall be made mandatory for grant of concessions for the exploitation of minor minerals by auction. (4l)
- vii. While endowing Panchayats in the Scheduled Areas with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government, a State Legislature shall ensure that the Panchayats at the appropriate level and the Gram Sabha are endowed specifically with – the ownership of minor forest produce (4m,ii); the power to prevent alienation of land in Scheduled Areas and to take appropriate action to restore any unlawfully alienated land of a Scheduled Tribe (4m,iii).

¹⁶³ My translation from “Nur wenn sich Politik subsidiär als Unterstützung der vielfältigen intermediären Sozialgebilde zwischen Einzelperson und Staat versteht, kann das humane Gesicht der Gesellschaft gewahrt werden.” M. Vogt, *Prinzip Nachhaltigkeit*, p. 420.

survival.¹⁶⁴ The belief that their ancestors are part of their lives and that they live with them in their land created a special bond between them and their land. It was unthinkable for them to sell the land because it belonged not only to them but also to their dead ancestors. Selling it would mean depriving their ancestors of their abode. Lourduswamy commends on the concept of ownership of land among the tribals:

The habitat is accepted as the common heritage of a community, individual has the limited right of using the same. Individual ownership is an alien concept, which is insidiously introduced through superimposition of laws without their understanding. Land alienation is a possible consequence only if ownership is individual.¹⁶⁵

The formal economy sees land, forests and natural resources as capital and a means of production, where a small number own them and the rest have to sell their labour to earn their means of sustenance. The informal economy of the tribals, on the other hand, sees land and resources as means of their livelihood. Here the goal of production is to meet the basic needs of the people and as Alex Ekka points out, “the small scale, labour intensive and resources regenerating approach” is characteristic of their economic system.¹⁶⁶ The tribals are often accused of not being ambitious because they are not keen to accumulate wealth for the future, but according to Stan Lourduswamy, this characteristic of the tribals cannot be attributed to their being lazy or carefree, but to “a basic trust in the nature that she would provide for their needs now and always”.¹⁶⁷ Accordingly, they respect and protect nature and have a symbiotic relationship with it. They believe that human beings are sustained by nature and in return have to protect it and its resources.

Sustainable Forms of Agriculture

As far as agriculture was concerned, the tribals had complete control over the means of production. They owned and operated them and this was the key to their contented life. They produced the primary needs of their life such as food and cloth locally. In producing them, simple technologies were used which were eco-friendly and energy efficient. Everyone had to work and even then they enjoyed a self-reliant and carefree life. They used naturally regenerated manures and gave sufficient rest to the land under cultivation. They would leave the best of their fruits for seeds and would not harvest all the corn and fruits, thereby leaving a share for birds and animals. These sustainable forms of agriculture helped them to earn

¹⁶⁴ Lourduswamy says: “Whereas the tribal world-view particularly with regard to natural resources is ‘live and let live’, meaning take from nature only what one needs and how much of it one needs at the moment, but never to deplete nature just because man now has greater capacity to exploit through modern science and technology.” S. Lourduswamy, *Jharkhandi’s Claim for Self-Rule*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁶⁵ S. Lourduswamy, *Jharkhandi’s Claim for Self-Rule*, p. 21.

¹⁶⁶ A. Ekka, “Indigenous People”, p. 274.

¹⁶⁷ S. Lourduswamy, *Jharkhandi’s Claim for Self-Rule*, p. 56.

enough for their survival and at the same time to preserve the land and its fertility for subsequent generations.

Dynamics of Tribal Markets

One of the major characteristics of the sustainable economy of the tribals was that they maintained a self-sufficient economy and non-profit oriented market system. P.C Jain describes this system:

They produced according to their available resources. Whatever was required by them was produced by them. They did not have surplus. And if they had some surplus it was brought to the market to fulfil non-food needs such as cloths, ornaments and the like. Such an economy did not create any market for them.¹⁶⁸

The weekly markets were the perfect example of the sustenance economy of the tribals. They functioned mostly on barter system and created markets for local products which were durable and of better quality. Above all, the purchaser knew who the producer was and where and how these were produced. These markets sold products that suited the cultural preferences and tastes of the tribals.¹⁶⁹ The village markets could to a certain extent protect the interests of the buyers and sellers from the operation of normal market forces. The price was not always determined by the interplay of demand and supply, but by the cost of production involved.¹⁷⁰

4.2.2.4.1. Challenges to Sustainability Today

Developmental activities in the tribal areas today are identified with the establishment of huge thermal power projects, giant steel plants, and cement factories. Though these projects are nominally meant to remove poverty and to create employment opportunities for the tribals, the latter do not profit much in actuality. The increase in the population all over India, especially in the Chotanagpur plateau, has increased non-tribal migration to the tribal areas. The new migrants, for whom the tribal territories are alien lands and merely a means of profit-making, have absolutely no interest in sustainability. Similarly, the multi-national companies who own most of the industries in this area have no political or social commitment and are strangers to the concept of sustainability. Their concern is limited to the maximisation of profit and they show very little interest in the development of tribals or in the preservation of their ecology.

The frequent droughts and intermittent floods have taken their toll of the productivity of the land. The government makes use of this opportunity to label more and more lands as “barren” and acquire them at lower prices for the booming mining and industrial activities. It

¹⁶⁸ P.C. Jain, *Globalisation and Tribal Economy*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2001, p. 9.

¹⁶⁹ S. Sharma, “Dynamics of Tribal Market in India”, p. 1753.

¹⁷⁰ Subhash Sharma observes that the tribals would return home even with perishable goods (fruits / vegetables etc.) rather than sell them at a reduced price when supply is more or demand is less. Cf. S. Sharma, “Dynamics of Tribal Market in India”, p. 1754.

is pointed out that over 40 Memoranda of Understanding with a proposed investment of ca. 41.745 million US Dollars have been signed between state government and private sector.¹⁷¹ The heavy industrialisation in modern India has not helped to better the plight of the tribals in this region either. On the other hand, it has worsened their plight on account of displacement. It has also led to erosion of fertile land, scarcity of drinking water and increased poverty among the tribals. The people of this area are severely affected and find it difficult to adjust to the changes in the environment caused by human hands. Industrialisation has caused not only the emergence of a rich middle class, but also disparities in the distribution of resources. The profits of industry are appropriated by the industrialists and politicians. The discrimination or disregard for the interests of local people is telling in the area of electrification of their villages – while a large part of the coal is mined from this area,¹⁷² which is used for making energy all over India, it is pointed out that only 32,2 percentage of the villages in Jharkhand have electricity.¹⁷³

Lourduswamy describes the negative impact of market-oriented production:

Now with the Indian capitalist ruling class focussing on *production* meant for market, the tribal production is considered inefficient and as such not contributing to the national production-thrust. Hence [*an impression is created that*] there is nothing wrong in taking over their land and handing it over to those who will produce five, ten times more the value compared to what the tribals are capable of producing.”¹⁷⁴

In the changed circumstances, he criticizes further the tendency to identify development with making additional income to meet exaggerated consumerist needs and condemns what he calls “the unwritten law” that “the more one consumes, the more developed he/she is!”¹⁷⁵

In the globalized market, locally made artefacts and handicrafts are in a position of disadvantage in the face of products imported from outside.¹⁷⁶ In the case of the tribals of Chotanagpur, the high caste Hindus gained access to their village markets with the protection of the government and the police. The profits from trade now went to the pockets of the higher caste Hindu businessmen. With the opening up of markets to the products of multinational companies the traditional marketing system took a further blow. Globalisation is now aimed at new markets for foreign exchange and it is characterized by more binding

¹⁷¹ Cf. P. Louis, “Tribals of Jharkhand at Crossroads”, p. 146.

¹⁷² The federal state of Jharkhand accounts for ca. 26 percent of coal mining in India.

¹⁷³ Cf. P. Louis, “Tribals of Jharkhand at Crossroads”, p. 142.

¹⁷⁴ S. Lourduswamy, *Jharkhandi's Claim for Self-Rule*, p. 25.

¹⁷⁵ S. Lourduswamy, *Jharkhandi's Claim for Self-Rule*, p. 5.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. P.C. Jain, *Globalisation and Tribal Economy*, p. 16.

regulations on national governments. It has thus reduced the scope of national policy in favour of the deprived sections all the more.¹⁷⁷

Deforestation, mindless exploitation of mineral resources, overburdening of the land and pollution of the air and water through industries and so on mark the new conduct of human beings with nature. Nature is purely seen as a raw material to be exploited and used. As a result, one sees today the hills of industrial waste piling up in the country side, poisonous emissions and dust casting a black cloud over the towns and cities. Climate change is the result of such uncontrolled pollution, the effects of which are already seen in increasing droughts and floods and in ever-decreasing and unreliable monsoon rains. It is no exaggeration to say that today this area stands at the brink of an ecological disaster. And the paradox is that it is the tribals who will have to suffer the consequences, even though they have not been responsible for creating this disaster.

4.2.2.4.2. Prophetic Vision for a Sustainable Society Today

The principle of sustainability means also that the needs of the present generation are reasonably fulfilled without depriving future generations of basic amenities to life. Seen from the socio-ethical point of view, the excessive exploitation of natural resources is against intergenerational justice. Markus Vogt has rightly said: “The anthropological basis of ethics requires one to be mindful of the lasting nature of the use and the complexity of the mutual dependence and also the intrinsic value of nature as co-creation.”¹⁷⁸ As such, nature is a capital entrusted to all human beings. It is a constant capital meant to sustain not only the present generation but also the coming generations. It is against justice when only a small section of the society benefits from this and in the same way it is against intergenerational justice when one generation excessively exploits it. The right of the tribals to water, land and forest is sacred and they should have the right to use it in such a way that the coming generations are not deprived of it. The following thoughts inspired from the social critique of Amos can be helpful in rediscovering a sustainable approach to nature.

Land as a Gift of God

One of the benevolent actions on the part of YHWH in the Israel Oracle, on the basis of which the prophet demands just conduct from Israel, is the fact that it is YHWH who helped them to take possession of the land (cf. 2,10). The formulation of the laws regarding

¹⁷⁷ Cf. P.C. Jain, *Globalisation and Tribal Economy*, p. 18.

¹⁷⁸ My translation from “Die anthropozentrische Ethikbegründung bedarf einer ökologischen Aufklärung hinsichtlich der Langfristigkeit des Nutzens, der Komplexität natürlicher Vernetzungszusammenhänge sowie des Eigenwertes der Mitgeschöpfe.” M. Vogt, “Natürliche Ressourcen und Intergenerationelle Gerechtigkeit”, in M. Heimbach-Steins (ed.), *Christliche Sozialethik. Ein Lehrbuch*, vol. 2, Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2005, p. 140.

harvest and gleaning makes it clear that the land and its produce belong to God, who has the right to decide the harvesting rights.¹⁷⁹ In the prophetic comprehension, failure to live justly in the land will result in loss of the land and in exile (cf. 4,2b; 6,7a). The futility of the agricultural activities (cf. 5,11) is also attributed to their unjust conduct. The land as a gift of God, as the prophets again and again reminded Israel, is a powerful concept to counter the consumerist tendencies that see it as a mere object to be plundered and made use of. The gift of land is to be respected and used responsibly, making its resources available for the good of all sections of society.

Though the analyzed texts do not speak about the exploitation of the land as such, the continued enjoying of the fruit of the land is associated with just conduct towards the weaker sections. The texts are concerned about the greed and corruption in society, which make life impossible for the weaker sections. Today we have to see the land itself as a victim that bears the brunt of the greed of human beings. The undue stress on production for surplus has led to the overexertion of the land. The mindless exploitation of natural resources by multinational corporations is the last stage of this process which has a dangerous impact on the sustainability of nature. Sustainable development requires recognition of the dignity of the land and nature.

Sustainable development in the tribal context should mean today the protection of the environment as part of a development strategy aimed at removing poverty. The environmental degradation in these areas is one of the major causes of poverty. It is a mistake to think that the destruction of land and resources can ever be compensated by development of the area with “better infrastructure”, which often means huge dams and highways. These, in fact, serve only the production of electricity for industries and for the transportation of raw materials and finished products. The benefit to the locals from such development is nil.

The population growth in non-tribal areas has led to immigration in tribal areas. The new migrants amass land and resources using their wealth, knowledge and influence in political circles. More and more areas are turned into residential areas and there is less land available for agriculture. Therefore, population growth needs to be proportionate to natural and socio-cultural resources. Sustainability in agriculture requires that sufficient land is used for agriculture and that the acquisition of land for industrial purposes is regulated. The land should be used in such a way that water, air, and biological diversity are protected and the balance of nature is preserved. Only such a respectful approach to land and its resources can in the long run sustain the earth.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. C. van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law*, p. 98.

Promotion of Sustainable Life-style and Practices

The prophets reminded the people of the will of YHWH for the secure future of Israel. In metaphors and idioms intelligible to their contemporaries, they warned the people of the consequences of their mindless exploitation, in terms of end of prosperity, military defeat and deportation. The critique of the prophets stresses the need for a sustainable life style where natural resources and opportunities are equally available to everyone in order to fulfill their basic needs. The manipulation of justice by the rich and the powerful to their own advantage will be disastrous for the future of the land, as the prophets foresaw. In tune with the prophetic vision, the principle of sustainability demands the overcoming of consumerist tendencies which burden the nature and make the lives of the weaker sections miserable. It visualizes the creation of a future that is not so much oriented to development but to a contented life within the ability of nature to support it.¹⁸⁰ Thus it is important to make the tribals aware of the futility of their attempt to raise their living standards by blindly following the non-tribals as this would only lead to a boom in consumerist products being sold in their markets.¹⁸¹ Markus Vogt points out: “Without self regulation, the present model of economic and technical development is bound to fail, for its global spread and related dynamics of growth destabilize the social and ecological conditions necessary for prosperity.”¹⁸²

Translating the message of the prophets into the context of the tribals could also mean that the government has to think about a different pattern of development in the tribal areas. Since their skills are more agricultural related, government has to encourage the traditional skills of the tribal farmers and provide them with opportunities to learn new skills.¹⁸³ They should have the autonomy to develop their own know-how. External support should aim to strengthen and protect the traditional know-how of the tribals which helped them live in harmony with nature.¹⁸⁴ In the face of a globalized marketing system, the products of the indigenous people need access to the world market. Pope Benedict XVI has argued for giving access to the products of the developing countries into international markets because, as he reminds us, “for such countries, the possibility of marketing their products is very often what guarantees their survival in both the short and long term.” *Caritas in veritate*, No. 58.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. M. Vogt, *Prinzip Nachhaltigkeit*, p. 28.

¹⁸¹ This unhealthy tendency once again burdens nature. Things could in fact be produced much cheaper locally than the multinational companies do today.

¹⁸² My translation from “Ohne Selbstbegrenzung wird das derzeitige Modell der wirtschaftlichen und technischen Entwicklung an seinem eigenen Erfolg scheitern, weil seine globale Ausbreitung und die mit ihm verbundene Dynamik des Wachstums die sozialen und ökologischen Voraussetzungen von Wohlstand destabilisieren.” M. Vogt, “Die Stärke der Schwachen”, p. 7.

¹⁸³ R.P. Toppo, “Understanding the Oraon Migration”, p. 161.

¹⁸⁴ Markus Vogt stresses this point: “Soziale Nachhaltigkeit ist Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe durch eine Kultur, die es ermöglicht, vom Reichtum der Natur zu leben.” M. Vogt, *Prinzip Nachhaltigkeit*, p. 142.

Following the same principle, the Church should insist on upholding this right also for indigenous people to have better access for their products into the market without the exploitation of middlemen and unfair trade practices.

Tribals as Partners in Development

It is true that the life of the tribals cannot be built around land and forest alone under the changed circumstances. The economic changes brought by industrialization, globalization and technology are irreversible. Nevertheless, their undesired effects on the life of the weaker sections of society have to be minimized. Here the state has to play a regulatory role to force the multinational corporations and the state bureaucracy to protect the interests of the tribals and to prevent the degradation of nature. The tribals have to be seen as partners in the development projects and it is necessary to have collaboration between them and the multinational concerns and other large businesses. The tribals are the actual owners of the mineral resources in their territories. It is true that they are not “qualified” to sit with the multinational companies as equal partners, but one has to remember that they have been owners and operators of these resources in a sustainable way for centuries, until the intervention of outside forces took place. They have the right to be consulted on what kind of development projects will suit their interests and will have least impact on the environment. They should be made equal partners by sharing the profits accumulated from the projects.¹⁸⁵ Distributing a percentage of the net profit for the development of the local area through the elected bodies is one of the ways in which local people can be compensated.

Muhammad Yunus’ concept of social business, which he has succeeded in implementing with a fair level of success through what he calls “Grameen”¹⁸⁶ (rural), a group of 25 companies, organized and managed by the rural people themselves, is a modern example to show how development can be carried out in such a way that people are made partners in it. He recommends that financial incentives should be used without making the local people dependent on them for their whole life.¹⁸⁷

In order to make the tribals partners in development it is also necessary that the traditional know-how of the tribals be appreciated and retained as mentioned above. This will

¹⁸⁵ Cf. A. Ekka, “Indigenous People”, pp. 277-78.

¹⁸⁶ The companies cater to the various needs of the poor in the following way: “Grameen Shakti [*Rural Power*], for example, produces and sells low cost renewable energy systems, including solar panels and bio-gas converters that turn otherwise valueless farm wastes into cooking fuel. Grameen Health Care runs health clinics and provides affordable health insurance to rural families. Grameen Fisheries and Livestock operates fish farms and provides vaccination and veterinary service to help small farmers in Bangladesh improve profitability.” M. Yunus, “Economic Security”, p. 9.

¹⁸⁷ The social business model of Yunus, mentioned in the previous chapter, suggests: “When a donor wants to give a loan or a grant to, say, build a bridge in a recipient country, it could create instead a bridge-building company owned by the local poor.” M. Yunus, “Economic Security”, p. 11.

help to preserve cultural diversity and tribal traditions. The recommendations by the Workshop on Application of Science and Technology in Tribal Development, held at the Cultural Research Institute, Calcutta, highlights the need that “transfer of technology should be made in tune with the power of assimilation and absorption of the tribal people and should be done by supplementation of their existing technology and not by substitution.”¹⁸⁸ The tribal technologies are time-tested, nature-friendly and low-cost. They should not be considered as out-dated and thereby done away with; instead, they have to be made more efficient to suit the needs of the time. The new technologies that are absolutely necessary should be transferred, taking into consideration the cultural and environmental sensitivities of the tribals.¹⁸⁹

4.3. Amos’ Theological Framework: a Model for Church’s Social Engagement

The prophetic response to the social crisis took place within a theological framework (see 3.3) and this framework has relevance for the social action of the Church in Chotanagpur today. The Christians are called upon to engage themselves with the struggles of the tribals as messengers of a God who are disturbed by the injustice and as people who care for the weak. The prophets used the personal intervention of YHWH on behalf of the weakling Israel as a paradigm for showing justice to the weak. This is a belief from which the Church in Chotanagpur could also draw inspiration in her mission to instil hope in the hearts of the tribals. Pope Benedict XVI also has affirmed in his Encyclical *Spe salvi*:

God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety. His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us. (No. 31)

It is the desire to imitate this God of justice which inspires just conduct in the community. The Indians, especially the tribals, are innately God-fearing. Religion is part of their attitudes and lives. They will certainly find a religion that insists on practicing just relationships and a dignified treatment of its members in the community relevant to their lives. The effort of the Church to identify itself with the struggles of the tribals will also help it to identify itself more deeply with the fundamental affirmation of the Second Vatican Council: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs

¹⁸⁸ A.K. Das, “Spread of Appropriate Level of Technology for Tribal Development”, in D.K. Behera / G. Pfeffer (eds.), *Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies*, vol. 2, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2009, p. 66.

¹⁸⁹ The above mentioned Workshop also recommends that the transfer of technology “be made on mutual co-operation giving due regard to the cultural heritage of the tribal people”. A.K. Das, “Spread of Appropriate Level of Technology”, p. 66.

and anxieties of the followers of Christ.” (*Gaudium et spes*, No. 1). This identification would call for a dedicated social praxis and a holistic approach to the proclamation of the word of God.¹⁹⁰ Such a social praxis has to be founded on the following two factors that stand out in the theological framework of the prophetic oracles: the recollection of the actions of God in history and the realization that God is aware of the transgressions of his people and is concerned with re-establishing their true identity.

4.3.1. Recollection of the Actions of God in the History

The prophets were convinced that God has intervened powerfully in their history, that he still has the power to act in the world and that he still leads and directs the course of its history. This conviction is also the foundation of biblical social laws. Remembering the rich cultural traditions of the past is an emotional act for the tribals of Chotanagpur. They cannot remember the peaceful and harmonious existence in the tribal villages of olden times, without feeling the pain of the loss of it today. What the prophetic thoughts can offer them today is a framework for recollecting, which can connect their past to the present and invite them to act in a spirit of mutual recognition and solidarity. A prophetic Church can contribute to this identity of the tribals, a sizeable number of them now being part of the Church, which inherits the fruits of the liberating actions of God in history. The practice of justice and a life free of exploitation and oppression belongs to their true identity. The mutual recognition of each other’s rights as the will of God and her own responsibility to make people aware of this will of God is what the prophetic critique offers to the Church in Chotanagpur. As Cornel West puts it,

... the role of any prophetic thinker and prophetic figure is to attempt to speak truth to power with love and humility. ... you speak the truth loudly and clearly and lucidly and you try to speak in such a way that it energizes and galvanizes folk who wouldn’t ordinarily believe in themselves enough to do something.¹⁹¹

The remembrance of God’s actions in history is an invitation to engage in the world today. However, the Church knows that the Kingdom of God and its justice is not only a this-worldly entity. She knows that the promise of the Lord will not be fully realized in this world and therefore there is no need to be discouraged and disillusioned by the fragmentary nature of justice in this world, but at the same time, she sees the promise of the Kingdom having relevance for the present. This then calls for a praxis that is oriented to the coming of the

¹⁹⁰ Bogaert recalls how during the dark ages, “the Benedictine monks had not only preached religion amongst the tribes of Europe but also taught them the *art of cultivation and artisanship*, and in this manner civilized them.” He believes that similar “total and integral approach” was effective in helping the tribal people of Chotanagpur. M. V.d. Bogaert, “Hoffmann’s Credit Cooperative Society”, p. 58.

¹⁹¹ C. West, *Prophetic Thought*, p. 66.

Kingdom of God and his justice and for a greater engagement for justice in the world.¹⁹² Thus the Church is called to participate in the developmental activities for the weaker sections of the society, but in her involvement she should not lose perspective of being the messenger of God and should affirm the fact that the human person is a “unity of body and soul” (cf. *Caritas in veritate*, No. 76).

4.3.2. God’s Awareness of Injustice and Re-establishing True Identity

The theological framework presents YHWH as a God who is aware of injustice in the community and as someone who does not tolerate it. The continual transgressions of Israel have caused the punitive intervention of YHWH because they threatened their identity as people of God. God could intervene to re-establish this identity. The Church, being a witness to God, has to play the role of re-establishing this identity. This means that the role of the Church is not to spread fear and anxiety among the people in the name of a “punishing God” or to make fear of punishment the motive for just conduct. The aim of the Church, its social ethics and theology, has to be “the instilling of hope, which does not suppress the dangers, but leads to solidarity, justice and salvation, as signified by the cross”.¹⁹³ I would suggest the following implications of prophetic proclamation, which shall help the tribals to reestablish their true identity.

First, the certainty that conduct which goes against the rights of others (see 3.3.3 above) will be punished by YHWH calls for a fundamental choice on the part of Israel. The choice consists of remaining free and enjoying the gifts of God or letting oneself be taken into bondage. One who chooses to remain free must respect the freedom of other persons too. The basic understanding behind it is the conviction that every person is a liberated being and has inherited freedom. However, this freedom has to be used responsibly, in an interpersonal context where it requires guarding the similar freedom of others. It is, in fact, in safeguarding the freedom of the other that one’s own freedom is fully realized. The freedom of one cannot lead to the loss of freedom of another.¹⁹⁴ This realization invites the Church in Chotanagpur to be a community of persons who respect the freedom of each other. It should also facilitate and promote conditions which foster freedom and the full flowering of persons.

Second, this is an invitation to the Church to keep her eyes open to the realities around by reading the actions of God in the signs of the time. Structural and personal shortcomings

¹⁹² Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, p. 224. History also tells us that the missions among the tribals never made a separation between their material and spiritual well being.

¹⁹³ My translation from “eine Hoffnung entgegenzusetzen, die nicht auf Verdrängung von Gefahren setzt, sondern auf Solidarität, Gerechtigkeit und das Heil, das im Kreuz liegt”. M. Vogt, *Prinzip Nachhaltigkeit*, p. 76.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. A. Anzenbacher, *Christliche Sozialethik*, p. 224.

exist in every society and it is the role of the Church to help cultures to recognize these shortcomings and appreciate the values that will help to overcome them – a fact Pope Benedict XVI reaffirms in *Caritas in veritate*, No. 59:

Every culture has burdens from which it must be freed and shadows from which it must emerge. The Christian faith, by becoming incarnate in cultures and at the same time transcending them, can help them grow in universal brotherhood and solidarity, for the advancement of global and community development.

Third, the prophets showed that God stands on the side of the people who are denied their rights, and they tried to give a voice to the voiceless and to make possible a dignified life for all. They speak of a God who wants to be discovered in our care for our fellow beings. The concept of justice in the prophetic understanding is not only an inner virtue, but also a criterion of relationships between persons and social structures. This justice required re-establishing the solidarity, which was necessary for a humane and dignified existence. This could be achieved only by assuring every one the fundamental right to basic material needs.¹⁹⁵ The relevance of the church in this area is still determined by its ability not only to provide people with meaning systems for their lives, but also the means of life in situations of need. The socio-ethical imperative of option for the poor is ever more important for the Christians today, living in a world where competition is the key word and where there is a clear “option for the strong and winner”.¹⁹⁶ In a society of glaring inequalities, like the one in Chotanagpur, the option for the poor is an “option for the weak”¹⁹⁷ and it calls the Church to set itself totally on the side of the weak.

Fourth, the Church in the tribal areas has the task of providing a substitute community in the face of the disappearance of tribal solidarity and mutual support mechanisms. It should become an organisation where individuals and groups find mutual support and feel secure as a community. Following in the footsteps of the courageous missionaries who fought for the cause of the tribals, and did not even hesitate to accompany them to courts, the Church should today read the signs of the time and stand for the protection of the land and culture of the tribals in the wake of heavy industrialisation and globalization.

Fifth, the overcoming of injustice in society has to take place through personal and communitarian conversion, as the prophets proposed. In resisting destabilizing factors, it is imperative that we desist from violent reactions and sectarian ideologies which are self-

¹⁹⁵ Cf. M. Vogt, “Soziale Interaktion und Gerechtigkeit”, p. 297.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. M. Vogt, “Die Stärke der Schwachen”, p. 3.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. M. Vogt, “Soziale Interaktion und Gerechtigkeit”, p. 296.

destructive.¹⁹⁸ The Chotanagpur Church has here the noble ideal of *ahimsa* or nonviolent protest proposed and demonstrated by the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi. He has shown how nonviolent protest can be used as an effective tool in the struggle for justice and freedom. The prophetic aim was to make injustice clear in the heart of the evildoer and to touch his heart with the word of God, inviting him to conversion. They made the speech of the weak into the speech of God and lent credibility to their aspirations for rights. The decisive factor behind their struggle is the support, accompaniment and the promise of YHWH that he is solidly with them. This is an invitation to the Church in Chotanagpur to follow the way of the cross, which ultimately is the way of victory as the Lord has shown, a way of protest against all injustices and at the same time a way on which the Church walks in solidarity with her people in their struggle for a meaningful existence.

4.4. Concluding Summary

The four principles of social ethics, viz., personality, solidarity, subsidiarity and sustainability can help us to formulate a response to unjust situations for a postmodern society, based on the aspects of justice expressed in the biblical prophets. The prophetic message reformulated in accordance with socio-ethical principles can help us to actualize it in concrete situations of the life of the people and help them to further their life in the light of the biblical message. In the context of the tribals of Chotanagpur, the social critique of Amos has a special relevance because of the socio-cultural and economic injustices that prevail in this society.

The socio-ethical principle of personality means that being created in the image of God, and being liberated by YHWH from all bondages, the human persons possess an undeniable dignity. This dignity is to be realized through a responsible handling of the rest of creation and by protecting the freedom and dignity of others. The prophets stress the this-worldly aspect of the salvation of human persons and invite the community to take responsibility for one another by securing justice for all. The principle of personality calls on every institution to create social, political, economic and cultural conditions for the development of human personality. The prophetic concern for protecting the dignity and right of human persons calls for vigilance against its violations and to secure social, economic and political conditions for the flowering of human personality. The tribals of Chotanagpur

¹⁹⁸ The neoliberal policies of successive governments in the tribal areas have increasingly alienated the people and it is a sad fact that the tribal youth today are misused by left-wing ideological groups to achieve their sectarian and political ambitions. The violent reactions organized by these groups threaten today the peaceful life of the tribals and have led to armed confrontation with the state, which will definitely have very dangerous consequences in terms of loss of innocent lives and a permanent rupture in the relationship between the tribals and the Indian state.

traditionally appreciated the dignified existence of human persons in a mutually supporting community, where women had a respectable place and the dignity of work was guaranteed to every person. However, in today's tribal society, displacement due to industrialization and urbanization and the consequent migration to towns and cities, indebtedness due to the failure of their traditional means of living, viz., agriculture, inhuman working conditions and human trafficking violate these conditions. Understanding the prophetic call to right and justice in this context means creation of an environment which supports the development of personality and establishing conditions which prevent the exploitation of women and domestic workers.

The disintegration of solidarity structures may have been one of the causes for social crisis addressed by the biblical prophets. The stratifications that emerged in society were not supportive of the interests of the weaker sections of the community. Solidarity, which means a preferential option for the poor, requires not only showing charity to the poor, but also creation of just economic structures that promote fair distribution of goods and services in modern societies. The prophetic social critique and the biblical social laws propose the saving actions of YHWH as a basis for concern for the poor and are aimed at protecting the interests of the weaker sections. These can inspire actions in favour of solidarity in the Chotanagpur tribal society today. The tribals stand in danger of losing their traditional solidarity structures on two grounds: the disappearance of the mutually supporting kinship relationship due to stratifications in society; and the loss of their symbiotic relationship with nature due to land alienation and loss of access to the forest and forest products. Protecting the interests of the affected people here would mean promotion of social structures based on mutual interaction and mutual support, and the adoption of a concept of development where the interests of the weaker sections are protected and the mutually supporting relationship between the tribals and the nature is restored.

The fact that the prophets took up the cause of those sections of the society, who were denied of opportunities for a decent human existence, calls our attention to the socio-ethical concept of subsidiarity, according to which every person should be given freedom and assistance to achieve what he/she is able to do by himself/herself. This principle means at the same time that the community has the duty to offer help for self-help, to achieve what the individuals and small communities left to themselves are not able to achieve. This principle can help us to paraphrase the prophetic condemnation of denying the freedom and dignity of weaker sections in terms of empowerment and development of basic human capabilities for our times. Applying this principle to the tribal community, the concept of subsidiarity determined tribal life, especially their kinship structure, which encouraged small group

initiatives and care for individuals. A clear example was the traditional self-rule which ensured government by the tribals themselves, who were aware of their needs and worked for their welfare. The stand of the prophets on the side of the weaker sections of society, whose subsidiary functioning was hindered, calls for organising help for self-help for women and youth and offering them professional education and skill training. It also appeals for the financial empowerment of the poor through initiatives like micro-credit societies. Strengthening the traditional self-rule system of the tribals could facilitate the free and responsible growth of individuals and communities.

The socio-ethical principle of sustainability suggests that every economic development should be evaluated on the basis of its ability to offer a meaningful living especially to the poor sections of the present generation and its ability to secure the life of future generations. Though the prophets were not faced with the modern ecological problems, their stand against luxurious lifestyle, egoism and pure profit-oriented pursuit of business can strengthen the basis of a Christian approach to the ecological issues of the day. An association could be drawn between the prophetic conviction that the unjust social practices will lead to the destruction of a nation and the ecological destruction caused by the loss of the tribal handling of the environment and the rising consumerist culture. The socio-ethical principle of sustainability implies respecting the tribals' right to land, water and forest, promotion of a contented lifestyle within the ability of nature to support it, and an integrated approach to the development of their areas by sharing the profit of the industries with them. The nature-friendly technology of the tribals has to be retained and reinforced rather than substituted.

Finally, the theological framework of Amos' social critique proposes a model for the social action of the Church in tribal areas. The Church is inspired to engage herself in the struggles of the tribals as a messenger of God, who sees human person as a unity of body and soul and hence sets herself at the service of his/her material as well as spiritual welfare. The Church has to become a place to re-live the mutually supporting and dignified traditions of the tribals reinforced by the recollections of the liberating actions of God in the biblical traditions and thus paving the way into a future in solidarity and freedom. The faith in YHWH, who vigorously defended the rights of the Israelites, should inspire the Church to become a place where the rights of each person are respected and the basic means of survival assured. It should also help her to bring to light the darker sides of the cultures, especially where unjust practices exist, to light through the encounter with the word of God and its inherent call for justice. She is called to challenge the injustice in society through nonviolent protest, which is another expression of true love.

General Conclusion

The socio-critical sayings of Amos are presented with a structure which mentions the addressees, the victims, the unjust actions committed, the recollection of the saving role of YHWH in history, and the announcement of punishments. This structure helped the prophet to present his message of justice touching the realities of his day and as rooted in the theological traditions of his faith. The transgressions are named without referring to specific contexts or without naming any person by name. This offers an opportunity to interpret the sayings in more than one context. The prophet, inspired by God, prophesied with conviction that oppression and exploitation must be ended so that the weaker sections in the community can have a dignified human existence. He called the rich and the responsible in the community to act justly so that basic values like solidarity and compassion for the weak are restored. The theological framework of these sayings recalls the saving actions of YHWH in the past, his active involvement in the present and his intention to bring about change in the existing situation through punitive actions.

The text itself is silent about the crisis which is addressed by Amos and therefore one must look into the historical and archaeological surveys to reconstruct the crisis. In this survey I rejected the various models proposed such as the influence of Canaanite officers and their value system on traditional Israelite society or the emergence of an early capitalist system with a few owning and operating the means of production, called rent capitalism, in favour of various factors that might have contributed to the creation of the social crisis at the emergence of monarchical states around the world. These factors included urbanization and population growth, increased construction and associated heavy taxes and forced labour, the break-up of the traditional tribal solidarity structures, the emergence of a class society and the debt system. Though the emergence of monarchy might have caused some of these factors, this crisis need not be seen as the product of a particular phase of Israelite history. The prophetic critique could reflect upon similar crises existing during the long compositional history of the book of Amos.

Though Amos does not speak in systematic categories, his idea of justice was similar to the realization-focused idea of justice proposed by Amartya Sen and the postmodern philosophical tradition of American pragmatism and had to do with rectifying the concrete instances of injustice that existed in his society. Justice in Amos' context meant re-establishing the YHWH-willed proper relationships in the community. Though he does not use the modern terms of human rights, human dignity and so on, his affirmation of the mutually recognizing relationships in the community is basic to these concepts as we

understand them today. The subtle social analysis used by Amos suggests evaluating socio-economic progress from the point of view of the most disadvantaged sections in the community. He understood deprivation itself in a broad sense as including not only material deprivation, but also the victims of various other kinds of afflictions, judicial manipulations and social discrimination. The community he envisioned is an inclusive community which transcends class distinctions and shows favour to the poor and needy. The biblical social laws present an institutional response to the social crisis which incorporated YHWH-willed dignified treatment of the weak in the community.

Christian social ethics offer us an opportunity to translate the biblical message for our times. Considering the fact that the reception of the prophetic traditions in the Church has not been very overwhelming, although the recent encyclicals and documents show some openness to them, it is the task of Christian social ethics to draw the implications of the message of justice in Amos and in biblical social laws for the Church today. This study reveals the following implications:

- i. To formulate a concept of justice that is realization-focused rather than a mere virtue, implying practicing justice in the community, in terms of mutually affirming relationships.
- ii. To creatively use the biblical traditions to promote the possibilities and potentialities of freedom and dignity of mankind and the sustainability of nature.
- iii. To be inclusive in its understanding of justice, to encompass especially the various deprived sections of society.
- iv. To influence the way of doing business today by questioning the pure profit-oriented pursuits and the use of money and power to the disadvantage of the weak.
- v. To resist tendencies to use gender as a factor of social control or justifying discrimination against women on cultural or religious grounds.
- vi. To fight the consumerist lifestyle unconcerned about the misery of teeming millions of poor in the world and to combine sociological and ecological factors in fighting environmental problems and poverty today.
- vii. To be universal in its approach to justice and to challenge class divisions on economic, social, confessional and ethnic lines.
- viii. To be aware that the Kingdom of God has also a necessary this-worldly dimension and to make the practice of justice in the community a visible sign of God's presence in the world.
- ix. To use the biblical prophecy to become self-critical and to let its spirit influence its teachings and practices to promote human rights and dignity.

x. To present God as someone who is deeply involved in the human history through the signs of the times and to recognize the actions of God in the aspirations and initiatives to create hope and to take responsibility for the poor.

xi. To creatively use recollection of the biblical traditions to foster the “we-identity” of the community and to move forward in solidarity and mutual appreciation.

xii. To stress the role of religion to shatter the false confidence of oppressive and exploitative human structures and to restore the true identity as a liberated community of mutual care.

Social ethics provides through the principles of personality, solidarity, subsidiarity and sustainability a possibility to actualize the biblical message for a context today. The actualization is a mutually benefitting process for social ethics and biblical exegesis. The significant gains for social ethics in this process are the following:

i. Biblical exegesis can offer a concrete foundation for Christian social ethics, which will help it make a contribution of its own to socio-ethical discussions today. One important contribution is definitely the idea of human dignity and responsible freedom underlying the prophetic and legal traditions of the Bible.

ii. YHWH’s concern for the weakling Israel as a paradigm for solidarity with weaker sections, which is characterized by his vigorous defense against injustice against them. The option for the weak is constitutive element of God’s chosen people and their continued existence in history depends on it.

iii. The source of the dignity and freedom is not a contract, nor mutual advantage, but the fact that people belong to a community liberated by YHWH and have a duty to treat one another with dignity and mutual respect. It makes mutual respect and freedom part of the identity of belonging to this community. The prophetic understanding of the role of a person in terms of maintaining justice and righteousness in the community can correct an anthropocentric understanding of the human role in the universe.

iv. The recommendation of self-regulation and abstinence to protect the interest of the weaker sections shows the way to overcome the ecological issues of our day and to solve the problem of poverty. The prophets and biblical social laws recommend an approach that can simultaneously take care of the ecological and sociological issues. Pursuing one to the peril of the other is to be avoided.

The actualization of the message through the principles of social ethics can contribute to biblical exegesis in the following way:

i. Social ethics provides the prophetic call to the dignified treatment of persons with application possibilities in the social, political, economic and cultural conditions of the

present day. It makes mutual respect for freedom and rights and condemnation of their violation a task of exegesis.

ii. Social ethics helps the prophetic concern for the weak and the call to solidarity with them to serve the creation of just structures that promote fair distribution of goods and services in modern societies.

iii. The prophetic idea of just treatment of the weak can be better understood today in terms of the development of basic human capabilities such as the ability to live a normal life, the right to bodily and emotional health and integrity, to freedom of senses, to live in freedom and respect with others and so on.

iv. The prophetic critique of the consumerist lifestyle, egoism and pure profit-oriented pursuit of business takes on a new dimension today when applied in the context of ecological crisis in evaluating every economic development on the basis of its ability to offer meaningful life to every section of society and to secure the life of future generations.

The attempt to actualize the prophetic message for a community today, the tribal community of Chotanagpur, through the principles of social ethics shows how the prophetic message can help people today to further their life in the light of it. This attempt helps to present the biblical message of protecting the dignity and rights of persons and concern for the poor and the weak as relevant to a particular context. The actualization requires understanding of the social and cultural background of the tribals and their present situation. The prophetic message has a special relevance for the tribals today as they find themselves in a situation where the mutually sustaining symbiotic relationship with nature is ruptured and the mutually supporting clan structure has disappeared in the face of industrialization, urbanization and globalization. In the present situation of the tribals the prophetic call for justice means a call to protect the tribal culture and traditions against the onslaught of outside influences, to protect women and domestic workers from exploitation, to promote social structures based on mutual interaction and mutual support, to empower through financial self-reliance and fostering of traditional self-governing institutions, to protect their right to land, water and forest, and to promote a lifestyle within the ability of nature to support it.

This study thus shows that a contextualized interpretation of the prophetic message using socio-ethical principles is a mutually beneficial process. The prophetic tradition can give a sound foundation to Christian social ethics with regard to the dignified treatment of individuals and nature. They need not look for it only in the speculations of socio-philosophical theories. The theories are intellectual speculations, but the biblical traditions are also memories pregnant with emotion, which makes the dignified treatment of others not a dry

duty but an important part of their identity as the people liberated by God, an endeavour prompted by the past experiences which promises future possibilities and hope.

A contextualized interpretation shows that exegesis need not be a mere exercise in textual criticism as it can serve to make the revelation of God meaningful and relevant for people today. Christian social ethics can provide it with a scientific method to present the message in today's context. Biblical exegesis becomes much richer as the word itself is liberated from the garb of culture and social settings of the time of its composition. A contextualized interpretation offers a possibility to re-incarnate the word in a garb understandable and appreciable in the present. Contextualization makes it possible for the word to come alive with new and creative elements every time it encounters a new context.

The texts analyzed in this study were those with socio-critical content and related to the call for social justice. Even with regard to these texts, this study is far from exhaustive. It would be enriching to look into the rest of the prophetic literature, especially the rest of the socio-critical prophecy of other 8th century BCE, the wisdom literature, the gospels and so on.

This kind of an analysis has the limitation that it is restricted to texts with social content, but the effort to make Bible relevant for the present need not be restricted to the texts with an accent on liberation. One could use psycho-analysis or cultural anthropology to interpret various biblical texts which relate to love, faith, trust, loyalty, salvation and similar themes. Christian social ethics and other disciplines can contribute to this endeavour by assuring that the biblical interpretation does not confine itself to the study of historical facts, ancient cultures or the activity of the human mind, but rather it helps to create new history, influence cultures and direct human thinking and actions, thus making God's revelation shape the life of people today. This study is only an indicator of the vast possibilities that exist in this area.

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