

**ENGAGING THE THEME OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN AMOS 5:21-24: A CHALLENGE
TO PROPHETIC MINISTRY IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH (LAWNA), NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

The main question that this thesis seeks to answer is, “If re-read through a justice-seeking lens, and informed by a justice-denying Nigerian context, could the theme of social justice, as reflected in the text of Amos 5:21-24, inspire the prophets of The Apostolic Church LAWNA to proclaim a liberating and empowering message to the powers that be (political establishment), in solidarity with the poor and marginalised people of Nigeria?” The study identifies social justice issues in Amos through a careful exegetical analysis of the text and its context. Using the historical method of documentary analysis, it also identifies prevalent social justice concerns in present day Nigeria. The study shows that Nigeria today is characterised by socio-political, economic and religious corruption and injustices, which are similar to those that the eighth century BCE Israelite prophet, Amos, addressed. Consequently, an exegetical study of Amos 5:21-24 was done for the insights it could provide about the prophetic voice then, which may still be relevant today. The study revealed that the prophetic ministry of The Apostolic Church LAWNA has not been effective in addressing social injustices that are prevalent in the Nigerian society. Following a careful reflection on the call for social justice in Amos 5:21-24, this study urges the prophets of The Apostolic Church LAWNA, Nigeria to employ their prophetic ministry to proclaim a liberating and empowering message to the political institutions of the day, in solidarity with the poor and marginalised people of Nigeria.

KEY WORDS

**SOCIAL JUSTICE, AMOS, PROPHECY, RIGHTEOUSNESS, ETHICAL RELIGION,
WORSHIP, NIGERIA, THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH, LAWNA, PROPHETIC
MINISTRY, INJUSTICE**

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, the late Pastor Joseph Akinyemi Akintola and Deaconess Dorcas Oyeladun Akintola who allowed themselves to be used by the Lord to bring me up to respond to the covenant call on my life. A special feeling of appreciation in loving memory of my dear father, the late Pastor Joseph Akinyemi Akintola who until his death was an ordained prophet of The Apostolic Church LAWNA for fifty years. It was his dying wish that I complete the present work which was started a year before he died. His passionate love for God and his selfless love for the downtrodden inspired the work.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	-	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ATR	-	African Traditional Religion
BCE	-	Before Common Era
BDB	-	Brown-Driver-Briggs
BHS	-	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
CAC	-	Christ Apostolic Church
ESJ	-	European Scientific Journal
FTC	-	Faith Tabernacle Congregation
HIV	-	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IJHS	-	Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies
IJRHSS	-	International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies
JBL	-	Journal of Biblical Literature
JJS	-	Journal of Jewish Studies
JSOT	-	Journal for the Study of Old Testament
LAWNA	-	Lagos, Western and Northern Areas
MT	-	Masoretic Text
NABIS	-	Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies
NRSV	-	New Revised Standard Version
OJT	-	Ogbomoso Journal of Theology
OT	-	Old Testament
SBL	-	Society of Biblical Literature
TAC	-	The Apostolic Church
TACN	-	The Apostolic Church, Nigeria

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Many contemporary Old Testament scholars regard prophecy and prophetism in ancient Israel as one of the most complex issues in Old Testament studies. For Akao (1993:104-115), the source, forms and content of Israelite prophetism defy the generally accepted academic definitions. He therefore defines prophecy as a mode of communication between the divine and a human audience. In cultures that believe that such contact is possible, this communication takes the form of dialogue, that is, messages in both directions are channelled through individuals who are recognised by others in the society as qualified to perform the prophetic function. Viewed this way, prophecy can be described as a social phenomenon. Prophecy is defined as an inspired word from Yahweh through a prepared and sanctified vessel namely, a prophet (Akao 1993:112).

Scholars have ascertained that Old Testament prophets played a great role in shaping the course and context of Israelite history and tradition. Israelite prophets are regarded as the proponents of an ethical religion. In other words, the main task of the prophets was to teach the people to live a faithful and fulfilled life. In his article, *Old Testament Prophets and Social Justice*, Lopez (2014) claims that one of the greatest influences on the social justice traditions of Christians and Jews are the Old Testament prophets. He notes that Old Testament prophets had a strong sense of social justice for the poor, the widow, the orphan and the marginalised.

A careful study of selected texts from Old Testament prophetic literature reveals that the prophets, among other things, denounced the existing social order in ancient Israel because it did not embody the values of Israelite religion. Yahweh's covenant requires that the economic and political structures of the society be based on ethical and religious standards. On the contrary, those who live in luxury do not worry about the destitute at their door, land-owners are greedy, creditors are heartless, the rich in general are vain and irresponsible (Scolnic 2008:2)

Similarly, Bokovo, (2014:1) writes that:

Reading through each of the prophetic texts of the Bible, the common denominator in terms of Israelite prophetic concerns is clear. Prophets were highly vested in what we often today refer to as

“social justice.” They believed that the establishment of “justice and righteousness” (a dual term used throughout the ancient Near East for something similar to the modern concept of social justice) was the purpose of Israel’s existence... Biblical prophets felt deeply concerned over the distribution of wealth in the covenant community, and the moral need to take care of the poor and needy. The call to liberate the financially enslaved is therefore characteristic of the prophetic call for social justice.

The eighth century BCE witnessed the emergence of the so-called writing prophets. At that time, the compilation of the books of Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah began (Lafferty 2010:2). One of the major voices that cried for social justice was that of the prophet Amos. According to Folarin and Olanisebe (2014:243), Amos was a great man of God whose message troubled though rarely influenced his audience to positive change. Amos judged his audience from other nations on the basis of general revelation, but he judged Israel and Judah based on the stipulations of Yahweh’s covenant (Folarin & Olanisebe 2014:243).

Mariottini (2014:2) agrees that Amos spoke to an oppressed society and his concern for the poor and the oppressed made him a prophet for all times (cf. Lopez 2014:2). Indeed, Amos’ prophecy transcends his generation. Undoubtedly, his oracle provides material for the study of the theme of social justice as a motivation for socio-economic and socio-religious transformation in our day. His oracles could not have been more apt and relevant, especially in the Nigerian context at a time when the gap between the rich and the poor has never been greater. Mariottini (2014:2) has rightly affirmed that:

... the sources of oppression and injustice may look different today, but people’s concern for material prosperity reflects the days in which Amos lived. Amos’ message of God’s opposition to injustice, his criticism of the people’s worship of material things, and his witness of God’s special concern for the poor and oppressed, affirm that the worship of God in any age is worthless if social oppression and injustice are ignored.

The foregoing assertion will certainly be engaged in the course of this study.

A thorough biblical reflection on the socio-political, economic and religious situation of Israel of the eighth century BCE, juxtaposed with the Nigerian context, shows that gross social injustice, an unbridged gap between the rich and the poor, systematic marginalisation, poor leadership and religious exuberance are a common denominator in both contexts (Otuibo 2003:67). The message of Amos, therefore, becomes relevant as a voice of conscience to the Nigerian state so that she can prove that she is indeed “the giant of Africa” (Holmes 1987:1), and take her rightful place in the community of nations.

The political and social conditions that informed the message of Amos are unambiguously disturbing. According to Harrison (1969:143), the concurrent reign of Uzziah of Judah in the South and Jeroboam II of Israel in the North, was marked by a period of peace and prosperity in both the Southern and Northern kingdoms. Further, Syria, the domineering northern neighbour of Israel had been crushed by Assyria (Harrison 1969:143). Due to their military success and the expansion of their territories (2 Kgs. 14: 25, 15:2; Chron. 26:26-8), great wealth accrued to the two kingdoms (Bussey 1965:168). Consequently, a powerful and wealthy class emerged in Samaria. This wealthy class abused their privileged position by oppressing the poor and the weak.

The ensuing prosperity was accompanied by an almost unprecedented degree of social corruption and the unmistakable symptom of a morally sick society began to manifest in Samaria. According to Bussey (1965:168), the effect of this degeneration on the society was felt in the corruption of justice, in wilful and luxurious living of the upper classes and in the general decay of social unity. The rich manifested no sense of responsibility towards the poor, and instead of relieving their economic distress, they seemed bent on depriving them of their ill-gotten wealth which enabled them to accumulate vast estates legally or forcefully (Harrison, 1969:144). In a very short time, the nation whose strength had subsisted in the mass of its independent citizens was divided into the dissolute rich and the oppressed poor.

The maxim “money corrupts” was truly exemplified in the Northern kingdom during the days of Jeroboam II. The rich merchant princes became immoral, corrupt and unjust; the poor were oppressed, robbed and ill-treated. The religious context of Amos’ time was grossly affected by the social situation. Calkins (1986:2) opines that Israel’s religion was characterised by superstition, hypocrisy and degrading immoralities. Its religious life was only a matter of form and outward observance of religious practice rather than a true spiritual ideal that ought to penetrate every phase of the existing order and shape it according to the principles of righteousness and justice. If Amos were to address the present situation in Nigeria, he would still have spoken with such audacious courage as he demonstrated in ancient Israel during the eighth century BCE. The reason is that Nigeria is characterised by similar socio-political, economic and religious corruption that was witnessed in eighth century Israel.

Nigeria occupies the basins of the Niger and Benue Rivers and extensive adjacent territories. The area of the country is 923 768 square kms (356 669 sq. mi) of which the water bodies cover about 13,000 square kms (Douglas 2004:10). It extends northward from the elbow of the Gulf of Guinea, and is bounded in the West by the Republic of Benin, in the North by the Republic of Niger and in the East by the Republic of Chad as well as the Republic of Cameroon (Otuibo 2003:56). With a population of approximately 202 million people (World Bank 2019:1), Nigeria is popularly known as the giant of Africa (Holmes 1987:1). However, considering the ugly trends in the country today, should this entity called Nigeria continue to be referred to as the giant of Africa? Nigeria is a nation endowed with human and natural resources as well as a rich cultural heritage. The natural resources include a rich deposit of quality petroleum and a huge reservoir of natural gas discovered in the Niger Delta in 1959 (Akpomuvie 2011:1). The country has vast arable land that stretches from the tropical rain forest of the south to the savannah regions of the north. The climate is mild, favourable to all year round production of food and cash crops. Major cash crops for export include cocoa, oil palm products and rubber. Fruits and vegetables are produced also in abundance. Nigeria makes a substantial contribution to world trade with some of these products.

Nigeria is endowed with enormous potential and resources that could make her to be truly great and enable her citizens to live comfortably. Like the biblical description of the land of Israel, Nigeria could also be a “land that flows with milk and honey.” According to Pope John Paul II, (1998:23)

God in fact has blessed this land with human and natural wealth and it is everyone’s duty to ensure that these resources are used for the good of the whole people. All Nigerians must work to rid the society of everything that offends the human person or violates human rights. This means reconciling differences, overcoming ethnic rivalries and injecting honesty, efficiency and competence into art of governance.

The positive view of the nation expressed above is also re-echoed in the communiqué of the Catholic Bishops’ conference of Nigeria held in Abuja in February 2002 as they recounted the nation’s blessings. It states that, “God has been kind to our nation. He has blessed us with wonderful people, resilient, hard-working and joyful; our people are deeply religious and God-fearing. Our ethnic and cultural diversity is a blessing yet to be fully realized...” (CSN2002:5).

In view of the above, the puzzling question is: How has the Nigerian state managed these blessings? The country is endowed with many skilful individuals (in business, politics, economics,

science and technology, etc.) of international repute whose efforts can set this nation on the path of greatness. However, Nigerians have suffered and continue to suffer under bad leadership and economic hardship. Nigeria is considered an economic powerhouse in Africa (The Root 2014:1). In 2014, it was reported that Nigeria's economy overtook South Africa's to become Africa's largest economy with a GDP calculation of more than \$500bn (Aljazeera 2014:1). According to a Forbes magazine rating of 2015, four of the nine richest black billionaires are Nigerians; and of the four, one of them, Aliko Dangote, is the world's richest black man (Nsele 2014:1); while Mrs Folorunsho Alakija, a Nigerian, is the world's richest black woman (Agoha 2017:18). The paradox, however, is that not all of the wealth in the country filters down to the majority of the populace, which still lives in abject poverty. High unemployment is well attested. In 2011, nearly one in every four Nigerians was unemployed, and in March 2016, Nigeria's unemployment rate was recorded at 12.1 percent (The Root 2014:1).

On the paradoxical situation in Nigeria, Ehusani's (1996:7) comments:

Yet the majority of Nigerians are today living in abject poverty. Though their land is rich and their people are intelligent, they are living in misery. The majority of Nigerians have been stripped naked by corrupt, selfish, greedy and callous elite. For thirty-five years the majority of Nigerians have suffered untold hardship at the hands of a succession of despotic rulers, decadent administrators, vision-less leaders and reckless managers. They have been humiliated, pauperized and reduced to a state of destitution by the combined forces of military dictatorship, political subterfuge and economic profligacy.

The above assertion is not farther from the truth. Leadership has been a great factor that has encouraged the untold anomalies that characterise the Nigerian society. Every nation or organisation rises or falls, and succeeds or fails depending on the quality of leadership in place. Since the country's independence, Nigerian leaders have performed poorly in terms of the socio-political and economic transformation of the country. Many past military leaders have left wounds that refuse to heal in the Nigeria socio-polity. In the present democratic dispensation, leadership has not fared too well. Leadership at every level has suffered abuse and corruption. Leaders who were supposed to use the funds allocated to develop the state and cater for the needs of its citizens have diverted such funds to their private accounts overseas (Olayiwola 2013:55). History will not forget the country's leaders who have looted and siphoned public funds that were meant for the good of the citizens to several foreign accounts. A case in point is the recent revelation that a former military Head of State General Sanni Abacha and his family stole from the nation's treasury. According to Sahara Reporters:

... [T]he document alleges that in one instance, Abacha, Mohammed, Bagudu, and others, systematically embezzled public funds worth billions of dollars from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) on the false pretence that the funds were necessary for “national security.” After the CBN disbursed the funds, Abacha and Bagudu moved them overseas. The document revealed that in all, more than \$2bn was stolen from CBN alone. (Sahara Reporter 2014:1)

Nigeria therefore finds herself repeating the same errors of corruption, oppression and social injustice of the eighth century BCE Israel which prophet Amos addressed.

It is clear that the situation in Nigeria today is not so different from that of the Israelites of Amos’ time. Nigeria is saddled with many socio-economic, moral, political and religious problems. Social injustice pervades the land. Poor leadership is a challenge that the nation faces. A wide gap exists between the rich and the poor, while corruption at the highest level continues to hinder national development (Agboluaje 2007:175-187; Oguntoye 2007:216-238; Oladimeji 2007:108-129). This present situation is comparable to the situation that Amos challenged in ancient Israel during the reigns of Uzziah of Judah (792-740 BCE) and Jeroboam of Israel (793–753 BCE) (Robertson 2010:172).

The message of Amos therefore becomes relevant in conscientising leaders to make Nigeria a better place where people can live together in peace and harmony. The question therefore is, can we find prophets today who will challenge the present social and economic injustices that are prevalent in the Nigerian society? This study therefore seeks to challenge the prophets of The Apostolic Church in Nigeria to deploy their prophetic ministry to speak out in God’s name against the social ills in the country. There is a need to hear prophetic voices that will not only promote social justice in Nigeria but will also speak out on behalf of the victims of injustice.

The Apostolic Church as a denomination is an offshoot of the Apostolic Church of the United Kingdom. It was established after three missionary delegates who arrived in Lagos, Nigeria on September 23, 1931 (Adegboyega 1978:20). These three delegates were the late Pastor D. P. Williams (President), A. Turnbull (Vice-President), and W. J. Williams (International Prophet) (Adegboyega 1978:20). Since then, The Apostolic Church Nigeria (TACN) has become a leading Pentecostal church in the country. A full history of the Church will be laid out in the third chapter of this thesis. However, suffice it to say that, The Apostolic Church is found in almost all the cities and villages of Nigeria. It has the world’s largest church temple at its headquarters in Lagos with a sitting capacity of 100,000 worshippers at a time (Vanguard 2011). Arguably, The Apostolic Church Nigeria is one of the largest denominations in the country. Against this background, the

question that arises is how has the church positively influenced the nation? How has The Apostolic Church played her prophetic role as a watchdog for the society and as an agent of transformation?

As a denomination, the church strongly regards the ministry of the apostles and prophets as part of the ascension leadership gifts given to the church in Ephesians 4:11-12. According to the doctrinal belief of the church, the government and administration of the church are on the shoulders of the Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers (TAC Ministers' Manual 2009:2). Among these five-fold ministry gifts, the office of the prophet holds such a significant position in the running of the church. Hence, the prophetic ministry has played a vital role in shaping and growing the church in Nigeria.

In his book, *The Voice of God through Prophetic Ministry*,” the late Pastor I. G. Sakpo, the first prophet of The Apostolic Church (TAC) LAWNA, asserts that God certainly speaks today through His prepared and sanctified vessel – the prophet (Sakpo 1988:14). Prophets in The Apostolic Church, LAWNA are ordained ministers of God who are called and set apart with identifiable gifts of prophecy to declare the mind and will of God to the people. Hence, prophets are regarded as the mouthpiece of God in the church and society (Sakpo 1988:14). Through their prophecies, prophets guide, instruct, and direct the leadership of the church in making administrative decisions. Prophets are also charged with the task of calling people to a right walk with God. The question to ask here is: To what extent, have the prophets of The Apostolic Church LAWNA served as agents of social change within the Nigerian society?

Prophets in The Apostolic Church LAWNA are tasked with the responsibility of not only ensuring that God's people walk in obedience to God's will, but of invoking God's judgment on those who are disobedient to God's instruction. They are to emulate the prophets in the Old Testament, whose role was to ensure the building of a society that confronted inequality; the exploitation and oppression of the poor, the widows and the orphan; corruption and perversion of justice; as well as the general disregard for the law of God.

The situation in the country does not give room for the church to ignore the socio-political and economic injustice that is prevalent in the country. Hasting (1985: 24- 25) has rightly said that, “the church is to be aggressive... in condemning sin, in advocating for justice, and in fighting ‘the battle of the poor, the hungry...’ against a system that too often turns deaf ear to their appeals.”

Like Amos, prophets of TAC also need to address the problem of injustice and oppression in the society as part of the quest for the socio-economic liberation of the country.

The Old Testament prophets, especially the eighth century BCE prophets, did not confine their prophetic ministry to the cultic centres, but exercised their prophetic calling by addressing national issues in order to produce social change (emancipation). The question therefore is, where are the Prophet ‘Amoses’ of our time who will roar in God’s name against the social injustices prevalent in the Nigerian society? It is not just enough for the prophets of The Apostolic Church LAWNA to beam their prophetic searchlight on the church, they are to also stand as the spiritual and moral conscience of the nation. Callaway (2011:1, cited by Uchegbue 2013:141-154) has rightly asserted that the church should not distance herself from the society; rather, she is to live out her calling as the light, the salt and the moral beacon of the earth.

Amos was clearly called by God and he spoke courageously and unapologetically in God's name to challenge the socio-economic injustices prevalent in the eighth century BCE Israel. To what extent then are the prophets of TAC LAWNA called to play a similar role regarding the present socio-economic injustices in the Nigerian society?

An analysis of the text of Amos 5:21-24 highlights the problem addressed by the prophets—Yahweh demands justice and righteousness from the Israelites; and these are more important than cultic practices. This message, which promotes compassion towards one’s neighbours as indicative of one’s regard for Yahweh, flows throughout the Old Testament passages that emphasise the importance of just and righteous behaviour on the part of the Israelites. As Kelly (1973:84) has shown, verses 21-24 clearly focus on the core theme of social justice. In these verses, Amos “caught the vision of a just society, a society in which religion was no longer a matter of rites and ceremonies, but where the true service of God was the service of the poor and the oppressed” (Kelly 1973:84). For Amos, the God of justice is more interested in equality among the people than in wealthy religious festivals where justice is neglected.

In the light of the above, the main research question investigated in this thesis can be formulated as follows:

If re-read through a justice-seeking lens, in a justice-denying Nigerian context, could the theme of social justice as reflected in the text of Amos 5:21-24 challenge the prophets of The Apostolic

Church LAWNA to proclaim a liberating and empowering message to the powers that be (political establishment), in solidarity with the poor and marginalised people of Nigeria?

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions will guide this study:

- Considering the theme of social justice as expressed in the text of Amos 5:21-24, how can the prophetic ministers of The Apostolic Church LAWNA, Nigeria, confront the social injustices prevalent in the present day Nigerian society?
- Given the situation in Nigeria today, which is similar to that of the time of Amos, how can the prophets of The Apostolic Church LAWNA confront, in God's name, the social and economic injustices that plague the land like Amos did?
- How can The Apostolic Church LAWNA encourage her ordained prophets to use their prophetic ministry not only to build the faith of the members of the church but also to address national issues which threaten the peace and the well-being of the citizens?

1.3 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose and objectives of this study are as follows:

- To interpret the theme of social justice in Amos 5:21-24 by focusing on the demand of social justice by Amos on his audience with the aim of challenging the contemporary prophets of The Apostolic Church LAWNA to call for social justice in the Nigerian society;
- To assess the relevance of the oracle of Amos to the Nigerian society. The work is a hermeneutical reflection on Amos' prophetic utterances regarding the socio-economic and religious situation in Israel in the eighth century BCE vis-à-vis the current situation in Nigeria.
- To consider the value of prophetic ministry in The Apostolic Church LAWNA, as a vehicle for the growth, stability and progress of TAC and the social and economic transformation of the Nigerian society at large. The ministry of Amos is a reminder to contemporary prophets in The Apostolic Church LAWNA to speak out against injustice not only in the church but also in the society.
- To identify and evaluate the approaches employed by the prophetic ministry in The Apostolic Church LAWNA in responding to the problem of social injustice in Nigeria, and

to unveil the implications of these responses for both TAC and the Nigerian society as a whole.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS POSTULATION

A hypothesis is a tentative or provisional conclusion which serves to guide the researcher in his/her work. The hypothesis of the present thesis is postulated from the main research problem as follows: Following a thorough reflection on the demand for social justice in Amos 5:21-24, and in view of a justice-denying Nigerian context, the prophets of The Apostolic Church LAWNA, Nigeria are challenged to employ their prophetic ministry to proclaim a liberating and empowering message to the powers that be (political establishment), in solidarity with the poor and marginalised people of Nigeria.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The term research methodology refers to a system of method(s) used in a particular field (Pearsall 2002:896). The methods used in data collection and analysis are discussed in this section.

1.5.1 Qualitative research

The study will adopt a qualitative research methodology. Henning (2004:5) describes qualitative research as “the type of enquiry in which the qualities, the characteristics or the properties of a phenomenon are examined for better understanding and explanation.” This study therefore employs the qualitative method of data collection such as observation and documentary analysis which have been described as the “ethnographical methods” (Kawulich 2005:1). The research also adopts a historical method of documentary analysis, which involves the consultation of existing documents to validate the claims made in the study. Additionally, a variety of primary, secondary and tertiary sources ranging from periodicals and internet sources to books, theses and dissertations will be consulted.

1.5.2 Historical-critical method

Barton (1995:3-14) describes a historical-critical method as an approach which discusses the world of the author vis-a-vis the culture, the language and the social background of the biblical world. The historical-critical method as a critical tool in biblical exegesis is based on the sound conviction that in order to understand the meaning of the Scriptures today, one must first

understand what the text meant to the original audience (Olagunju 2014:1). The historical-critical method studies the text as an historical document and seeks to understand it in the light of its historical context. This method is helpful because it calls the interpreter to a diligent study and faithful interpretation of biblical texts. Although, the historical-critical method is not completely free of weaknesses, it has proven to be a veritable critical tool in uncovering the truths about the integrity of the Bible (Barton 1995:14).

Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) attributes two strong advantages to the historical-critical method. Firstly, its emphasis on the meaning of the text in its own era frees exegesis from the dogmatic framework in which the Bible was interpreted in the past. Secondly, it affords insight into biblical times, especially, the growth process that the biblical text underwent (Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) 1996:23). This method is deemed useful for this work because it will help us to unearth the historical and cultural contexts of the text of Amos 5:21-24. The historical-critical method will play a critical role in the investigation of the life setting of eighth century BCE Israel.

Other critical apparatus that form part of the historical studies include but are not limited to redaction (higher criticism) and textual criticism. This study shall also engage both the redaction and textual criticism to arrive at its findings. Le Roux's (2008:307-308) view that it is unwise and unhelpful for African biblical scholars to reject Western Old Testament scholarship is significant. Textual criticism is useful to the exegete in locating Amos 5:21-24 within the broader context of its many versions and translations (Hayes & Holladay 2005:35). However, redaction criticism will help us to focus on the editorial stages that led to the final written form of the passage of Amos 5 (Hayes & Holladay 2005:101-109). For the methodology to be relevant to the Nigerian context, the historical-critical methodology will not be used alone. The text will also be viewed from an African cultural hermeneutical perspective.

1.5.3 Inculturation hermeneutics

The present study is marked by a comparative element because it establishes similarities between the phenomenon of the prophetic ministry in the Old Testament—in this case, the prophetic ministry of Amos—and the prophetic ministry in The Apostolic Church LAWNA Nigeria. However, it will also adopt Ukpong's (2001:14) Inculturation Hermeneutics or what Adamo

(2005:59) refers to as African Cultural Hermeneutics.¹ Ukpong (1995:3-14, in Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) 1996:23) defines inculturation hermeneutics as an approach to biblical interpretation that seeks to make the African socio-cultural context a subject of interpretation. To make a specific socio-cultural context (be it the text's context or the interpreter's context) the subject of interpretation means that the conceptual framework, its methodology, and the personal input of the interpreter are consciously informed by the worldview of and the life experiences in that culture (Ukpong 1995:3-14). Manus (2003:663) describes it as a methodology that employs the resources of Africa's social or religio-cultural contexts, that is, the African view of reality and African life experiences, to examine the text of a given passage of the Bible and to derive meaning suitable to the interpreter's context. In short, this method is evaluative in nature, and the analysis in this study will follow the evaluative approach outlined by Ukpong. The approach employs a biblical text or theme to critique a particular issue in the society or in the church, or examines lessons that may be drawn from a biblical text or theme for a particular context (Ukpong, 1995:3-14).

Ukpong (2002:12) views culture as the total sum of life of a given community. Although culture entails the community's way of viewing reality, it also includes the political, economic, social and religious activities, the art, and the textual production, among others, of a community (Ukpong 2002:12). Such a holistic understanding of culture acknowledges the contribution of the ordinary and the commonplace in knowledge production (Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) 2016:2). Within the sphere of Ukpong's inculturation hermeneutics, therefore, a variety of justice issues such as gender, race, social, economic, political and religious oppression and issues of indigenous cultural identity, customs and practices are raised.

Thus, the historical-critical method will be used to analyse the theme of social justice in Amos 5:21-24. Additionally, inculturation hermeneutics will be employed to challenge the prophetic

¹ African Cultural Hermeneutics or Inculturation Hermeneutics is also used synonymously with Liberation Hermeneutics or Contextual Hermeneutics by Gerald West (1991) *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Model of Reading the Bible in South African Context*, Monograph Series no. 1, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, Cluster Publications; Afrocentric Hermeneutics by Gosnell L. Yorke, (1995), "Biblical Hermeneutics: an Afrocentric Perspective," *Journal of Religion and Theology*, vol. 2, no 2 (1995), 145-158; Vernacular Hermeneutics by R. S. Sugirtharajah (1991), "Vernacular Resurrections: An Introduction," in R. S. Sugirtharajah, (ed) *Vernacular Hermeneutics*. Sheffield Academy Press; and Intercultural Hermeneutics by Manus C. O (2003), *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa: Methods and Approach, Biblical Studies in Africa Series*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers.

ministry in The Apostolic Church LAWNA to be purposeful in responding to social injustices both in the church as well as in the Nigerian society at large.

1.6 RELEVANCE OF STUDY

Several scholarly works have been carried out on the theme of social justice in the book of Amos. Extensive research has been done also on the themes of corruption, poverty and social justice in Nigeria. However, as far as I know, no specific study has been done on the role of the prophetic ministry in The Apostolic Church LAWNA as a vehicle for social transformation of the Nigerian society.

Nigeria has had its fair share of oppression and social injustice that has created a wide gap between the rich and the poor. Even though the country is endowed with both natural and human resources, most of her citizens live in abject poverty. The rich and those in leadership positions oppress the poor in the society. Corruption has become endemic in the country and all efforts by the government to tackle corruption and address the poverty situation in the country have produced little result.

It is therefore argued in this study that if the government's efforts to address the social injustice in the country fail, then, the church has a greater responsibility to take a clear stance against social injustice and become the voice of the voiceless in the society. The Apostolic Church is a leading Pentecostal church that recognises the office of the prophet. Hence, the prophets of The Apostolic Church, like Prophet Amos, are called upon to confront the social evil in the land. Rather than confining their prophetic ministry to the church and to the management of church councils and supervision of liturgical and doctrinal practices, they are charged to speak out in God's name against the social injustice and corruption in the land through their prophetic ministry.

This study hopefully will motivate the leadership of The Apostolic Church LAWNA Nigeria to encourage its prophets to use their prophetic ministry to serve as the conscience of the nation, and as vanguard of peace, justice and social transformation. The findings from this study should also help prophets in The Apostolic Church to see their prophetic ministry as a vehicle for social change in Nigeria especially at this time when the challenge of poverty, inequality, economic oppression and corruption has become a recurrent decimal in the nation's affairs. Furthermore, it is expected that this research will serve as a handy material for future research on the prophetic ministry in

The Apostolic Church, LAWNA Nigeria.

1.7 DELIMITATION OF STUDY

The present research considers the theme of social justice as reflected in the text of Amos 5:21-24. Although this study acknowledges that the theme of social justice runs through the whole book of Amos, the focus will be on the exegetical cum theological reflections on the theme of social justice in Amos 5:21-24.

The Apostolic Church Nigeria is spread across the whole of the 36 states in the country. Administratively, The Apostolic Church Nigeria is divided into five territories. LAWNA which is an acronym of Lagos, Western and Northern Areas cover 26 states including Abuja, the country's capital. This study therefore is limited to the prophetic ministry in LAWNA. Although LAWNA itself is a large territory, the study will focus on the western region of the country.

1.8 CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1 presents the introduction to the study, the statement of the problem, preliminary hypothesis, research methodology, and the relevance of the study. It also highlights the delimitation and the chapter outline of the whole of thesis.

Chapter 2 presents the "Literature Review" to this study, probing relevant literature on the theme of social justice in the book of Amos. It also reviews previous scholarly works on the nature of the prophetic ministry in the Old Testament and the relevance of Amos' prophecy to contemporary society, with Nigeria as a case study.

Chapter 3 is titled "Prophetic Ministry in the Apostolic Church LAWNA." It examines the prophetic ministry in The Apostolic Church LAWNA, Nigeria. A background to the history of The Apostolic Church Nigeria as well as the doctrinal practice of prophecy in The Apostolic Church LAWNA is presented. Furthermore, the chapter considers the value of the prophetic ministry in The Apostolic Church LAWNA, as a vehicle for the growth, stability and progress of The Apostolic Church, and for the socio-economic transformation of the Nigerian society.

Chapter 4, titled, "Engaging the Theme of Social Justice in Amos 5:21-24," focuses on the theme of social justice in the text of Amos 5:21-24. A historical-critical study is employed to examine,

amongst other things, the *Sitz-im-Leben* and the date of the text, its audience and the purpose of its writing.

Chapter 5, that is, “Engaging the Theme of Social Justice in Amos 5:21-24 within the Nigerian Context,” is a re-reading of Amos 5:21-24 in which an African cultural hermeneutical approach is employed to critique the theme of social justice in Nigeria vis-à-vis the role of the prophetic ministry in The Apostolic Church LAWNA, Nigeria. An attempt is made in this chapter to bring the ancient text of Amos 5:21-24 to bear on the present-day context of Nigeria.

In Chapter 6, titled, “Findings, Conclusion and Recommendation,” the problem and the hypothesis of this study are revisited. In view of the statement of the problem and the hypothesis of the research, the findings of the entire research are put together and presented in Chapter 6. Recommendations for future studies are also be made.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A study such as the present one requires extensive literature review in order to identify gaps in knowledge. The identification of gaps in existing literature will further rationalize the study. Previous scholarly works are subsequently examined under the following sub-headings:

2.2 PROPHETIC MINISTRY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The starting point of any analysis is the definition of terms. In studying prophecy, therefore, it is helpful to know how the term is used in the Hebrew Bible and to note any changes in its usage in different periods of the history of Israel.

2.2.1 What is prophecy?

The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English defines the word 'prophecy' as the power of telling what will happen in the future, which is also referred to as foretelling or prediction (Hornby & Welmeier 2000:682). In that sense, the Old Testament prophets are commonly understood as men who fulfilled this function and in some ways, their writings have pointed to certain predictions of events that would take place later in the future. However, the preceding definition is not entirely accurate when applied to Old Testament prophets, as it is misleading in two respects.

First, it would be a serious limitation of their work to assume that the prophets were preoccupied only with future events. Any serious reading of the prophetic books would reveal a concern with contemporary affairs which they commented on often in the strongest possible terms. Thus, it is frequently said that the "pro" in prophecy signifies not "fore-telling" but "forth-telling" (Lindblom 1963:1). In other words, they sent forth the message of God to the people of their own day about the situations of the time. Second, their oracles sometimes involved predictions about the future based on observations of the present, and when this happened, they did not hesitate to proclaim what they believed was about to happen, but such future was usually at hand. It concerned the imminent fate of the people to whom they spoke and not events that would happen thousands of years ahead. Destruction, defeat in battle, the fall of Jerusalem, the exile in Babylon were all future

events of which the prophets spoke before they happened, but they were to happen soon. In addition, however, they did at times look further into the future beyond the coming disaster, and their faith in God enabled them to express hopes, which were by no means immediately fulfilled. We cannot however affirm, as some have said, that the prophets were speaking directly of the coming of the Messiah or of the end of the world. Nothing was that definite in their minds. They were simply expressing the implications of their understanding of God's will for the future.

It must be noted that in contemporary religious settings, prophecy is understood to mean prediction or prognostication, which is the ability to indicate what is to happen in the nearest or distant future. Whereas they affirm that the definition of prophecy as foretelling is incomplete and limited, Harvey and Newcombe (2013:82) nonetheless reveal that such a definition applies primarily to the relatively few men and women who self-designate as prophets and who are recognised by others to hold the office of a prophet. However, from the biblical viewpoint, prophecy is not just about prediction. This fact becomes clearer against the background of the biblical understanding of prophecy as “forth telling” and “foretelling.”

Hills (1989:15) defines prophecy as the revealed word of God. He states that prophecy is not the product of intellectual attainment or rational debate, neither is it brought about through the process of logical deduction. Prophecy is the revealed truth that comes directly from God. It is thus the word of God delivered by God to human beings. The point being made here is that prophecy is “received” rather than produced by the human mind. This statement is in line with the biblical view that prophecy is an inspired word (message) from Yahweh through a prepared and sanctified vessel (a prophet). In essence, prophecy is a mediated message from God. Since God is Spirit and God is interested in communicating with God's people, God does so through men and women who have been prepared and sanctified for God's work. The source of Israelite prophecy therefore is Yahweh, hence, the difference between Israel and other ancient Near Eastern cultures, where people manipulated natural and supernatural objects and phenomena for a message from their gods and goddesses. For the Israelites, prophecy was a divine initiative brought about by Yahweh who spoke to the people through the prophets.

2.2.2 Who is an Israelite prophet?

Defining the word “prophet” may not be as easy as it sounds. Generally, four words are noted to hold the key of the concept. These are the Hebrew words *nabi*, *ro’eh* and *chozeh* and the Greek word *prophetes*. Of the four words, *nabi* is the most significant (Albright 1957:20).

Folarin (2004:10) notes that there are two main approaches to defining the term “prophet,” the etymological and the biblio-contextual approaches. The etymological approach, he asserts, defines a “prophet” by searching for the root of the word. However, the etymological search has failed so far to help biblical scholars to determine the fundamental conception of the office of a prophet (Folarin 2004:10). The difficulty according to him is recognised by both Laney (1990a:234-312) of the conservative camp and Schildenberge (1981:27) of the liberal camp.

Since the attempt at finding the Hebrew etymology of *nabi* has failed, some scholars have extended their etymological search into other Semitic languages. Various suggestions about the origin of the word *nabi* include the Akkadian word *nabu*, which means “to call,” the Arabian word *naba’a*, which means “to announce,” and the Ethiopian word *nab’aba*, which means “to speak” (Folarin 2004:11). Even if the issue of the etymology of *nabi* is resolved, which is unlikely, another difficulty is the translation of the word; should it be active or passive? For instance, the Akkadian word *nabu*, if interpreted actively, would mean “a caller,” having the sense of one who calls out to all human beings probably in the name of God.

However, Albright (1969:20) has suggested that the word *nabi* should be given a passive sense, “the one called.” The reason is that a prophet is one who steps into the prophetic ministry as a result of divine call. Thus, a prophet would be a person called by God. In a sense, both the active and the passive renderings of the word are appropriate. The prophets of Israel were called by Yahweh to announce Yahweh’s word. They spoke for Yahweh and their messages carried the authority of the one who had given the message.

Folarin sees the definition of the term prophet from the biblio-contextual approach as a better approach to defining a *nabi*. He identifies three texts that are particularly helpful in this regard, that is, Exodus 4:16; 7:1ff and Jeremiah 1:5-6. Although, in the first text, the word *nabi* does not appear, the passage contains the identity of a *nabi*. The first two texts emphasise the idea that a *nabi* is an appointed regular speaker for a divine being, and the third text adds the idea that the

prophet is often called into the prophetic ministry against the prophet's will (Folarin 2004:11). Consequently, the three texts agree that the primary task of a prophet is to speak. Although in one case, the prophet complains that he is not fluent at speaking, God replies that he has put words into the prophet's mouth. The point being made here is that a prophet is an authorised spokesperson for God in whom a divinely communicated power resides.

Apart from the word *nabi*, which has attracted wider recognition, Lindblom (1963:21) in his book, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, also identifies two other words which are translated prophet, namely, the verbs *ro'eh* and *chozeh*, meaning "seer." In 1 Samuel 9:9, both *nabi* and *ro'eh* are used to refer to the same person (Samuel), but the exact type of relationship between the two terms, "prophet" and "seer" is a matter of controversy (Lindblom 1963:21). Lange (1960:12) notes that the office of a prophet is seen as a development from the office of a seer. In his view, a "seer" was merely a diviner who functioned without any specific call from God, and the office of a prophet which developed later, absorbed the role of a seer.

However, Ellicott's (1957:118) argument that both *ro'eh* and *chozeh* are synonymous with *nabi* has been supported by some other scholars. A study of texts such as Amos 7:12 and 7:15 in which Amos is called both a prophet and a seer suggests that *ro'eh* possibly emphasises the means by which a *nabi* communicates with God. Since the emphasis of *ro'eh* and *chozeh* is on revelation through vision, a "seer" in the biblical sense is thus a person who has an extraordinary influence brought to bear on his/her seeing faculty, by which he/she is able to see things, instead of hear them. On account of his/her ability to see, a message of divine provenance is introduced into his/her consciousness (cf. Num. 12:6f) (Folarin 2004:11). Consequently, the area of difference between *nabi* and 'seer' is that *nabi* describes the active function of speaking for the transmission of the message, but "seer" describes the passive experience of being made acquainted with a message by sight. However, a *nabi* may also receive prophetic revelation through hearing (Von Rad 1965:54).

From the preceding arguments, it can be deduced that Yahweh chooses his own spokesperson. It is Yahweh who calls, prepares and sanctifies the vessel that Yahweh intends to use. The foregoing facts may be responsible for the occurrence of the call narratives in the extant works of the prophets (cf. Isa. 6:1-10; Jer. 1:4-19; Ezek. 1:1-15; Amos 7:14). Huffman's (1976:697) definition of the term prophet is helpful at this point. According to him, a prophet is "an inspired speaker, under divine constraint or commission, who publicly announces an immediate revelation." Given the

monotheistic religion of Israel, it will be safe to assert that prophets are human media who mediate between God and the human audience. The prophets, therefore, are people called of God to convey God's message in order to reveal His will and plan to the community (Freedman 2000:1086–1088; Nissinen 2004:18–19). The fact that it is a call that makes one a prophet can be gleaned from the example of Moses who became the standard of comparison for all future prophets (Deut. 18:15ff). He was called specifically and personally by God, contrary to some of the false prophets who apparently stepped into prophetic office without being called. In the case of Amos, it was his call by Yahweh that he used to validate his prophetic ministry before Amaziah (Amos 7:14f).

Rowley (1956:16) reveals that the first element of prophetic ministry in the Old Testament is the mediation of divine message in order to bring about the repentance or deep commitment of Israel. In his book, *The Heart of the Hebrew History*, Hester (1949:26) refers to this ministry as the preaching of the message of righteousness received by the prophets from Yahweh to the people of their time. Both Rowley and Hester agree that the mediative aspect of the prophet's ministry is expressed in the preaching or teaching of the righteousness that Yahweh demanded from the people (cf. 1 Kgs. 18:18; Isa. 52:11; Jer. 4:1-4; Amos 5:24). The prophets were tasked with the responsibility of counselling their leaders and/or their subjects on the will of Yahweh in particular situations (cf. 1 Kgs. 22). They criticised the political, the social, or even the religious actions of their leaders and/or their subjects whenever it was necessary, even in the face of apparent danger to their lives (1 Sam. 13:6-14, 2 Sam. 12:1-14, Isa. 1:13-18; Jer. 11:18-23). They comforted the wounded or the discouraged (Isa. 51-60; Jer. 30:31), warned the people against the danger of apostasy (Jer. 11:12), encouraged the people to be more dedicated to Yahweh (Amos 5:14f; Mic. 6:8), and explained the plan of God's kingdom (Daniel 7).

According to Rowley (1956:16), the approach of the prophets to achieving the expectations or demands of their call is three faceted—the appeal to the past, the present and the future. They appealed to the past and the future solely to influence the present. With regard to the past, the prophets may recall, record, interpret and apply the work of Yahweh in the past to the present situation; thereby, they called for positive response to the demands of the Sinaic covenant. In that way, they also functioned as historians.

Zimmerli (1965:20) points out that the prophets of Israel proclaimed and reinterpreted the sacred traditions of their people. Both Von Rad (1965:27) and Noth (1966:26-27) highlight those

traditions. Von Rad (1965:27) categorises the traditions as the exodus, the wilderness wanderings, and the gift of the land, which are reflected in what he calls the “Short historical credo” of the Jews. Noth (1966:26-27) disagrees that the traditions are historical. Rather, he speaks of themes in the Pentateuchal tradition, which the prophets of Israel employed in their proclamation. He identifies the five themes as the guidance out of Egypt, the guidance into the arable land of Palestine, the promise to the Patriarchs, the guidance in the wilderness, and the revelation at Sinai (Noth 1966:26-27).

An example of a prophetic reinterpretation of tradition is the retelling of the story of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. The “exodus,” which was initially interpreted as evidence of divine favour to the people is reinterpreted by some prophets to reveal the rejection of Israel by God (Amos 9:7-8), while the same tradition is depicted by other prophets as a type of future restoration of the Jews (after the people have been purged) (cf. Isa. 43:16ff; Jer. 16:4-15; 23:7-8).

Another example is how the story of the wilderness wandering and the conquest is retold and reinterpreted. Amos turns the case into an accusation against the people (5:25). Amos confronts the Israelites with the story of the conquest to point out their ingratitude of repaying Yahweh’s great deed with disobedience (Amos 2:9ff; cf. Num. 13-14).

Regarding the future, Hester notes that the prophets promised reward for righteous living and threatened judgment for failure to adhere to the teaching of Yahweh. Further, because the prophets of Israel were preachers of Yahweh’s salvation in its entirety, they underscored the fact that the kingdom of Yahweh would be established, and Israel would be redeemed from all its enemies (Hester 1949:29). As regards the immediate period of which the prophets spoke, they analysed their situation, and based on the words of Yahweh, they evaluated the situation of their time and exhorted the people on what to do. Their message for their time was “repent.” The time in question was the historical period in which the prophet lived.

Ackroyd (1968:19) reveals that during the exile, the prophets acted as a check on the assimilation of the religion of Israel to the religion of their conquerors by interpreting their captivity, not as the failure or inferiority of the power of their God, but as a manifestation of the divine punishment for the waywardness and disobedience of Israel. The calamities that befell the Israelites were, therefore, not the triumph of the conquering nation or its gods over Israel and its God, but the will

of God—a punishment from Yahweh. Ackroyd notes further that the conquering nation did demand that the conquered worshipped its gods. He supports his claim with the stories in Daniel 3 and 6, which reflect the refusal of certain Babylonian Jews to serve the gods of their conqueror (Ackroyd 1968:19). Kidney (1987:2) confirms that the name of Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, king of Judah, appears on a treaty-tablet drawn up in 672 BCE whereby each vassal swore to treat the chief Assyrian god, Asshur, as his own god. The prophets thus dissuaded the Israelites from exchanging their God for any other god.

While prophetic ministry in Israel was not entirely predictive, it did contain an element of prediction. According to Archer (1974:28), Isaiah 44:2-8 was connected with a prediction of the liberation of the Jews by Cyrus, an event which was not to occur until 150 years later. Scholars who reject specific prediction as a function of Old Testament prophets find it hard to believe that Isaiah the son of Amoz could have written the book. Others, however, have no problem with the idea that God has both the power and will to give such predictions. However, the view that removes prediction from the realm of Old Testament prophecy does not seem to be valid since the source of Israelite prophecy is Yahweh. He could declare His will in the present as well as in the future.

Folarin (2004:11-12) states that another function of the prophetic work is intercession. According to him, Moses interceded for the Israelites so that God would not annihilate them when they worshipped the golden calf (Exod. 32:30-32). Samuel interceded for his people after they sinned by requesting for a king (1 Sam. 12:23). King Hezekiah asked Isaiah to pray for the deliverance of Jerusalem (Isa. 37:1-4). Amos pleaded with God to temper justice with mercy in dealing with Israel (7:28; Folarin 2004:11-12). Folarin's assertion is quite convincing. The fact that God told Jeremiah not to intercede for Judah (Jer. 7:16) clearly shows that intercession was a natural role of prophets in ancient Israel.

2.2.3 The prophet's call and reception of revelation

The call is a vital criterion by which to recognise a prophet. Mowvley (1979:16) asserts that one of the criteria used to recognise a prophet was the special call to proclaim the word of God unconditionally. We shall therefore consider the call of the prophets in the Old Testament. We shall examine also how the prophets received the messages that they were commissioned to convey to the people.

2.2.3.1 The prophet's call

The assurance of a divine call and commission was a primary element in the prophetic consciousness. The idea of a call is primarily rooted in subjective experience. The certainty of the call was an impelling force in the lives of the prophets and, at the same time, a source of confidence and fortitude.

Brueggemann (1997:630) has rightly shown that one of the ways in which the prophets of the Old Testament sought to establish trans-historical authority for themselves was by the articulation of a prophetic call. In such a narrative, the prophet purports to narrate the direct encounter with Yahweh whereby the prophet was pressed into service as a messenger of Yahweh. The legitimacy of the true prophet and the authority of his message are established by his call – all true prophets are called by God, while false prophets are not. The certainty and compelling impact of the call perhaps was the only credential that Jeremiah had to display passionately before his critics and unbelieving audience. Though other prophets had call narratives built into their stories, it is difficult to use such a criterion as a sole distinguishing mark for distinguishing the true from the false prophets. The reason is that a call is a subjective individual experience, which cannot be subjected to the parameters of verifiability.

The point should be made however that both within and outside of the Old Testament, the narratives about prophets often are too brief for any such call to be described. In some of the prophetic books of the Old Testament, we do find descriptions of what is termed call narratives. The prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries BCE were said to have received their call through God's direct and personal address to them. They had distinctly heard God's voice, hence, their classical formula, "Thus said the Lord." This expression is what scholars refer to as the messenger formula (Brueggemann 1997:630; Matthews 2001:29). By this formula, the prophet affirms that the message is not his own.

The call to be a prophet was, in most cases, accompanied by a compelling and irresistible force. There is a universal agreement that auditions came to the prophets from outside themselves (Baker 1980:1278-9; Brueggemann 1997:622-623; Wilson 1980:24). According to Brueggemann (1997:623), the prophets spoke because they were compelled by an inexplicable force that was taken to be the summons of Yahweh. Amos, the herdsman protested that he prophesied not of his

own choice, but due to an irresistible divine command which had uprooted him bodily from his familiar way of life (Amos 1:2ff).

Isaiah, the aristocrat, heard the voice of the sovereign Lord calling for a messenger and he responded, for he knew that the call was meant for him. Micah, the peasant, was possessed by his message and the power to deliver it. Ezekiel was a priest who was called to be a prophet. He found himself in exile in Babylon and got his call there.

The call appeared to have come to each prophet at a time of intellectual and emotional tension in the prophet's life or in the life of the society. One common feature of the call was that it was a very personal experience closely related to the prophet's own circumstances. Amos and Jeremiah were both addressed by name, but in the case of Hosea and Ezekiel, it was the highly personal relationships of family life, which formed the background and the basis of their calls. Isaiah had to be cleansed and made fit for his task, his own sin having been forgiven. On the part of the prophets, their responses to the call were often that of disbelief, reluctance and a feeling of inadequacy. Jeremiah's hesitancy stemmed from his youthfulness and inexperience (Mowvley 1979:19). Ezekiel, perhaps even more than Isaiah, was overwhelmed by the holiness, power and majesty of God, and could only fall prostrate before Yahweh. It was this feeling of inadequacy, which made the prophets to be conscious of the power of God and of their dependence on God throughout their lives. They saw their ministry as part of the great divine purpose in which they, by their call, have been caught up.

Remarkably, there is no evidence to suggest that the prophets ever set out to become prophets. God himself took the initiative to single out and call these men for their task (Baker 1980:1277). Therefore, throughout their time of ministry and in their varied experiences, the prophets were confronted by the word of God, and rarely did they seem to have sought for it in quiet retreat. A case in point is Jeremiah, who on one occasion did so because of his uncertainty in the face of contradiction by another prophet (Jer. 28:11). Just as the call came in the real concrete experience of life, so the message was related to the real, concrete events in the life of their nation.

Thus, there is a combination of what Mowvley (1979:20) calls the "religious" and the "political." To express it more vividly, the word which came to the prophets through external circumstances was recognised as God's word and should be applied to those circumstances. Again, besides that the call experience gave the prophets the basis for their message, it equally provided them with a

deep sense of compulsion. Scholars are therefore of the opinion that the call narrative characteristically aimed to assert that Yahweh controls any particular prophetic activity or utterance, and that prophets on occasion are compelled to speak, even against their will (Carroll 1981:31-58; Habel 1995:297-291; Brueggemann 1997:622-649; Matthews 2001:29). For example, Jeremiah, who would have loved to stop preaching, but he was unable to do so due to the call of God. In Jeremiah's experience, the word of God was like fire within him. He was weary of withholding it (Jer. 20:9). Nonetheless, the prophet had no choice. Regardless of how painful it was for him, he had to proclaim the word of God.

It is therefore worthy of reiterating that the basis of engaging in prophetic vocation in ancient Israel was the call from Yahweh which was accepted reluctantly by the men who were themselves not idle or jobless as it were. In Africa, however, some prophetic 'calls' resulted from unemployment and a craze for supernatural and/or political power. At times, some people even go into prophetic ministry through hereditary conferment of prophetic powers. However, a few others like Garrick Braide,² T. O. Obadare,³ I. G. Sakpo,⁴ and J. A. Akintola,⁵ claim that they were forced into the prophetic ministry through the divine call which they had individually received.

2.2.3.2 *Reception of revelation*

The prophets were messengers of God, delivering His words of judgment as well as His words of encouragement and hope. The question therefore is how did the prophet receive the message which he was commissioned to convey to his fellows? The answer given in the vast majority of cases is perfectly clear and yet tantalizingly vague. Smith (1991:34) rightly says that, "the method of receiving the divine message has always been partially hidden in mystery." Some prophets indicate that their 'call' to the prophetic office occurred when they saw a vision of God (Isa. 6; Ezek. 1-3), but most prophets never had any spectacular call experience.

Vos (1948:26) points out three inadequate views that are sometimes suggested to explain how the prophets of Israel received God's revelation. One is that the prophets knew that no such

² Braide (1978:8).

³ T. O. Obadare, who was a popular prophet in Nigeria, confirmed how he received his call in one of his messages on tape.

⁴ I. G. Sakpo was the first ordained prophet in The Apostolic Church LAWNA Prophets.

⁵ Interview with Pastor J. A. Akintola, The Apostolic Church Ibadan Area Prophet on 17th December, 2016.

communication existed between them and God. However, since they desired to impress the people that their teaching was true, they pretended that the message came from God. Two problems with the preceding views are that they are too modern for the antique mind and morally inexcusable. How could such prophets be justified for accusing some other prophets of prophesying their minds and not God's mind?

Another hypothesis is that God simply implanted only the essential kernel of the truth in the prophets, but the working out of this kernel was left to the subjective prophetic reflection. The suggestion, however, would need a long intervening period between the reception of the kernel and the development of the full prophecy. The third hypothesis is that the prophets employed divination as a means of receiving the message. Such a theory is particularly devised to explain the predictive elements of the prophetic writings (Akao 2004:10).

By the mode of receiving revelation, we mean the vehicle of inspiration. Folarin (2004:26) identifies three ways by which the prophets received their revelation namely, through speech and hearing, through showing and seeing, and through rapture.

As far as the prophets were concerned, God spoke to them (Isa. 19:17; 23:9, Jer. 51:29; Amos 3:7) in space and time (Isa. 5:9; 16:13-14; 22:14; Jer. 1:13; Ezek. 3:12). In 1 Samuel 3:8-9, the voice was so external that Samuel mistook it for Eli's voice. At times though, the voice was only heard internally in what is called the "still small voice" (cf. Job 4:12-16). Akao (2004:10) has rightly posited that the word of Yahweh was received by the prophet principally through audition. It came to the prophet not as a result of his own wishes but rather as an external force that pressed in on the prophet with a burning urgency to be proclaimed even against his will (cf. Jer. 20:7). Similarly, Hills (1989:35) opines that the ministry of the prophet required spending time in the presence of God. Jeremiah calls this standing "in the council of the Lord to see or to hear his word" (Jer. 23:18). This statement neatly sums up the way in which all the prophets received the divine message. Hills (1989:35) succinctly puts it thus:

...they learned to listen to God, to meditate upon his word, to allow their thoughts to be directed by the spirit of God and sometimes to receive picture through which he communicated a message to them. The prophet learned to allow the divine invasion to take place from the time when God had first made his unsought invasion into the life of the one who was to serve him by revealing his word to the nation.

The mind of the prophet was never passive, as it would be if he were in a trance. The mind was active in co-operation with God, so that the *ruach* could blow upon him. Prophecy then was the willing co-operation of the spirit of a human being with the spirit of God made possible by God breathing into a human being and pervading his spirit. It was the active response of the spirit within a human being to the spirit of the living God. Visions and dreams also had their place in the reception or inspiration of the prophet. According to Numbers 12:16, visions or dreams were the commonest mode of receiving prophetic revelation at the time of Moses. Folarin (2004:26) calls this prophetic revelation through showing and seeing.

It is difficult to draw clear distinctions between dreams and visions. The emphasis on vision seems to be on the unusual nature of the experience and on its character as revelation. It points to a special awareness of God. Most of the visions of the prophets conveyed one spiritual truth or the other. For instance, Amos saw locusts eating up the green at the beginning of the harvest (7:1-3). This registered in him a message of judgment; locusts eating up the crops signified that Israel would face famine and starvation. Another example of vision that serves as a mode of revelation is the dream of Jeremiah. He looked at the almond tree (Jer. 1:1-18). Perhaps everyone around also saw the tree but as far as he was concerned, his sight did not register any message. It is possible even for Jeremiah himself to have seen the same almond tree from time to time without it conveying any message at all. Under the inspiration of God, however, the sight conveyed a message. In this case, the sight of the prophet was inspired (Jer. 1:11-12). God inspires the totality of the personality of the prophet.

The borderline between dream and vision appears thin, and among the Israelites, a dream was recognised as a means by which God communicates with the people. Among the ancient Israelites, there was a close connection between dreams and the role of the prophets. Jeremiah was said to have received the word of God through a dream in Jeremiah 31:26.

Again, on several occasions, the inspiration of the prophet is said to be due to the “hand of Yahweh” upon him. This has been understood to denote the onset of ecstasy (Lindblom 1963:134). The music of the minstrel in 2 Kings 3:15 induced the “hand of Yahweh” upon Elisha and enabled him to prophesy. Since music is used to induce ecstasy, the hand of Yahweh here could denote an ecstatic state. The phrase, though, is used also of Isaiah (Isa. 8:11) and Jeremiah (Jer. 1:8) where there is no suggestion of ecstatic behaviour. It occurs predominantly in the book of Ezekiel. Since

Ezekiel did manifest what looks like an ecstatic behaviour on several occasions, the suggestion that “hand of Yahweh” refers to the onset of ecstasy seems to be well founded. However, it would be wrong to separate the use of the phrase in the prophetic context from its use elsewhere in the Old Testament. It is equally noteworthy that the phrase, ‘the hand of God’, occurs no less than 122 times altogether in the Old Testament.

In the Hebrew usage, the names of the parts of the body are not only used to denote a physical feature but also to indicate the function which that physical feature performs (Schroer & Staubli 2017:34). A hand, therefore, is not just the part of the body at the end of the arm. It is also a sign of power. Therefore, when it occurs with reference to the prophets, the “hand of Yahweh” simply means the power to fulfil their calling and to prophesy. Sometimes this may or may not involve ecstasy. It was the power, which enabled Elijah to run faster than Ahab. It was the power, which equally enabled Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel to prophesy. It does not necessarily mean that they did so in an ecstatic state. The “hand of Yahweh” then denotes the empowering of the prophet by Yahweh.

Overall, whatever mode God chose to reveal his word to the prophet, there was nothing magical or occultic in the way the prophet received from God. God used the ordinary attributes common to all humanity that he himself had formed when creating men and women in his own image. It is equally worthy of note that the prophets did not always hear from God every day. Many times, we read of the word of the Lord coming to the prophet, or the Spirit of God taking hold of the prophet. Sometimes, it was a struggle of concentration to receive the word and to discern an important message, for example, when it took Jeremiah ten days to receive the word of the Lord (Jer. 2:7).

Thus, Old Testament prophets were men and women who were chosen by God and endowed with the characteristics that were essential for receiving revelation. They possessed the ability to enter into his presence and to receive his word which was the essential prerequisite for the proclamation of the word of God to the nation.

2.3 THE PROPHET AND THE CULT

Some scholars view the Israelite prophets as the proponents of an ethical religion. In other words, the main interest of the prophets was to teach the people how to live a faithful and fulfilled life. In essence, they had nothing to do with the cult. The cult here refers to the formal and ritual aspects

of worship, that is, it relates to sacrifices and other rituals. It is the visible expression of faith. The relationship between the prophets of Israel and the cult has caused much debate among scholars (Clements 1983:70; Barton 2005:111-1122). According to Pedersen (1957:127-142), the prophets of Israel have been accused of being attached to and living in the Temple (sanctuaries). Since it was common in the religions of the Near East to have cultic prophets who lived in the sanctuaries of their cults, Israel must have borrowed this idea from them (Harrison 1969:127). In line with this critical argument, Mowinckel (2004:23) asserts that many of the prophet reformers were members of the cultic staff of local sanctuaries. For example, Samuel is said to be a prophet and a cultic official (1 Sam. 3:19ff; 9:12ff), like Gad (2 Sam. 24:11; 2 Chron. 29:25) and Nathan (2 Sam. 7:1ff). However, the conclusion that the prophets were not opposed to the cult itself, but only to the cult as understood and practiced by their contemporaries would be strengthened considerably if it could be shown that some prophets held an official position within the cult as members of the cultic personnel (Johnson 1962:62).

From the prophetic books, mention is made of false prophets who were frequently associated with the royal court, but there was also a close connection between the court and the cult. At Jerusalem in Judah and at Bethel in Israel, the king and his court were much involved in the worship because the cultic centres were royal sanctuaries. It would not be surprising therefore if the so-called court prophets were also cult prophets and if they functioned not only as counsellors to the king but also as cult officials of sorts. Further, it would be wrong to assume that all these prophets were false (Rowley 1967:165).

That many were regarded as false by the classical prophets cannot be doubted, but there were people like Huldah in the days of Jeremiah (2 Kgs. 22:14ff), who apparently held official positions and yet proclaimed the genuine word of God as true prophets did. An investigation into the forerunners of the classical prophets would reveal that many of them had close connections with the cult. However, when we turn to the classical prophets themselves, the evidence of any official connection with the cult is rather slight. It is indisputable that the call of Isaiah is couched strongly in cultic terms (Isa. 6), but this does not imply that he was a cultic prophet. The language may derive simply from his regular participation in the temple worship as a prominent layperson in Jerusalem and from his intimate knowledge of the temple worship. It is true that he had access to the king as though he had some standing in the court, and that he married a woman who is described

as a prophetess in her own right (Isa. 8:3). The preceding however is insufficient evidence to draw any conclusion about his relations to the cult, and his teaching gives us no further clue.

On the relationship between the prophets and the cult, some scholars claim that the prophets especially the classical prophets were strongly and predominantly anti-cultic (Wood 1984:94). In support of this interpretation, some passages are often quoted to advance the positions that the prophets in ancient Israel were anti-cultic, for example, Isaiah 1:10-14:

The multitude of your sacrifice what are they to me?, says the Lord. I have more than enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened animals, I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats when you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my court, stop bringing meaningless offerings, your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations I cannot bear your evil assemblies (NIV).

Furthermore, Amos 5:5 (NIV) says, “Do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba for Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to nothing.” From these passages especially the latter, it is clear that Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba were principal cultic centres in ancient Israel. It is not surprising that these names were highlighted repeatedly to show that the prophets categorically condemned Israel’s cult and its cultic centres. Thus, the prophets were seen as protagonist of an ethical religion.

It has been observed that it would have been exceedingly difficult if not impossible to maintain an anti-cult and anti-institutional prophetism in Israel, for the cult was from the beginning the tangible expression of Israel’s faith and prophetism almost certainly remained in close relationship with the cult. The relationship was indeed one of mutual indebtedness. It is obvious that the prophets were familiar with the rituals and meaning of the cults such that they sometimes spoke in language borrowed from it. As Young also opines, the prophet and priest were not so consistently and inimically opposed, as is sometimes assumed. It is significant that the two figures were accorded an important stake in Israel’s religion (Young 1983:144).

Moses and Elijah are both remembered for their dual role of prophet-priest. Moses was a Levite (cf. Exod. 2:1), and Elijah conducted sacrifice (1 Kgs. 18:32ff). Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel were also priests and prophets at the same time (Jer. 1:1; Ezek. 1:3). Moreover, a Levite, that is, a cultic official was inspired by the spirit of God to bring a prophetic message at a time of national crisis (2 Chron. 20:14). It is possible also that the group of Levitical singers after the exile were survivors of groups of cultic prophets attached to the sanctuaries. Prophets are also associated with temple singers in 2 Chronicles 29:25. Prophets and priests are often linked together in a way that suggests

professional association (e.g. 2 Kgs. 23:2). On the other hand, the condemnation of the cult by prophets like Isaiah and Amos does not imply that they were against the cult. It revealed the lack of moral concern and holy living on the part of those who brought sacrifices and joined in the rituals (Amos 5:21ff). Isaiah too strongly condemned the sacrifices, the Sabbath and even prayer (Isa. 1) to show that they were all useless in the context of a blatantly sinful life. It is important at this stage to investigate how the Old Testament prophets interacted with the society and how their messages shaped the course and context of their times.

2.4 PROPHETS AND SOCIETY

It is undeniable that prophecy is a social phenomenon (Kelle 2014:275). It is an activity carried out by some members of a specific society, which conforms to the social norms operative among the people. The prophets are thus essentially intermediaries between the human and divine worlds. In other words, prophets are channels through whom divine messages reach the ordinary world and through whom humans can gain direct access to the divine.

Beecher underscores the relationship between the prophets and the society in ancient Israel. He asserts that the prophets of Yahweh were raised up by God from society (Deut. 18:15), and they sustained a prominent relationship with society as political and religious leaders, preachers of the law, predictors of future judgment, watchmen over the spiritual life of the nation, intercessors for the people and persecutors of covenant-breakers. According to him, the prophets were concerned with international events and the future, while at the same time they were practical in dealing with the concerns of their own locality and generation (Beecher 1905:98).

The foregoing therefore shows that prophets were vital agents in effecting social change in a given society. They (prophets) were able to make appreciable impact on their societies because it would be presumed that any call for innovation that was articulated by them had not only been approved but also demanded by God. Examples of this can be seen in the Old Testament. Yahweh communicated continually with his chosen people through the prophets. The prophets through their message demonstrated opposition to whatever threatened the life and survival of the nation of Israel. This therefore made them politically active.

Kraeling (1969:40) has well said that the great Hebrew prophets were public men and women, who were concerned about political and social questions of the day. They had a definite concern

for social justice as well as religious orthodoxy. As Beecher notes, “More prominently than anything else they rebuked unequal and unkind practices in the administration of justice, and inexorably demanded reformation.” According to him, it was largely for the purpose of reform that the prophets engaged in public affairs (Beecher 1905:97).

Nonetheless, while the prophets engaged in social concerns, they were not primarily social reformers. Bullock (1986:25) regards the prophets as “theological reformers,” for “their basic motivation was generated from their commitment to the fundamental laws of God,” because their concern for the oppressed, the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the resident alien sprang from God’s own compassionate nature (Deut. 15:11; 24:14-15; Exod. 22:21-27).

Heschel (1962:198), writing in *The Prophets*, states that justice was important to the prophets because it pertained to God’s status in human life. This goes to say that the social concern of the prophets was grounded in theological reform with an expressed concern for elevating the reputation of God and God’s standard in society.

The prophets considered each citizen responsible for dispensing justice (Mic. 6:8). Isaiah for instance called the Israelites to “give rest to the weary” (Isa. 28:12). When the members of Israelite society failed to fulfil this responsibility, the prophets stepped in to intercede on behalf of those who had no intercessor. As Bullock (1986:25) notes, “Where the king and official, either because of apathy or inaccessibility, stepped out of their expected role, the prophets stepped in.”

In a well-researched article, Laney remarks that the prophets of Israel were greatly concerned about social issues, including moral and religious issues. For the prophets, social and moral concerns were at the very heart of religion. Further, the prophets repeatedly condemned idolatry, formalistic worship, failure to support temple worship, oppression of the poor, murder, and dissipation (Laney 1990b: 147).

However, the origin of the social and moral concerns which was often expressed by the prophets is a point of debate. Hammershaimb (1966:71) has noted a relationship between the Deuteronomic Law and the Prophets, suggesting that Deuteronomy was an attempt to bring the teaching of the prophets into statute form. In reality, it should be viewed the other way around. As Kaufmann (1960:365) observes, “The prophetic demands for social justice echo, for the most part, the ancient covenant laws.” Schultz (1968:45) who concurs with Kaufmann writes that:

The ethical and social concern expressed by Moses was likewise repeatedly appealed to by the prophets. Having departed from the prescribed Mosaic standard, the Israelites were warned by the prophets of their shortcomings on the basis of divinely revealed Law of Moses.

Indeed, the prophets were not great innovators, presenting the Israelites with new responsibilities in the social and moral realm. Rather, they believed that the ideal for Israel's society was laid down in the covenantal legislation of the past. Bullock (1986:28) is therefore right that "Justice and righteousness, the foundation of the Law and Pillar of Society, were viewed by the prophets as the order for every age." Thus, the point being made is that the prophet's concern for society and social issues clearly originated with the Mosaic Law and with Yahweh Himself. The prophets of God simply applied the Mosaic legislation to their contemporary situation. Among the eight-century BCE prophets who became the major proponent and advocate of social justice in ancient Israel, was Amos. In the following section, we shall engage the theme of social justice as reflected in Amos 5.

2.5 SOCIAL JUSTICE IN AMOS 5

The prophets of Israel, especially the eighth-century BCE prophets, have been described as the proponents of a sound social-ethical society. Schoors (2013:230) comments that, "The Prophets of the eighth century no doubt have a social-ethical message, which is expressed in their condemnation of social justice." The prophets knew that without justice, there would not be peace and salvation. Bokovoy (2014:1) reiterates further that the prophets believed that the establishment of "justice and righteousness" was the reason for Israel's existence. The deep concern of the biblical prophets was about the distribution of wealth and the moral need to take care of the poor and needy in the covenant community. Consequently, it is the call to liberate the financially enslaved and marginalised that propelled the prophets to demand social reform (Bokovoy 2014:1). The Old Testament prophets have indeed played significant roles in influencing the social justice tradition of ancient Israel. Lopez (2015:1) affirms that, "The Old Testament prophets had a strong sense of social justice for the poor, the widow, the orphan and the marginalized." Prominent among these prophets was Amos who has been described as the prophet of social justice (Kelly 1972:82; Jense 2006:73; Mariottini 2007:1).

The book of Amos tells us much about the prophet who is regarded as the earliest of all the classical prophets (Malchow 1996:31). Amos came from a small town called Tekoa, which was situated in the hill country, south of Jerusalem (Strydom & Wessels 2000:169). He lived in the first half of

the eighth century BCE during the reigns of Jeroboam II (793 – 753 BC) in Israel and Uzziah (791-740) in Judah (Amos 1:1). Though he was from the southern kingdom of Judah, he prophesied in the northern kingdom (Strydom & Wessels 2000:169).

That Amos was a great prophet of social justice is evident in his work. Scholars such as Keller (1972:6) also submit that the dominant theme of the book of Amos is social justice. According to Doorly (1989:88), Amos spoke of only one sin, and that is, the selfish greed of the rich and powerful of Samaria who prevented the fair distribution of the earth's resources among all the people of Israel. In the same vein, Woodbridge and Semmelink (2013:79-100) assert that no prophet had a stronger voice for justice than Amos. The foregoing therefore explains why Christians, over the years, have drawn on Amos in their call for justice. Although Amos prophesied at a time of relative peace and prosperity, it was also a time when the Israelites neglected Yahweh's laws.

Amos spoke so vehemently against the increased disparity between the very wealthy and the very poor. Amos delivered the message of God to Israel when the economy was buoyant, and the rich were trampling on the poor. Meanwhile, maltreating the poor, the strangers, and the vulnerable in the land was a grievous offence before God (Duet. 15:7-9). Amos did not hesitate to cry out to every group that trampled on poor people in the land. He proclaimed God's judgment over the nations (Amos 3:10), while pointing out that any nation that failed to do what was right and harboured violence and robbery should inevitably expect the wrath of God.

Routtenberg (1971:9) rightly notes that, "Of all the literary prophets of Israel, Amos has left the profoundest impression of the prophetic insistence on justice." Schmidt (1984:199) asserts that when we describe Amos as a prophet of social justice, we put our finger on the principal theme of his arraignment. Amos has also been viewed as a prophet of doom by some scholars simply for his stern denunciation of the injustice and inequality of his day with the attendant judgment that inevitably would fall on the perpetuator of such evil (Schoors 2015:231; Folarin & Olanisebe 2014:2). However, going by his vicious castigation of corruption and social injustice among Israel's pagan neighbours, Israel itself, and Judah, one would agree with Schmidt's assertion. For Amos, God is sovereign over humans, and God's imminent judgment looms over Israel and Judah for their corruption of social justice. Amos became a living voice who spoke out in God's name to

an oppressed society, and his concern for the poor and the oppressed made him a prophet for all time (Mariottini 2007:1).

Although most scholars have engaged the book of Amos and especially the theme of social justice based on different academic parameters, little has been done on the theme of social justice specifically in Amos 5:21-24, as it relates to the role of prophets or clergy in the fight against social justice in the Nigerian context.

2.5.1 Amos' call for social justice (Amos 5:21-24)

The crux of Amos 5:21-24 is that social justice is an imperative demonstration of true religion. Amos' observation and concern were that Israel had gratified herself in religious formalities to the detriment of the ethical and moral demands of the law of YHWH. Amos decried YHWH's rejection of Israel's religious sacrifice in verses 21-23 thus:

“I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.”

According to Wax (2013:193), the focus of Amos' oracle in these verses shifted to cultic worship practices and the extent to which these practices undermine the administration of justice and the principle of righteousness. Amos expressed YHWH's utter disgust for Israel's worship and festival, not because those cultic activities were idolatrous or ritually incorrect in themselves, but because they encouraged a fundamentally wrong understanding of the demands of YHWH. The strong use of the words “hate,” “despise” (or reject, in RSV), and “will not smell” in relation to Israel's array of cultic activities by YHWH is said to indicate YHWH's gross displeasure in Israel's superficial worship to the detriment of the administration of justice and righteousness (Mays 1969:106-108; Andersen & Freedman 1989:523-524; Paul 1991:188).

Paul (1991:188) states that while speaking on behalf of YHWH, Amos “levels his most uncompromising attack against the lavishness of the official monotheistic cult” (cf. Isa. 1:10-17; Jer. 6:19-21; Hos. 6:6; 8:13; Mal. 1:10; 2:13). Wax (2013:188) concurs that Israel's display of religious enthusiasm and indulgence through her sacrifices, offerings and music in worship did very little to impress YHWH. The reason was that the most important ingredients of justice and

righteousness in daily conduct were obviously missing, making their entire religious zeal and enthusiasm meaningless (Wax 2013:188).

Finley's (1990:249-251) comment on Amos' expression of YHWH's outright rejection of Israel's sacrifices and cultic worship activities is profound. According to him, these sacrifices functioned to maintain the relationship between YHWH and his people. When conducted properly and with the devoted attitude of the worshipper, YHWH would accept them to make atonement for sin (Lev. 1:4), and as a means to express love and devotion to Him. However, this was not the case. Israel had dirtied her hands by oppressing her neighbours and refusing to seek justice, hence, YHWH would vehemently reject these offerings and elaborate worship, says Amos (Finley 1990:250)

Simundson (2005:199-200) explains that Amos 5:21-24 outlines the very desire and demand of YHWH from His covenant people. Any act of religious worship that is void of justice and righteousness is not only incomplete but also unacceptable to YHWH. Hence, "Amos speaks of justice and righteousness to define what YHWH expects from Israelite society and to point out what is, in fact, missing" (Simundson 2005:199-200). Similarly, Leliovskyi (2015:15) quotes Hymans (2002:233) thus:

The message of Amos is not that religious practice is unnecessary and undesirable. The message is rather that the emphasis on ritual can be corrupting and inconsistent with the Lord's direction towards moral behaviour. The bringing of offering to the Lord and singing of ritual hymns are acceptable only when they accompany social action consistent with the Lord's commandment directed towards social justice and moral righteousness among the people.

According to Leliovskyi (2015:15), Amos wanted Israel to understand that YHWH was not impressed by the piping of pious songs and psalms, while the people forgot their responsibilities to their fellow women and men, as they ground the poor into the mire and loaded the overburdened with misery. Hence, the corresponding demand for justice and righteousness must be allowed to flow forth as ever-flowing rushing water. Although Leliovskyi's exposition of Amos 5:18-27 is commendable, he focuses more on the textual and hermeneutical analysis of the passage. His approach to the text in question is useful to the present analysis. The study nonetheless, shall focus on the demand for social justice in Amos 5:21-24 within the context of the prophetic ministry of The Apostolic Church (TAC) LAWNA, Nigeria.

Having called the attention of Israel to YHWH's displeasure of their hypocritical offerings and worship at the expense of administration of justice, Amos confronts Israel with YHWH'S demand for justice and righteousness, for proper order in society (v. 24). Hayes (1988:174) comments that, "Over and against the festivities of the autumn celebrations that contributed to the divisiveness of society, Amos places the topic that is the constant theme of the exhortations in the book." Amos, like his younger contemporary, Isaiah, declared that what was most needed and pleasing to YHWH was not the elaborate worship in the form of self-serving religious activities but a new state of social order that engenders correct administration of justice and righteousness (Hayes 1988:174).

In Keller's (1972:82) view, Amos 5:24 could be called the Golden Verse of Amos, as it serves as the keynote for the entire book. Relating the themes of justice and righteousness in the prophecy of Amos to the issues of social justice in Ghana, Amissah (2016:152) affirms that, "the climax of Amos' prophecy is his emphatic call for social justice '... Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream'" (v. 24). Amissah (2016:152) states further that Amos 5:24 should be viewed as a demand for social justice. Amos 5:24 called on the ruling class and other individuals to support the cause of the vulnerable in the society and be fair to them. For Amissah (2016:152), Amos' call for justice and righteousness is a call for a change of direction from the status quo of maintaining the hierarchy in society to a new era where the wellbeing of the vulnerable in society is paramount.

While Amissah (2016:1-291) focuses on the condemnation of social injustice in the oracles of Amos and their implications for social justice in the world today, using examples from contemporary Ghana, the present research aims to engage Amos' demand for social justice, specifically in Amos 5:21-24 as a model for prophetic ministry in TAC LAWNA Nigeria. Amissah carries out a thorough exploration of all the texts dealing with social justice in the book of Amos through the prophet's criticism of the society of his time. Using the justice-seeking lens of Amos, he shows how the social injustice which Amos condemned speaks to social injustice in Ghana today. Although the present work will benefit immensely from the former, it will nonetheless concentrate on the Nigerian context.

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that Israel had disrupted the social order in the society by abolishing justice and righteousness. The existence of class and hierarchy in the society was infringing on the very core of sound harmonious living and respect for the rights of others in the

society. The cry of Amos to allow justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream was not only a wakeup call but also a demand by YHWH for a state of sound social order.

For Amos, “justice” encompasses reparation for the defrauded, fairness for the less fortunate, and dignity and compassion for the needy. “Righteousness” connotes the conditions that make justice possible—attitudes of mercy and generosity, and honest dealings that imitate the character of YHWH as He reveals Himself in the Law of Moses (Mays 1969:92; Finley 1990:251).

It is important to the researcher to relate the theme of social justice in Amos to the present-day context. To this end, articles and scholarly works from the Nigerian context are examined in order to help us identify the gap which the present work could fill, and I shall attempt to do so below.

2.6 SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

Several research works (Ayegboyin 2001:99; Ehusani 1996:5; Otuibe 2003:67; Agboluaje 2007:187) have established the striking similarities between the situations of the Nigerian society and of the eighth century Israel. Amos’ oracle confronted the latter setting. However, the Nigerian society of today is not any better than the Israelites in Amos’ day. The message of Amos has great relevance to the Nigerian situation today since the crimes for which Israel was condemned are commonly witnessed even in present day Nigeria (DiGangi 1985:5). Reflecting on the situation in contemporary Nigeria, Lere (2007:133) asserts that Nigeria can be likened to the biblical Palestine as a land that flows with “milk and honey.” Ehusani (1996:5), Ayegboyin (2001:99) and Otuibe (2003:67) all concur that Nigeria is a great nation endowed with both tremendous human and natural resources. Despite these resources, the masses are greatly impoverished, largely, due to the social injustice and corruption that are prevalent in the country (Lere 2007:133-134).

Ode-Idahosa (2013) also confirms that Nigeria possesses abundant human and natural resources but she is counted among the poorest countries on the earth. The situation is not only calamitous but a paradox. Ogungbemi (2007:195) describes it as a paradox of “poverty in the midst of plenty!” Okoroafo and Chinweoke (2013:105) also agree that Nigeria is a nation marked by paradox—wealthy nation, poor people.

According to Ogungbola (2013:3):

Several commentaries have been passed by individuals, national and international organizations about the possible causes of the peaking crime and violence in Nigeria, but none seem as strong as “social injustice” as the major cause among others (sic), in spite of the complexities and confusion surrounding this pressing issue .

Ogungbola is of the view that social injustice, which is at the core of the numerous socio-economic problems in the Nigerian society, has almost if not, totally defied solution. He argues further that,

Even though, social injustice might exist in other societies at various levels, the situation in Nigeria is apparently different from what might be obtainable in any side of the world; ranging from the nation’s economy and resource management, to her political and leadership profile, education and human development – the sounds of the themes of justice and equity are long dead (Ogungbola 2013:3).

The preceding statement might appear to indict a nation that is regarded as the giant of Africa; it is nonetheless true, at least, to a large extent. However, no matter how abysmal and hopeless the country’s situation may seem today, it is not beyond redemption. It is this call for redemption that the present work seeks to advocate as it seeks to use the prophet Amos as a model to challenge the prophets of The Apostolic Church LAWNA, Nigeria to address the situation in the Nigeria society with a view to bringing about the desired social change.

In a well-researched paper, “The Ministry of Amos in Israel and its Socio-Religious Implication for the Nigerian Nation,” presented at the conference of Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies (NABIS) in Ekpoma, Nigeria, that discussed the theme: “Biblical Studies and Corruption in Africa,” Agboluaje (2007:175) argues that the Old Testament prophets “still speak to our age with tremendous challenge.” Agboluaje then pointed out four implications of Amos’ message for Nigeria. The first is that like the nations, which the prophet initially criticised, the Nigerian society is also plagued with injustice and economic oppression, culminating in economic disparity, discontentment and destitution. The second is that the socio-economic situation in the contemporary Nigerian society is characterised by widespread corruption. Third, corruption in the society extends to worship. Lastly, the contemporary Nigerian society wrongly holds that performing religious rituals is sufficient to satisfy God (2007:175). Going by the present situation in the country, one would confirm that the Nigerian problem is more complex than what Agboluaje has rightly pointed out in his paper. The present study therefore calls the attention of the church, specifically, The Apostolic Church LAWNA, through her prophets, to rise up like Amos and demand for social order in the society.

In his work, *Rethinking Prophetic Critique of Worship in Amos 5 for Contemporary Nigeria and USA*, Udoekpo (2017:5-8) affirms that Amos 5 focuses on socio-political and economic justice, divine judgement and the ethics of worship. Although the book of Amos paints a picture of political stability and material prosperity in eighth century BCE Israel, Udoekpo argues that this was a paradox. The prosperity was limited to a corrupt elite minority class of hypocritical worshippers to the neglect and abuse of the poor majority (Udoekpo 2017:8). Through a thorough exegetical-theological analysis of the book of Amos in its historical and literary context, Udoekpo (2017:21) unpacks the different theological elements in Amos 5. The elements include the lamentation (vv. 1-3), the inherent motifs of hope for the remnant, the exhortation to seek the Lord, as well as the concepts of justice, righteousness (vv. 4-6, 14-15, 24), and judgment/the Day of the Lord (vv. 18-20), as they relate to the prophet's entire ethics of worship (vv. 21-27).

Udoekpo (2017) argues that, for Amos, worship should not become mere religious and hypocritical “pilgrimages, offerings, ceremonial songs, sacrifices, and empty rituals – especially by the elites of the community, who delight in neglecting the suffering of the poor and investing in the exploitation of their lowliness.” In other words, Udoekpo's work seeks to lift up the oppressed based on his stance that genuine worship must find expression outside the temple by ethics of obedience to God, love of neighbours, the promotion of social justice of all dimensions, acts of kindness, and through righteousness in daily living. The main thrust of his work is to re-evaluate Amos' theology of worship in Chapter 5 in order to apply it to contemporary society, including the religious communities in Africa, and especially Nigeria and the United States of America. However, as thorough as Udoekpo's work is, and as relevant as it is to the present work, it does not address the role that the contemporary prophets and clergy in Nigeria should play in the demand for social justice. The present study seeks to fill this gap by engaging Amos' demand for social justice in Amos 5:21-24 to challenge the prophets in The Apostolic Church LAWNA, Nigeria to use their prophetic ministry to confront the social injustice that is prevalent in present day Nigerian society.

In a similar study, Oguntoye's (2007:216-238) essay, “Amos and the Miscarriage of Justice in Israel in the Context of Nigerian Socio-political Order” focuses broadly on the socio-political issues with specific theological reflections for contemporary Nigeria. Using the text of Amos 5:24, Oguntoye relates the phrase, “let justice roll down like water,” to the current socio-political situation in Nigeria, and sees it as a call for divine justice. Although Oguntoye critically analyses

the concept of justice and righteousness in Amos 5:24, he does not sufficiently relate his conclusion to the expected role of the clergy in promoting social justice that will engender a right social order in the society. The present work seeks to address that gap.

In their article, “Threats of Judgment in Amos and Its Lessons for Nigeria,” Folarin and Olanisebe also focus on the socio-religious implication of Amos for the Nigerian society. They emphasise the threats of judgment motif in the book of Amos which functions as a corrective measure but is not definitive on the positive role that the contemporary prophets could play in bringing about social justice in a country like Nigeria where social injustice is grossly prevalent.

Okunoye’s (2014:1-15) essay, “The Relevance of Prophet Amos’ Message in Reviving Nigerian Society,” comments on the ministry of Amos and attempts to relate it to the socio-political, economic and religious situation in Nigeria. Okunoye (2014:1-15) offers a biblical reflection on Prophet Amos’ pronouncements on Israel’s socio-political, economic and religious situation in the eighth century vis-à-vis Nigeria at the centenarian celebration of its nationhood based on the historical-critical approach. Okunoye concludes that, “It is only when justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a flowing stream that there will be hope for individuals and the society at large.” Although Okunoye’s study focuses on the Nigerian context, it does not consider the prophetic role that the church through her clergy should play in speaking out against oppression and social injustice like Prophet Amos did. The present thesis therefore will address this gap.

In a multi-religious society like Nigeria, the church has a pertinent role to play in the fight against social injustice. Oloyede (2014:107) has rightly observed that, over the years, there has been much expectation on the part of the people that the political class should solve the cancerous problems of corruption, inequality and injustice in African countries, but there has been little or no lasting solution. Hence, using a biblical-theological approach, Oloyede submits that the church with her leaders and members should shoulder the responsibility of ensuring a transformative society that engenders justice and equality through her calling as the “salt of the earth and light of the world” (Oloyede 2014:107).

One can also agree with Achunonu (2012:166) that, “In history, the church has always demonstrated that she is a mother and is solidly behind her children even in the face of most inhuman treatment perpetuated against the poor in her midst.” Achunonu’s statement explains the prophetic role of the church as the voice of the voiceless, in both the church and the society. In the

Nigerian context, the church, to an extent, has risen up to her responsibility. The church has courageously taken a stance with the poor, the afflicted, and the oppressed. However, in view of the escalating cases of oppression of the poor masses, corruption and human devaluation, the church needs to do more by continuing the prophetic mission of Christ and defending those authentic human values which are basic to a person's life (Achunonu 2012:166).

It must however be noted that over the years, the Church in Nigeria has tried, through Bible studies, sermons and daily ministrations, to utter her prophetic voice against the oppression of the poor, marginalisation of the masses and the monster called corruption which has plagued the Nigerian society. Several scholars agree that the Church in Nigeria is one of the most effective agents of social change and transformation (Mthembu 1992; Owioye 2005; Akanbi & Beyers 2017; Ishaya 2017; Orji 2017; Modise 2018;). Through her clergy, the church has helped to combat oppression and corruption in Nigeria (Ishaya 2017:89). Ishaya points out the concerted effort by the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria in raising their voices against corruption during one of their Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) meetings. At two of such plenary assemblies in the month of September in 1998 and in 1999, the theme was "Corruption in Nigeria: Implication for Nation Building" (Ishaya 2017:89).

Likewise, the prophets of The Apostolic Church, LAWNA have not been completely passive in raising their prophetic voices in solidarity with the poor, the needy and the hungry, and the oppressed in Nigeria. According to Oyejimi (2017:105), TAC prophets have not only engaged their prophetic ministry to condemn corruption and evil practices among members of the church, but on several occasions have condemned corruption, oppressive policies and practices in Nigeria. Like Prophet Amos, TAC prophets have challenged and condemned the political, economic, social, religious and moral ills of the day in Nigeria. It is however the observation of the researcher that, though on few occasions, prophets of TAC LAWNA spoke out against some of the social injustices in the country, their voice has not been loud and consistent enough in a nation that is totally engrossed in the sin of social injustice.

The Church cannot afford to remain silent in the face of the high rate of oppression of the poor masses and the marginalisation that remain prevalent in Nigeria. Nyiawung (2010:798-799) argues that it is the urgent task of the church to fight against social injustices, through its prophetic witness. Woodbridge and Semmelink (2013:79-100) have noted that the "exploitation of the poor

remains a concern in our society today.” The authors argue further that the prevalence of social injustice in African countries calls for a reconsideration of the role of the church as a prophetic witness and representative of God. Thus, the present work seeks to use the prophetic witness of Amos to challenge the prophets of TAC LAWNA to take up their roles as God’s oracles in society and to speak out against the socio-economic and political injustice in Nigeria.

The studies reviewed above have confirmed that various scholars, both Western and African, have analysed the text of Amos through the traditional diachronic or historical-critical method as well as synchronic approach. The pattern among Western scholars though, is to focus on the text, while most African scholars focus on both text and context. This study seeks to use the biblical text to engage with the contemporary Nigerian context.

CHAPTER 3

PROPHETIC MINISTRY IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH LAWNA

3.1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH IN NIGERIA

Tracing the history of The Apostolic Church Nigeria, a denomination that just celebrated her centenary in Lagos State, Nigeria in August 2018, will be a herculean task within the scope of the present study. Hence, a brief historical sketch of the Church's pioneering role as the first classical Pentecostal denomination in Nigeria as a whole will suffice. Barrett (1982:530) has rightly affirmed that the history of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is incomplete without the history of the pioneering role played by The Apostolic Church Nigeria. The history of The Apostolic Church Nigeria is more of making the church indigenous than European foundership, and predates 1931 when the denomination name was adopted in Nigeria. In fact, as Fatokun (2006:49-50) asserts, the history of The Apostolic Church Nigeria, as a careful historical research has shown, is a history of a metamorphosis of an African indigenous prophetic-healing Pentecostal movement into a classical European Pentecostal denomination by way of affiliation.

According to church historians (Turner 1972:3; Taise 1978:45; Ayegboyin & Ishola 1997:59-63; 2016:217; Sundkler & Steed 2000:233), the first Pentecostal form of Christianity in Nigeria appeared very early in the twentieth century in the form of spontaneous and independent prophetic or "spiritual" movements in communities where non-Pentecostal missions had already planted churches. The first of these was the Garrick Sokari Braide movement in the Niger-Delta area in 1915 (see Fatokun 2017:1). The movement, which was led by an Ijaw man and a catechist of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S), triggered a reaction from some orthodox churches in Nigeria. By 1916, this form of Pentecostalism had spread to many parts of the C.M.S in Niger-Delta.

Significantly, as early as 1918, the Holy Spirit began a similar indigenous Pentecostal revival in South-west Nigeria. The revival was conducted through Spirit-filled and inspired African leaders without the physical presence of any European or American Pentecostal leader. As a result of that indigenous Pentecostal revival, a nationwide revival was ignited in 1930 which spread to neighbouring African countries, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit reminiscent of the first-century Apostolic experience recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (Fatokun 2017:2). However,

with the growth and expansion of the Church, came intense persecution. Due to the intense persecution, as was characteristic of the first-century Apostolic Church, the leadership of the indigenous Pentecostal group in Nigeria, previously called Precious Stone or Diamond Society but now affiliated with a Holiness Movement in the United States of America's Faith Tabernacle Congregation, sent a Pentecostal "Macedonian call" to the authorities of The Apostolic Church in Great Britain. The call was necessary because of the failure of the American affiliate to offer needed support during the revival (Fatokun 2017:2).

It is pertinent to mention at this point that, by historical origin, The Apostolic Church as a denominational name worldwide emerged as one of the earliest classical Pentecostal denominations in Europe at Penygroes, South Wales, United Kingdom in 1916. It originated as an aftermath of the 1904-1905 Wales Revival by Evans Roberts, with the Wales Pastor Daniel Powel Williams, as the popularly acclaimed founder of the Church (Adegboyega 1978:46; Fatokun 2017:2).

The "Welsh Revival," as it was popularly known, broke out in Wales, and the news of the revival started to spread throughout the United Kingdom. During the revival, multitudes received salvation, and wonderful manifestations of the Holy Spirit were witnessed. The impact of the revival spread to many parts of the British Isles (Fatokun 2017:5). Twelve years later, precisely in 1916, a group of Christians met one night in Penygroes in a small quiet village in Caramathens (Dyfed) at the Independent Chapel. Pastor D. P. Williams, one of the people in the group, who had accepted salvation on 25th December 1904 at one of the services of the Welsh Revival, was used by the Lord, together with his brother to start a fellowship called The Apostolic Church in 1916. Eventually, the church started by Pastor D. P. William later spread to other parts of Britain and subsequently to other parts of the world.

As earlier stated, while the fire of Pentecostalism was being reignited in the United Kingdom in 1916, Africa was not left behind. Similar indigenous Pentecostal revivals particularly in South-west Nigeria among other places was taking place. Pastor S. G. Adegboyega, one of the patriarchs of The Apostolic Church Nigeria narrated his experience as follows:

I attended the revival conducted in March, 1916 at the St. Paul's Anglican Church, Breadfruit Street, Lagos, under the distinguished chairmanship of Bishop James Johnson. A similar one was simultaneously conducted by Bishop Oluwole. These two revival services focused on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and efficacy of prayers by believers through faith in the name of Jesus Christ. In

this revival many ministers received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and I was positively affected by the revival (Adegboyega 1978:10).

In 1918, a group of people came together as a Praying Band called “Precious Stone Society” or “Diamond Stone Society.” The group, according to Osuntayo (2018:26), had its centre at Ijebu-Ode under the leadership of Pastors J. B. Shadare and J. B. Esinsinade. The Society became more prominent when Miss Sophia A. Odunlami was mightily used of God to heal people who were afflicted by the influenza epidemic of that the time. Many healings and miracles were wrought by the Lord through her. The supernatural visitations further ignited the fire of revival across the Southwestern province of Nigeria.

In 1920-1921, with the efforts of Pastor D. O. Odubanjo, Precious Stone had started gathering in Lagos and the worship services took place on Upper Kings Street. The leaders later corresponded with Pastor A. Clarke, who was then the leader of the Faith Tabernacle Congregation (FTC)⁶ in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. By 1923, the leaders of Diamond/Precious Stone in Nigeria decided to change its name by affiliating with Faith Tabernacle Congregation. Between 1925 and 1930, a long expected revival broke out and the Lord raised up two evangelists who simultaneously conducted evangelical outreaches in different parts of Nigeria. Through the revival, the FTC had acquired branches at Ijebu-Ode, Lagos, Ilesha, Zaria, Kaduna, Kano, Minna, Umuahia and Jos. The ministry was also able to gather many converts from both other denominations and other religions. Prominent among these new converts who were later mightily used by God in evangelising and winning more souls to the kingdom of God were Evangelists D.O. Orekoya and J.A. Babalola. Evangelist D.O. Orekoya was instrumental in many successful revivals held in several cities including Idi-Oro in Lagos, Oke-Bola in Ibadan, Oke-Oye in Ilesha and Warri, all in Western Nigeria. His life came to a sudden end in 1930 due to a fire accident. Outstanding among the many miracles God performed through him was the restoration of a pregnant woman to life after she had been declared dead for four days (Adegboyega 1978:29).

⁶ The Faith Tabernacle Congregation with headquarters in Philadelphia, U.S.A is a Holiness Movement whose historical origin dated back to May 1897. It emerged as an offshoot of John Alexander Dowie’s Christian Catholic Church. Her most famous church periodical *Sword of the Spirit Magazine* became more popular outside the United States of America (especially in West Africa – in Nigeria and Ghana in particular) with the assumption of the Assistant Pastor Ambrose Clarke as the second presiding pastor of the church in 1917. Cf. Adam Mohr, 2010. “Out of Zion into Philadelphia and West Africa: Faith Tabernacle Congregation, 1897-1925,” *Pneuma*, vol. 32, 1, pp, 56-79.

Evangelist Joseph Ayo Babalola, a young man of 24 years of age, was a mighty instrument in the hand of the Lord in the ensuing revival of 1930. The revival will ever remain a point of reference for years to come in the history of The Apostolic Church Nigeria. Evangelist Babalola was a junior minister under Pastor J. A. Babatope at the Ilesa branch of the FTC. It was reported that the full-blown revival under Evangelist Babalola made pews in most of the orthodox churches in the South-west of Nigeria almost empty as many of their members trooped to the Revival and subsequently became members of the FTC (Jemigbon 2001:34). Those who were converted during the time included witches, wizards, *ifa* priests, and idol worshippers, among others (Jemigbon 2001:34). Due to the great revival, a serious persecution arose from the government of the day, nominal Christians, Muslims and some traditionalists. The persecution affected most of the churches in the country then. As a result, there were recurrent sympathy visits of encouragement to Ilesha and prayer was fervently made by the believers from Lagos and Ibadan under the leadership of Pastor D.O. Odubanjo who was based in Lagos (Jemigbon 2001:35).

However, in a prayer session held before the arrival of the Lagos brethren in 1930, Evangelist Babalola saw a vision in which an envelope was handed over to the church leaders. According to Adebisi (10:2018), the envelope had an inscription on it—"The Apostolic Church." Later on, during the believers' regular visit to Ilesa, Pastor J. A. Babatope related the vision of Babalola to the visitors. Pastor Odubanjo, who was then the secretary of the FTC, told the church council at the same forum that he had been receiving some publications from a church organisation called by that name. The name of the magazine was "Riches of Grace." On hearing what Odubanjo said, all the ministers agreed that he (Odubanjo) should contact that church and invite their leaders to Nigeria.

Meanwhile, the Lord had also informed The Apostolic Church in Great Britain in a prophecy that there would be an invitation from some people outside the British Isles, which should not be refused, and that the church was to prepare financially and materially for the invitation. The prophecy was thus confirmed when a letter was received from Nigeria. The Church in the UK then invited the Nigerian brethren to Britain. Pastor J. A. Babatope, and Pastor Eni and his wife from the eastern part of Nigeria, represented the Nigerian brethren (Osuntayo 2018:26).

It was after the visit that the brethren from Europe came to Nigeria. However, they could not get to Ilesa because they were deported at Ibadan. On their return to Britain, they consulted the Queen

about their problem in Nigeria, and a grant was given to them to visit wherever they wished in Nigeria. Consequently, a return voyage was made and the officials arrived in Nigeria in September 1931 (Osuntayo 2018:29).

Before the arrival of the delegates of The Apostolic Church from Great Britain, there was a persistent rumour in the church that The Apostolic Church Great Britain did not believe in divine healing (that is, healing without the use of medicine), a belief which was warmly embraced and practiced by the FTC in Nigeria. Jemigbon (2001:35) reveals that the conference of pastors of FTC was held at Ijebu-Ode, and they decided to send a telegram to the awaited delegates to cancel their visit to Nigeria. However, through divine providence, Pastor I. G. Sakpo who was not an ordained pastor at the time and was not present at the meeting, was stirred by the Lord to come and deliver a very strong message to the ministers at the conference from his house in Ijebu-Ode. He literally barged into the meeting and began to prophesy regarding the decision that the pastors were about to take on the delegates of The Apostolic Church, Great Britain. Through Sakpo, the Lord warned the ministers to desist from the negative decision and to allow the apostolic missionaries to come to Nigeria. After his message, the pastors in attendance were in awe and, thus, yielded to the authority of God through the prophecy (Osuntayo 2018:29).

On 23rd September 1931, the missionaries appointed by the TAC missionary council in Great Britain arrived on the shores of Nigeria through Apapa Wharf. One of the three missionaries was Pastor D.P. Williams who was the founder and President of TAC in Great Britain. He arrived with the vice-president, Andrew Turnbull, and a prophet, W.J. Williams. The trio were mightily used by the Lord in Nigeria. They held revival crusades in Lagos, Yaba, Iperu, Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode and Ibadan. Hundreds of people were converted, and many of them received both water and Holy Spirit baptisms. On the success of the crusades, Adegboyega (1978:59) writes:

It is evidently conclusive that the ministry of the missionaries from Great Britain was greatly blessed by the Lord. It was indeed the genesis of the Apostolic Church in Nigeria for which we have great cause to thank our God who directed us to TAC vision.

Fatokun (2017:3) notes that the missionaries did not visit Ilesha, Calabar and Kaduna on the advice of the European Political Commissioners due to the then on-going persecution. However, after the crusade at Ibadan, they returned to Lagos, where they held a series of consultative meetings with the leaders of FTC, Nigeria. Matters discussed included church doctrine, administration, the stance of both groups on divine healing, baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, marriage,

divorce, education, wearing of ecclesiastical outfits, and many other related issues. At the end of the meetings, the leaders of FTC unanimously agreed to affiliate with The Apostolic Church of Great Britain. They therefore dropped the name “Faith Tabernacle Congregation,” and the church became known as a branch of The Apostolic Church in Great Britain.

According to Omowole (1994:59), before the missionaries left Nigeria, soon after the agreement, many requests were put before them. They were asked to send resident missionaries from Britain to help build and establish The Apostolic Church in Nigeria. The request was granted before they left for Britain in November 1931. No sooner had the missionaries returned home, than they sent two pastors—Pastor Prefect and Prophet J. Vaughan. They arrived on the 2nd June 1932 with a letter from the Secretary of State to the colonies in London, authorizing them to establish TAC in Nigeria without any hindrance. This opened the way for the establishment of new assemblies of the Church, schools, revival centres, open-air gospel campaigns, and freedom of worship generally throughout the country in The Apostolic Church way. The authorisation ended all forms of persecution (Omowole 1994:59).

With the help of the resident missionaries, Evangelist J.A. Babalola, who was initially imprisoned due to religious matters by the government, was released from prison. After his release, he was able to work much more than ever before because he had the support of the government. With the newfound freedom, Babalola was able to move without any restriction throughout the length and breadth of the country to conduct evangelistic crusades (Omowole 1994:59).

There were, as already mentioned, some areas of disagreement between the Nigerian FTC and The Apostolic Church, Britain. The Europeans also tried to “answer questions” regarding their doctrinal beliefs. These resulted in the re-opening of the closed door of Pentecostal evangelism. Administrative centres were created in Lagos, Ilesha, Calabar and Kaduna. By 1937, four Area Superintendents, who were all European Missionaries, had managed the centres. The president of the General Council was Pastor Perfect who was also the Lagos Area Superintendent. It was this council that sent J.A. Babalola and Vaughan to Creek Town and Calabar respectively for evangelistic work in 1933. The arrangement was the beginning of The Apostolic Church work in the Eastern part of Nigeria (Omowole 1994:59).

In all, not less than forty missionaries worked in Nigeria at that time. They spread the teachings of The Apostolic Church and many aspects of their teachings are perpetuated within The Apostolic Church Nigeria and to a lesser degree in the Christ Apostolic Church.

3.1.2 The Apostolic Church LAWNA Territory

As noted in the previous section, The Apostolic Church has occupied an enviable position in ecclesiastical circles in Nigeria. The Apostolic Church Nigeria has its tentacles across the 36 states in Nigeria and is arguably one of the biggest denominations in the country with over 10.5 million members (Fatokun 2017:40).

In 1933, the assemblies of The Apostolic Church Nigeria (TACN) were divided into four administrative centres for easy administration. These were the Lagos centre (from Lagos to Oshogbo), Ilesha centre, Zaria centre and Calabar centre, all under one central church administration in Lagos which was the National Headquarters of the Church. These four Centres were regrouped into Areas later in 1936, and Kabba was created as an additional Area for easy management of the churches in the mid-northern part in 1947 (Adegboyega 1978:84). Under each of these Areas were Districts and Sections which were a group of assemblies.

In 1970, with the new development, the Nigeria General Council (NGC), which was successively headed by the Resident European Superintendent for Lagos Area, was replaced with another council called, Federal and Western/Northern Area Council (FAWNAC), for the unification and centralisation of all the administrative areas in different parts of Nigeria. With this new administrative set-up, an African, Pastor S. G. Adegboyega, who was then the Lagos Area Superintendent, emerged as the National Leader of the church. Pastor S. G. Adegboyega emerged as the first indigenous National Council Chairman of FAWNAC, by virtue of his position as the Superintendent for Lagos Area.⁷

However, towards the end of the 1970s, there was a move by the International Missionary Council in Bradford to grant autonomy to The Apostolic Church Nigeria, which hitherto had been treated as a mission field. Thus, a National Advisory Council (NAC) was set up as a transitional council with the responsibility of working out the modalities to grant autonomy to the church. The Church

⁷ The Lagos Area doubled as the National Headquarters of the Church in Nigeria (now 42 Cemetery Street, Ebute-metta, Lagos (cf. Fatokun 2017:195).

was then granted autonomy during the celebration of the fifty years anniversary of the adoption of The Apostolic Church as a denominational name in Nigeria in 1981 (Fatokun 2017:196).

It is pertinent to note that during the late 1960s Civil War that almost tore Nigeria apart as an entity, the Administrative Areas in the old Eastern Region were severed from the Western and Northern Areas as the war was primarily between Western and Northern Nigeria and Eastern Nigeria. Thus, in 1969, a prophecy came through Pastor Soetan that the Church should carve out the Lagos, Western and Northern Areas (LAWNA) Territory, as a single administrative entity. The new Territory would centralise and unite all the remaining Areas in the country, until the Areas in the Eastern Region, which were affected by the civil war, could be re-united with them (Fatokun 2017:198).

Fatokun (2017:220) further reveals that, owing to the enormous growth of The Apostolic Church in Nigeria, all the numerous assemblies of the church were divided structurally into administrative territories, fields, areas, and districts on a geographical basis and for effective administration. Each administrative Territory is administered by a Territorial Executive Council (EC) followed by Territorial General Executive Council (GEC), and General Council (GC) (Fatokun 2017:220).

The largest administrative unit under the national body is referred to as Territory, which may comprise of administrative Fields⁸, Metropolitan Areas, Zones, and Areas, as variously designated in different Territories. At the national level, The Apostolic Church Nigeria is divided presently into six administrative units, comprising of five administrative Territories, namely, LAWNA Territory, Cross River Territory, Igboland Territory, Maritime Territory, Akwa Ibom Territory, and one distinct administrative Field called Andoni Field (Fatokun 2017:220).

The largest of all the six main administrative units in TACN is the Lagos, Western and Northern Areas (LAWNA)⁹ Territory,¹⁰ carved out in 1969. According to Adeleye (2017:247), the inauguration of LAWNA as a Territory was done formally on Sunday 29th March 1970 by the unanimous decision of the Apostles and Prophets in all the Areas which were under the LAWNA Territory during the Easter Convention at Ilesa, Osun State, Nigeria. However, the operation of

⁸Administrative Fields are still in use in Cross River and Akwa Ibom Territories, while LAWNA, Igboland and Maritime Territories use Areas.

⁹ The designation LAWNA is an acronym for Lagos, Western and Northern Areas of The Apostolic Church in Nigeria.

¹⁰ The designation Territory refers to a geographical jurisdiction comprising the entire Western and Northern States.

this Territory as an entity did not commence until 1st January 1972, barely two years after the induction of Pastor S. G. Adegboyega as the pioneer Territorial Chairman, and Pastor Ayo Anjorin as the pioneer Administrative Secretary (Sakpo 1995:5). It is safe to say that LAWNA is the child of a unification process.

At first, LAWNA comprised of the four principal Areas in the old Western and Northern Regions of Nigeria, namely Lagos, Ilesa, Zaria (created in 1936), and Kabba (created in 1947). The creation of LAWNA Territory hinges so much on a vision of the divine order of one central church administration allegedly received from the Lord through prophetic ministry (Sakpo 1995:5). Its established policy of “unity and centralization of all things in the church” is fully explained in a twelve-point outline of the purposes and objectives of LAWNAISM¹¹ which include among others:

- To break down all barriers and partitions existing at that time between the Areas;
- To ensure that the governmental, administrative, doctrinal, evangelical, ministerial and financial matters are co-jointly handled and controlled from one common forum;
- To bring together all ministerial staff under one umbrella as well as other matters relating to appointments, transfers, dismissals, termination of appointments, discipline, calling into ministry, ordinations, salaries, and other allied matters (TAC Brochure 2018:30-31).

In other words, LAWNA Territory was created to “ensure the unity of the Spirit not so evident from the above quote in the bond of peace,” a cardinal teaching in TAC’s Pentecostal doctrine (TAC Constitution 1983:234). Consequently, every member Area is enjoined to ensure the survival of “LAWNAISM” through willingness and compliance with the principles and guidelines governing the establishment.

From 1972 until date, five people have served as TAC LAWNA Territorial Chair—Pastor S. G. Adegboyega who died in 1979 and was succeeded by Pastor I. G. Sakpo, Pastor S. S. Jemigbon who succeeded Pastor I. G. Sakpo after his death in 2009, and Pastor G. O. Olutola who succeeded Pastor S. S. Jemigbon after his death in 2009. In 2017, Pastor Olutola retired voluntarily and handed over to Pastor Dr E. S. Awojide who became the fifth LAWNA Territorial Chairman in April 2017 (Fatokun 2017:221).

¹¹ LAWNAISM is defined as a vision of order of one central divine government of all things in TACN.

LAWNA Territory, which was a unification of those four Areas¹² in 1970, has grown today into 98 Areas across the country, and it has eight missionary fields overseas. The Territory covers 27 out of Nigeria's 36 states and Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory of The Federal Republic of Nigeria. Within LAWNA Territory, there are 108 Areas, 708 Districts, 3,007 Assemblies, eight Missionary Fields which include Côte d'Ivoire, USA, Israel, Lesotho, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, and Sierra Leone. These are headed by one LAWNA Territorial Chairman, 79 Area Superintendents and three Missionary Field Superintendents, 250 Apostles, 98 Area Prophets, 28 Area Evangelists, 1, 664 Pastors, 780 Assistant Pastors, and 807 Student Pastors (Fatokun 2017:223).

3.2 PROPHETIC MINISTRY IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH LAWNA

It is important at this point to examine the role of prophecy in the establishment of the Church as well as the shifts in the understanding and use of prophecy in The Apostolic Church. The Apostolic Church LAWNA believes that the Church cannot fulfil her divine mandate unless the five ministry or leadership gifts of the ascended Christ namely, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are in place (Fatokun 2017:479). Although the five ascension gifts of Christ above are important, the prophetic office/gift stands out because it is designated specifically as the foundation of the church in close association with the gift of the apostle (Eph. 2:20). It is thus no coincidence that the prophetic ministry is the focus of the present work.

Indeed, the most significant factor which distinguished the Apostolic Church from other denominations, was her emphasis on the roles of apostles and prophets. Of the five ministry gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers—only the last three are commonly accepted by most mainline churches. Pentecostal churches accept all five, but generally use only two—pastor and evangelist—as titles. The Apostolic Church, on the other hand, encourages and recognises all the five (Oyejimi 2017:45). The ninth tenet of the Apostolic Church mentions “Church Government by Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, Teachers, Elders and Deacons” (TAC Ministers' Manual 2009:60). In practice, there are clear lines of demarcation between the various offices. Apostles and prophets plainly stand out well above the rest. Apostles exercise an administrative function, while prophets offer guidance and direction.

¹² An area in TAC is the next largest single unit than the Territory in LAWNA. It is usually headed by an Area Superintendent.

According to Fatokun (2017:479), prophetism is one of the distinguishing features of The Apostolic Church Nigeria, which is a classical Pentecostal denomination. Unlike many other Pentecostal churches which equally believe in the gift of prophecy, the gift of prophecy functions more frequently in the liturgy of TAC LAWNA. Members are always eager to hear prophecies which reveal the mind of God to the church in virtually every church service or meeting. In fact, an average apostolic church member does not feel satisfied in public worship where there is no ‘voice of the Lord’ through the prophetic ministry. As such, one can deduce that services in TAC seem to be incomplete without a prophecy.

Prophecies in TAC LAWNA are given using the biblical prophetic oracular expression, “Thus says the Lord.” Through the prophetic ministry, the church receives words of comfort, consolation, direction, instruction, guidance, revelation of hidden things/mysteries, and even rebuke and reproof in accordance with the biblical pattern.¹³

Prophetic ministry in TAC is as old as the Church. One could safely say that TAC Nigeria came to being, inter-alia, through the prophetic ministry. As indicated earlier, TAC Nigeria was founded as a result of the merger of the defunct Faith Tabernacle Congregation (FTC) with The Apostolic Church Great Britain. During the 1930 Revival, the members of the FTC were greatly persecuted by the then colonial government. Consequently, the members of the FTC sought a way out, and by divine providence, they discovered TAC Great Britain and took steps to affiliate with them. This affiliation would not have been possible if not for divine intervention through the prophetic ministry (Fatokun 2006:55).

Although the FTC had earlier written to TAC Great Britain to send missionaries to them, they later asked the missionaries not to come. This was due to a misconception that the church did not believe in divine healing. Fatokun (2006:55) reveals that before the arrival of the missionaries, the Lord had visited the church by pouring out the gifts of the Holy Spirit, with the manifestation of the prophetic ministry upon members of the then FTC. According to Fatokun (2006:65), the first to receive the gift were Brother I. G. Sakpo, (who later became a pastor and the second TAC LAWNA Chairman) and Brother Silas Ogunlaja.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 13:3-4, 12, 31.

The move by those FTC leaders to stop the missionaries from visiting Nigeria was interrupted through the prophetic ministration of Pastor I. G. Sakpo. Meanwhile, before the invitation from Nigeria, there was a prophetic message among the brethren in TAC Great Britain that an invitation would be coming from a far away country. According to Fatokun (2006:65), the Lord revealed to them that there would be an invitation from people outside the British Isles, that should not be refused. Hence, with deep conviction based on the prophetic ministration of I. G. Sakpo, the FTC leaders changed their minds and stuck to their initial decision to welcome missionaries from TAC Great Britain.

Since the merger, TAC Nigeria has continued to enjoy the leading of God through the prophetic ministry, that is, as a denomination, and in her different Territories, Areas, Districts and Assemblies. Over the years, the prophetic ministry became an important feature of the church's yearly National conventions, Territorial conventions, Area conventions, Movement conventions, Districts' combined services, and Assembly programmes. According to Oyejimi (2017:42), the prophetic ministry has been helpful in sustaining the church in different situations and at different levels of church administration.

3.3 TYPES OF PROPHETS IN TAC LAWNA

People who operate in the prophetic ministry in TAC LAWNA are classified into two—those who operate in the gift of prophecy, otherwise referred to as Prophetic Vessels/Channels, and those who operate in the office of a prophet, otherwise referred to as the Ordained Prophets. In TAC LAWNA, there is a distinction between those operating in the simple gift of prophecy and those ordained as prophets (Constitution 2011:89).

3.3.1 Prophetic Vessels/Channels

Prophetic Vessels/Channels are general members of TAC (both males and females) who manifest the gift of prophecy and operate in the prophetic ministry through the oracular formula, "Thus says the Lord" (Fatokun 2017:479). In The Apostolic Church's administration, their scope is limited to local assembly meetings (Fatokun 2017:479). Oyejimi (2017:53) confirms that a Prophetic Channel in TAC LAWNA is any person, male or female, young or old, and educated or uneducated, who has the gift of prophecy and uses it in his or her local assembly, but has not been ordained formally or received the call into the office of a prophet. In Fakunle's (2017:37) words,

“the first type of prophecy has to do with those who operate in the spirit of prophecy that graduates into the simple gift of prophecy.”

The TAC LAWNA considers that the simple gift of prophecy is for exhortation, edification and comfort (Ogundele 1984:67). In its use, there is no prediction neither does it evoke any directive element. The church believes that such a gift is open to every believer in the church as long as the individual submits to the Holy Spirit (Ogundele 1984:67). From observation by the researcher, those learning to prophesy at this level may shake, cry, and sometimes find it difficult to control themselves. They sometimes fall on the floor. However, people who shake violently, cry, and exhibit other emotional outbursts when prophesying are considered novice in TAC LAWNA. Consequently, TAC LAWNA leadership holds that those operating the gift of prophecy, that is, Prophetic Channels, need teaching, guidance, and to involve themselves in certain spiritual exercises like prayer, fasting, Bible study, fellowship, holy living plus other activities like paying tithes faithfully, and being generous in supporting the needy in order to grow in the gift (Sakpo 1988:54).

The Prophetic Channels in TAC LAWNA are those who possess the gift of prophecy and upon whom the spirit of prophecy rests. The gift of prophecy is viewed in TAC LAWNA as one of the gifts (charismata) or manifestations of the Spirit of God. It is distributed to individuals, according to the will of the Spirit. The spirit of prophecy occurs during intense worship when anyone under the influence of the Holy Spirit, receives and delivers a prophecy (Oyejimi 2017: 54). TAC LAWNA places strict limitations on the Prophetic Channels regarding their function and the use of their gifts. Their function is limited to “edification, and exhortation and consolation,” according to 1 Corinthians 14:3. In TAC LAWNA, the preceding verse means that the gift of prophecy has little to do with judgement or direction. The content of the prophecy is not future-oriented but is applicable to people’s present physical, emotional and mental situations.

3.3.2 Ordained prophets

Ordained Prophets in TAC LAWNA differ from the Prophetic Vessels/Channels and are higher in categorisation in the sense that they are full-time ministers of the church who are by calling and gifting recognised as prophets (Fatokun 2017:479). Unlike the Prophetic Vessels/Channels, ordained prophets are characteristically distinguished in the sense that in addition to the initial

pastoral ordination, they receive formal ordination from the church's apostleship into the office of the prophet, which ranks next to apostleship in TAC's ministerial ranking.

Although TAC LAWNA recognises the office of the prophet (Ogundele 1984:103), (d prophets or called prophets in TAC LAWNA are those who, besides having the gift of prophecy, have received the call into full-time ministry and have been ordained as such. According to Oyejimi (2017:53-54), a prophet in TAC LAWNA is a person who possesses the gift of prophecy with a call into full-time ministry and into the prophetic ministry. An ordained prophet is therefore first a Prophetic Channel who has been found to be consistent in his or her prophetic ministrations.

Sakpo (1988:18), who was the first officially ordained prophet of TAC Nigeria, explained that, "An ordained prophet is one who is called and sent to declare God's mind and who does so through directive prophecy and revelation." Sakpo (1988:18) adds that such a prophet must have been endowed with some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as the gift of prophecy, discerning of spirits, word of knowledge and word of wisdom as indicated in 2 Corinthians 12.

On the character and function of an ordained prophet in TAC LAWNA, Fakunle (2017:39) says, "Prophets are male ministers who exercised the prophetic ministry and are called into the office of prophets, which is one of the high offices in TAC LAWNA." He further states that:

... Prophets in TAC LAWNA are spirit filled, proclaimers and interpreters of the word of God. [They are] called to warn, exhort, comfort and edify (Acts 2:14-36; 14:30). They exercise the gift of prophecy and sometimes foretell the future (Acts 11:28). They expose sin, proclaim righteousness, warn of judgement to come and combat worldliness and lukewarmness among God's people (Luke 1:14-17).

As part of his spiritual endowment, a true prophet of God in TAC LAWNA operates the gift of prophecy, discernment of spirits, exhortation, teaching and the twin gifts of word of wisdom and word of knowledge (Fakunle 2017:40). The rationale for possession of the twin gifts of word of wisdom and word of knowledge is to shield the prophet against deception and provide guidance to his prophetic perception.

It must be stated here also that TAC LAWNA sees the office of the prophet as complementary to the office of the apostle which calls, directs and ordains ministers and other officers of the Church (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11-13). It should be noted also that whereas a Prophetic Channel (as in the first category mentioned above) may be male or female, the office of the ordained prophet is only reserved for males, as TAC LAWNA does not ordain women into full-time ministry.

The researcher however considers that the practice of ordaining only the men into prophetic and pastoral ministry has no biblical basis. Examples abound in the Scriptures of how God raised and used women to function in both prophetic and leadership roles. These include Deborah (Judges 4:4-7), who was not only a prophetess, but also a judge in Israel; Huldah (2 Kgs. 22:8-20; 2 Chron. 34:14-33), whose prophetic ministry triggered the spiritual reformation that took place in Josiah's days. Interestingly, among those who were instrumental to the establishment of The Apostolic Church in Nigeria, was a woman, Miss Sophia Odunlami. She played significant role in spreading the gospel to places where most men would dread. Her role especially in the miraculous healing that trailed her ministry cannot be pushed aside. It is important to establish that God is the one who calls and gives gifts to whomsoever he wants. Hence, I believe that restriction should not be placed on anyone whom God chooses to empower and use in the ministry based on gender.

3.4 THE CALL AND TRAINING OF PROPHETS IN TAC LAWNA

Oyejimi (2017:54) has outlined some qualities that are required of a person that would be ordained as a prophet in TAC LAWNA:

- He must be genuinely saved.
- He must have the gift of prophecy and be consistent in using the gift.
- He must be conversant with the mode of operation and principles guiding the use of prophecy in the church, and at the different levels of the church.
- He must have the call of God upon him into full-time ministry.
- He must have the call of God upon him into the prophetic ministry and
- He must be considered, approved and ordained to be a prophet by the Church leadership.

The point being made from the foregoing among other things is that an “ordained prophet” in TAC LAWNA must be specially called by God. The call by God designates a prophet as such and bestows on him the authority for his work.

Fatokun (2017:40) concurs that for a prophet to be so designated in TAC LAWNA, he must:

- (1) Be born again, that is, he must have had a personal salvation experience.
- (2) Have undergone water baptism and be partaking in Holy Communion.
- (3) Be baptized in the Holy Spirit.
- (4) Have the gift of prophecy, discernment of spirit, word of wisdom and word of knowledge.

- (5) Be using the gift of prophecy consistently in the church and in line with the prophetic values in 1 Corinthians 14:3.
- (6) He should be recognised as a Prophetic Channel in the church.

Fatokun further notes that the prophetic utterances of such a person are judged by the Apostles to ascertain that they are genuine. If his prophetic utterances originate from the Holy Spirit, they will come to fulfilment without any manipulation. Above all, the person must have a call into full-time ministry in TAC LAWNA (Fatokun 2017:40). This call must be recognised and accepted by the authority of TAC LAWNA Territory. Lastly, the Holy Spirit must confirm that such a person was truly called to the Prophetic ministry.

Similarly, Fakunle (2017:53) stresses that for one to qualify for ordination as a prophet, one must have been called into the full-time ministry of the Church. The person must have been prophesying regularly and consistently with a proven record of fulfilled prophecy. The person must also have a proven record of integrity in money matters, his relationship with the opposite sex, and management of his household affairs, *inter alia*.

From Pastor Ajibade's lecture notes (2015:14), we can infer also that:

- (1) In addition to God's call and the gift of prophecy, a prophet person needs the endorsement of the Church leadership.
- (2) The Church authority will only call a person to the prophetic ministry when his prophecies are adjudged or found to be spiritual.
- (3) Only a full-time male minister of TAC LAWNA can become a prophet.
- (4) A person would go through a certain period of training and apprenticeship before being called into the prophetic office in TAC LAWNA.

In agreement with the preceding, Fakunle (2017:41) submits that before a Channel is considered and ordained a prophet in TAC, he must have proven to be a man of sound character, even though he has the divine call and gift. However, even if a Channel has an 'honest report,' he must have the recommendations of his District and Area apostles before he is invited for an interview by the Church authority. Thus, it is possible to fail the interview simply on the grounds of unfaithfulness or dishonesty, even if the person has a call into the ministry.

In light of these criteria, prophets are encouraged from time to time, as part of their training, to work on their moral lives, have deep appreciation of spiritual exercises such as worship, prayer, fasting, and singing spiritual songs. Having daily Bible studies as well as being sensitive to spiritual things, and sharing experiences with more mature prophets, are part of the recommendations. Through these personal acts of consecration, messages received will conform to sound biblical doctrines.

It must be emphasised that a person does not become a prophet in TAC LAWNA merely because the person utters prophecy. On the contrary, and as established from the foregoing, a candidate who would be called into the office of the prophet must have received the call into full-time ministry. According to Adeleye (2009:7), a full-time minister, who is already a Prophetic Channel, would have to indicate to the Church his intention and calling to become a full-time minister in TAC LAWNA. At this stage, such a person undergoes a two-year probation training under an Apostle at the area level to ascertain whether the person's call is genuine or not (Adeleye 2009:7). During the two years' probation, the candidate's character, preaching and teaching ability and prayer life are monitored closely by his Area Apostle to see if he is suitable for ministry. At the expiration of the two years, the candidate, who must have satisfied all the conditions of probation, is then asked to proceed to the church's theological seminary for a thorough ministerial and theological training in any course of the candidate's choice and as his academic qualifications may allow. It is after his theological training that he is now accepted as a full-time minister of the Church.

Adeleye (2009:7) notes that the training at the seminary could last for two to four years depending on whether the candidate came in to do a diploma or a degree program. After completing the theological training, the Church leadership then sends the candidate to serve under an Area Apostle for a minimum of another two years. At this stage, the candidate is designated an assistant pastor. During the period of his probationary service as an assistant pastor, he will be appraised on whether the church he is pastoring is experiencing growth spiritually (knowledge of the Scriptures, prayer life, testimony of sound moral life), numerically, and financially. Adeleye (2009:7) adds that further assessment of the candidate includes the number of souls saved under his ministry, the number of people who were baptised in water or who received the Holy Spirit baptism with the evidence of speaking in tongues, the number of churches that were planted and the quality of the prayer life of his congregation.

The researcher however, observed that although the period of this ‘second probation’ is supposed to last for two years, some people have been serving as assistant pastors for more than five years or even ten years and have not yet been ordained as pastors. In most cases, this could be due to their incompetence or neglect on the part of their Area Apostles who fail to recommend such individuals for pastoral ordination. On the other hand, some candidates did not spend up to a year after they graduated from the seminary before they underwent pastoral ordination because of the outstanding ministry of such candidates.

In any case, it is expected that after a candidate has proven himself worthy during the period of the two years of seminary training, he would then be called into the pastorate (Ogundele 1984:67). The transition into the prophetic office would therefore only take place after two or three other years of pastoring. Oyejimi (2017:43) notes that only after the ordination into the pastoral office, is a person ordained into the office of a prophet. In other words, if a person has a proven prophetic ability, he could then be called and ordained into the office of a prophet after a few more years of his call into pastorate. In TAC LAWNA, one has to pass through so many stages to become a prophet.

In addition to the preceding procedure for ordaining a prophet in TAC LAWNA, one would have to be recommended for ordination into the office of a prophet by his District Apostle who would then present the candidate to the Area council for an interview before a panel headed by the Area Superintendent. A candidate who is successful at the Area level is then presented to the LAWNA Executive Council for further reassessment (Oyejimi 2017:44). At this level, if nothing adverse is noted about the candidate, he is then ordained into the office of a prophet.

There are different categories of ordained prophets in TAC LAWNA, which are designated based on the scope and jurisdiction of the prophet’s ordination at the time of ordination. These categories are the District Prophet (the Prophet-in-charge of a District), Area Prophet (the Prophet-in-charge of an Area), and Council Prophets, whose sphere of operation covers the Territory (Fatokun 2017:479).

3.5 OFFICE OF THE PROPHET AND ITS FUNCTIONS IN TAC LAWNA

Next in importance to the office of the apostle in TAC LAWNA’s divine administration is the office of the prophet (Fatokun 2006:120). For smooth administration, the office of the prophet

organisationally goes alongside that of an apostle in TAC LAWNA, just as in the early church (Eph. 2:20; 3:5, 6). The unity between Paul and Silas in their missionary journeys serves as a classical model for TAC LAWNA's divine administration.

As further noted by Fakunle (2017:40), the ministry of the prophet functions together with the ministry of the apostle in church leadership (cf. Acts 15:27; Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11). According to the Church doctrine, therefore, the prophet is the right-hand man of the apostle at the District, Area or National levels. The prophet is God's spokesperson to the community of saints revealing to them from time to time the counsel of Christ, the head of the church. Hence, while the apostle directs the affairs of the church, the prophet, as his right-hand man, guides him in the task of divine administration.

The institution of the office of the prophet in TAC LAWNA dates back to 1933 when Pastor I. G. Sakpo was called and ordained into the office of prophet as the first Nigerian to occupy that office. Sakpo was ordained by the European missionaries of TAC Great Britain to compliment the ordained apostles in administrative matters (Adegboyega 1978:72). The administrative status of the office of the prophet is upheld as one of the distinctive traits of TAC LAWNA. Adegboyega stresses this point thus:

... This is where we are different to other denominational churches, whether they are Pentecostal or orthodox. We believe in the written word of God, which is the Bible and also in spoken word of the Lord, which is the voice of the Lord through prophetic ministry for divine guidance and other directives in the church government. Other denominational Christian bodies only believe partly in the written word of God... not in prophetic ministry by ordained prophet as revealed in the Bible itself... some Pentecostal bodies believe in prophecy but not in prophetic office.

Although the apostle is said to possess the power of divine revelation, as earlier stated, the prophet is distinct by virtue of his office in that he relays divine messages in the form of prophecy using the biblical oracular expression, "Thus says the Lord."

In the light of the above, an ordained prophet, as the official seer of a group of assemblies in a particular locality, is entrusted with administrative functions of communicating doctrinal truths through direct divine revelation. In doing this, the prophet helps to maintain the purity of the doctrines by confirming members and reminding them of church doctrines through prophetic ministry. The prophet also directs and guides the church in both spiritual and secular matters by prophetic communication of the mind of Christ. In fact, prophetic ministry in TAC LAWNA is not

limited to only church matters, but it also cuts across the socio-political and economic spheres of the country and the world at large (Oyejimi 2017:53).

Besides sharing divine revelation on administrative matters of the church, one of the primary functions of the “office of the prophet” in TAC LAWNA is to perfect the saints or make them Christ-like through a series of prophetic messages (Fatokun 2017:482). The prophet is called to warn, exhort, comfort, teach and counsel the people of God in order to produce godly character in the lives of the people of God. The prophets insist that the worship of God must be backed by a sound moral and ethical lifestyle that includes treating others fairly and justly.

Although TAC LAWNA accords great importance to the “office of the prophet” as concomitant to that of the apostle in divine administration, not all who prophesy are recognised as “prophets.” The church makes a clear distinction between the “gift of prophecy” and the “office of a prophet.” According to Sakpo (1988:40), the “gift of prophecy” is one of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:3, which is open to any member of the church, while the office of the prophet is regarded as one of the ascension gifts to the church in Ephesians 4:11.

For the above reason, and as indicated earlier, TAC LAWNA distinguishes between individual members with the gift of prophecy and pastors with the additional ordination into the office of prophet. Though both are believed to exhibit the same gift of prophecy, the former is only regarded as a Prophetic Channel, while the latter is a prophet by office, by virtue of ordination. The ordained prophet is a duly recognised church administrator while the Prophetic Channel is not (Sakpo 1988:43). In fact, in TAC’s administration, both have different spheres of operation; the former can only prophesy at the Assembly level under the direct supervision of his/her Assembly pastor, while the latter, as a recognised administrative office holder, divinely guides the Church through prophecy at the District, Area, Field/Territorial or National levels under the supervision of the apostles.

Over the years, TAC has produced great prophets whose prophetic ministries have contributed significantly to the expansion of the church and the spiritual growth of the members. The first ordained indigenous prophet of the church was Pastor I. G. Sakpo. He received the gift of prophecy during the Holy Spirit tarrying meeting conducted in 1931 by Pastor D.O. Odubanjo, shortly before the arrival of TAC delegates from the United Kingdom. After him was Pastor E.O. Onabanjo, one of the five men who started the prayer group in 1918 that later metamorphosed into Precious Stone

Society. At the inauguration of the church as an autonomous entity in 1981, the pioneering Council Prophets were P. B. Isaac, A. E. E. Udo, A. M. O. Osinowo and J. E. Adebayo (TACN 1981:9). Great prophetic figures in the Church, particularly in TAC LAWNA Territory, include Pastors J. E. Adebayo (who emerged as the first LAWNA Territorial Prophet), P. U. Ikpen (retired leading LAWNA Council Prophet), J. A. Olabiyi (present leading LAWNA Council Prophet), and J. O. Olayemi (LAWNA Council Prophet). On the national level, the most prominent is Pastor N. O. Awojide (the present National Council Prophet). There are equally other great and well-respected prophets in the other Territories and Fields of TAC Nigeria as well as in different administrative Areas of the Church, whose names cannot be forgotten in the history of the Church owing to their outstanding prophetic ministry.

The researcher observes that, although prophets play a significant role in the church polity and in building the faith of the believers, their voices are not as loud as they should be in the ears of the leaders or in addressing the social injustices being perpetrated in the country. One would expect that the church, through her prophets, would arise and speak out in God's name to confront the injustices being done by the powerful against the powerless.

3.6 RECEPTION OF THE PROPHETIC WORD IN TAC LAWNA

Oyejimi (2017:18) reveals that prophets in TAC LAWNA receive their messages in several ways, in line with Hebrew 1:1. The prophetic message is received as an irresistible word from God causing the prophet or Prophetic Channel to become restless until the word has been delivered. The prophets or Prophetic Channels in TAC LAWNA therefore have different ways of receiving messages from the Lord. The way God communicates his message may be different from one prophet to the other.

It is believed that one of the ways the word of prophecy comes to the prophet is through an inner voice. Oyejimi (2017:18) describes this mode as the Holy Spirit speaking the mind of God into the mind of the prophet, as in the case of Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:1-2; 3:24). Fakunle (2017:23) agrees that, "the word of prophecy comes to the prophets from God speaking to the spirit or heart of the prophet as indicated in 1 Kings 19:9-18 as 'the still small voice'." In other words, God would implant the kernel of truth into the heart or spirit of the prophet, while the prophet decides how he would communicate it.

Another means by which some of prophets receive words of prophecy is through an audible voice. Oyejimi (2017:19) notes that even though this could be an exceptional way, some prophets confirm that they receive their messages from God by means of an audible voice, as illustrated in Ezekiel 1:28, which says, “...I heard the voice of one speaking.”

Again, the word of prophecy may come to others through vision or what Sakpo (1988:43) describes as “mental pictures.” Such a vision could be an open vision, that is, a vision that the prophet receives when his physical eyes are wide open. In this case, the prophet sees into the realm of the spirit. It could also be a closed vision; in other words, a vision is received when the prophet’s physical eyes were closed. The third kind of vision is a trance. In this case, the physical senses of the prophet are suspended while he sees into the realm of the spirit. In this state, the prophets sometimes receive messages and prescribe solutions to people’s problems.

Fatokun (2017:478) also indicates that some prophets in TAC LAWNA receive their messages by reading it from a board, a wall or a book. The prophet is shown some inscriptions which could be either a lengthy message or a short message. The mode of delivery therefore is at the prophet’s discretion.

Oyejimi (2017:19), however, warns that regardless of how one receives his message, the prophet has to make sure that such a message is truly from God, and that it is in accordance with the word of God. According to him, it is important for the prophet to be vigilant, prayerful and well-versed in his knowledge of the Bible to guide against any form of manipulation.

From the foregoing evaluation of the functionality of the prophetic ministry in TAC LAWNA, it is apparent that though the Church focuses on prophecy, the prophetic ministry, especially in relation to the injustices done in the country, does not have much impact “outside the Church” or on the various leaders in the public arena. Could it be that the kind of theology/hermeneutic propagated by the Church in its prophetic ministry does not sufficiently reflect the tradition of the eighth-century BCE prophets like Amos? If it does, why should it then be uttered only within the confines of the church? The body of believers in my view needs to hear such prophetic utterances; however, most of the fitting members of the prospective audience would be the powerful in the society. It is to this concern that we shall turn in the subsequent chapter. However, at this point, it is imperative to examine some of the symptoms of social injustice perpetuated in Nigeria, which call for the intervention of a prophetic voice.

3.7 SOCIAL INJUSTICE IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

A major evil that has plagued Nigeria is the issue of social injustice. Umeanolue (2018:183) states that, like the message delivered to the people of northern Israel, social injustice has been the order of the day in the contemporary Nigerian society. As incurably religious and economically buoyant as the Nigeria society is, social injustice remains her major deficiency. Glaring among the features of social injustice issues in Nigeria are the oppression of the poor and the marginalised, corruption and misplacement of justice in the courts, unemployment, unequal opportunities, and inequitable distribution of the vast wealth of the country, to mention a few.

Babalola (2014:87) defines social injustice as “the unfair distribution of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities, oppression of any form and anything that prevents people from exercising self-determination and realizing their full potential.” Thus, social injustice occurs when people are being treated unfairly, and when resources and facilities that should have been accessible by every member of the society are being monopolised by only a small percentage of the society. Social injustice is perpetuated when a few members of the society feel that they deserve a better life than the other members of the society, and therefore amass for themselves the resources meant for common good. Stated more broadly, social injustice is characterised by the prevalence of inequality among citizens (as against equality among citizens), domination and exploitation of the poor, the vulnerable and those on the margin (as against liberty), selfishness and individualism (as against individuality of citizen), disregard for community (as against collective orientation), competition (as against the spirit of cooperation), and unjust societies (as against just societies) (Gil 1998:48; see Gabriel 2014:137).

The above characteristics of social injustice are widespread in the Nigerian society. In an attempt to determine the prevalence of social injustice in Nigeria, Babalola (2014:91) offers some examples of what can be called acts of social injustice in Nigeria. These include “Police brutality, genocide, child soldiers, child suicide bombers, poverty, discrimination, bullying, child labour, corruption, prejudice, oppression, racism, cartelism, ageism, sexism, to mention few among others.” Unfortunately, these acts have impeded the development of the country, and resulted in insecurity as well as increase in crime and violence.

Abogunrin agrees that we live in an age where security and prestige have dwindled. The loss of the sense of security today is due to injustice, violence, the sinister aspects of political dealings, religious crises, economic problems, unemployment, unequal opportunities, oppression, and marital crises (Abogunrin 1994:5). It is therefore safe to deduce that the main reason for the prevalence of crime and violence in Nigeria is the absence of social justice and socio-economic equality. It is reasonable therefore to assume that in any society where social justice and economic equality abound, peace and tranquillity are most likely to prevail.

Vogel asserts that social injustice is a factor of social and economic inequality, that individuals become estranged or alienated in society if they are not part of the productive force, because they participate in only a small portion of social growth. Consequently, the individuals may only become emotionally attached to the commodity that is being produced (Vogel 2011:70). Babalola (2014:86) also notes that, “the stress is on individualism and the pursuit of materialism which have brought corruption, strife and cynicism.” The outcome therefore will be a society where selfishness, greed and stinginess are rife.

Vogel further indicates that social injustice manifests in various ways—in the form of slavery, racism, child labour, homelessness, gender inequality and poverty, among others. The concept of social injustice arose from the belief that all individuals are not the same, that is, everyone is not created equal and that not everyone is entitled to enjoy life freely (Vogel 2011:74). Thus, social injustice occurs where the majority of the populace is denied access to the facilities, services or systems within the society. The preceding description becomes clearer when juxtaposed with the ideological orientation of what is referred to as the ruling class in Nigeria. The ideology is that only a few are born to rule while others are born to serve (Vanguard 2016:2). Such an ideology holds strongly in the northern part of the country predominantly among the Hausa speaking tribe of Nigeria.

The issue of social injustice has debased humankind. It has made so many Nigerians to become slaves of materialism. Today, the issue of poverty has caught the world’s attention due to the stratification and injustice that exist in every society, especially in Nigeria where every form of social injustice is the order of the day. The masses experience prejudice, ill-treatment, injustice and fanaticism. The scenario of social injustice in Nigeria calls for social change. Without equity

and peace in the social, economic and political institutions of the Nigerian society, development and progress will be retarded.

Lamenting on the state of inequality that permeates the Nigerian society, Oludare (2004:3) observes that Nigeria is a society where the masses are subjected to hardship and are exploited, hence, the gap between the rich and the poor keeps widening. Umejiesi (2007:97), commenting on the vast potential of the Nigerian economy, points out that Nigeria is the sixth largest producer and exporter of crude oil and is the seventh nation with the greatest natural gas reserve. However, since independence, Nigeria has earned over 600 billion US Dollars from oil revenue, while Nigeria remains among the world's poorest countries.

Nigeria is often described as 'the giant of Africa' (Ogedegbe, 2007:188-2006). To what extent has this description translated into the economic and social transformation of her citizens? This question still requires an answer. The reality however is that the majority of Nigerians continue to live in abject poverty, barely able to afford three quality meals a day.

Okoroafo and Chinweoke (2013:106) also comment that:

The average Nigerian is a poor man. Nigeria is a nation of riches and poverty – splendid wealth in the hands of few and extreme/abject poverty at the doorsteps of many. The divergence between Nigeria's economic indicators, macroeconomic variables and the reality is a source of concern. The reality is that people die because they cannot afford three square meals a day as well as access basic public healthcare. As strange as this may sound, this goes on side-by-side with ostentatious display of wealth by the privileged few.

A recent survey by the World Bank reports that with a population of about 202 million people, Nigeria is the largest country in Africa and accounts for 47% of West Africa's population (World Bank 2019:1). It is also the biggest oil exporter in Africa, with the largest natural gas reserves on the continent (World Bank 2019:1). It is however sad to note that the vast portion of the nation's wealth is in the hands of a few wealthy individuals while a greater percentage of the population remains poor. According to the information from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the situation in Nigeria is contradictory given the large resources (human and natural) that the country is endowed with. The country has increasing rates of poverty both at the regional and national levels. High unemployment rate, high income inequality, low quality human capital, high percentage of population on welfare and high rate of marginalisation despite the high economic growth measured by GDP (NBS 2006; 2012).

Lamenting about the decadence in the Nigeria society, Abogunrin (1986:2-3) writes that:

... our major ethical problems include tribalism, armed robbery and pen-robbery, indolence and murder, cheating The prodigal display of ill-gotten wealth by emergency contractors and politicians, retired civil servants and military officers has increased the thirst of most Nigerians for the Naira. It is now common to spray in dollars or pound sterling in order to really prove that one has made it.

Similarly, Lasebikan (1986:88) states that:

...people holding the government coffers are building for themselves both winter and summer houses... bullet proof cars and private jets... The rich extort the poor... There is cheating in business, injustice in law courts, hypocrisy of all sorts, falsehood and lying... This period in Nigeria's history is just as bad as the days of Amos...

The above findings confirm the sickening state of the country which is due to the unfair distribution of the nation's wealth and the continuous hoarding and amassing of public funds. Sadly, many Nigerians are starving, several are homeless, and the educational system is in a deplorable state just as the health sector.

Agboluaje (2007:181) has well observed that Nigeria is a society characterised by notable affluence, exploitation and a profit motive while moral standards sink into disrepute. Further, Nigeria is a society plagued by the malaise of social injustice, economic disparity between the rich and the poor masses, discontentment and destitution.

However, corruption is seen as a major contributor to poverty in Nigeria. According to a report published by ActionAid Nigeria, the vast incidence of poverty in the midst of plenty has been linked severally to the endemic corruption in the country, as it involves the massive stealing of resources that would otherwise have been invested in providing infrastructure that would create wealth for the citizens (ActionAid Nigeria 2015:6).

Lere (2007:134-135) asserts that the level of corruption and injustice in Nigeria has reached an alarming rate. Indeed, corruption is not only endemic to the Nigerian society; it is pervasive. It has crippled good governance and undermined the very essence of democracy. Nigeria is regarded as one of the most corrupt countries in the world by Transparency International. Sometimes ago, the former British Prime minister, David Cameron made a sarcastic comment to the Queen of England about Nigeria which he referred to as "fantastically corrupt" (BBC 2016). Although this statement may sound derisive, it is sadly true. Incidentally, that point was noted years ago by a renowned world novelist, Achebe (1983:9-10), that Nigeria is one of the most disorderly, corrupt, insensitive,

inefficient places under the sun. Indeed, “it is one of the most expensive countries and one of those that give least value for money. It is dirty, callous, noisy, ostentatious, dishonest and vulgar. In short, it is among the most unpleasant places on earth!” (Achebe 1983:9-10).

The preceding statement might appear indicting to a nation that is regarded as the giant of Africa, it is nonetheless, largely true. No matter how abysmal and hopeless the country’s situation may seem today, it is not beyond redemption. The present work therefore seeks to highlight this call for redemption by presenting Prophet Amos as a model that would challenge prophets of The Apostolic Church LAWNA, Nigeria to address the situation in the country with a view to bringing about the desired social change.

Over the years, successive governments have made major efforts to tackle this cankerworm of corruption which has eaten deep into the fabric of the society, but they have not yet succeeded. The present government under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari has launched a major crusade to fight corruption but it seems the more he fights against corruption, the more corruption gains ground. The academia also is not left out in the fight against corruption and social injustice. In 2007, at the conference of the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies, Bible scholars from major higher institutions in the country came together to brainstorm on the possible way out of the country’s corruption problem; hence, the theme for that year’s academic conference: “Biblical Studies and Corruption in Africa.”

The causes of corruption in the country are varied—the craving for money and material acquisition (Abogunrin 2007:240), greed (Gwamna 2007:435-446), and poor leadership (Oladunjoye 2007:2-3), inter alia. People in leadership positions and those in echelons of power are accused of contributing to the perpetuation of corruption in Nigeria. Oladunjoye (2007:2-3) has rightly observed that leaders’ greed for wealth and money laundering are the reasons for the increase in corruption in Nigeria. Corruption is evident in the lives of those who hold political office, many of whom only use such positions to enrich themselves and by so doing, impoverish the people they were meant to lead.

Bemoaning the predicament of corruption which is attributed to bad leadership in Nigeria, Achebe (1983:1) opines that the trouble with Nigeria is simply the failure of leadership. Nigeria’s problem does not stem from its abundant human and natural resources, but the unwillingness or inability of

its leaders to rise to their responsibility, and lead by example, which is the hallmark of true leadership.

The findings from the research that has been done on the state of the Nigerian economy confirm that corruption and social injustice have become monsters in the Nigerian society (Lere 2007:135). Lere enumerates the following vices as proof of the corruption and social injustice which permeate the political, social, economic and religious life of Nigerians:

1. Amassing wealth through all fraudulent means thus taking undue advantage of the masses;
2. Exploiting the masses to get votes during the time of election, yet neglecting their needs;
3. Ostentatious lifestyle of the rich and their lack of sensitivity to the plight of the poor and needy;
4. Growing businesses through falsehood, cheating and the use of false weights and measure;
5. Idolatry and syncretism;
6. Bribery and corruption in both low and high places; and
7. Misplacement of justice in the courts.

The preceding analysis aligns with the practice of social injustice in ancient Israel which Amos' oracles attacked. If these social ills are still with us today and in spite of all the unsuccessful efforts by the Nigerian government to tackle them permanently, then, there is a need for the church, in this case The Apostolic Church, LAWNA, to use her prophetic voice to demand social justice in the nation.

In a multi-religious society like Nigeria, the role of the church in the fight against social injustice is clear. Oloyede (2014:107) has rightly observed that over the years, there has been so much expectation from the public that the political class would tackle the cancerous issue of corruption, inequality and injustice in African countries, but there has been little or no lasting solution. Using a biblical-theological approach, Oloyede therefore submits that the church as well as her leaders and members is charged with the responsibility of ensuring a transformative society that engenders justice and equality through her calling as "salt of the earth and light of the world" (Oloyede 2014:107).

Thus, it is important to examine the role of the prophets of TAC LAWNA in the demand for social justice in Nigeria.

3.8 CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER

In view of the prevailing social injustice and other social vices which are fast eroding the moral values of the Nigerian society, there is a need to use all available resources and machinery to address and reverse the current situation to the normal order. Consequently, the church, which has been regarded as light and beacon of hope to the society, needs to step up by lending her prophetic voice to challenge the authorities and demand for social justice in the land. Adekoya 2018:51-52 notes that, “the Christian church is called to influence the course of events of the world, to create a just society, where social justice and peace reign in every area of human life.” In other words, the church should be a catalyst in the transformation of any society; otherwise, she would have failed in her role as the light of the world.

To that end, biblical prophetic texts like the book of Amos could serve as models for the type of prophecy needed in our day. In the next chapter, the prophetic voice that spoke in Amos 5:21-24, the key text of our investigation, will be probed to determine its relevance in the present day Nigerian context.

CHAPTER 4

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN AMOS 5:21-24

4.1 AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK OF AMOS

Before engaging the text that highlights the theme of social justice in the book of Amos, it is imperative to examine some historical issues in the book critically. Issues such as the authorship of the book, the person and profession of Amos, and the historical situations that warranted the oracles of Amos, are a critical part of a biblical exegesis of Amos. Doorly (1989:5) has argued that before the oracles of the eighth century prophets reached their final form, as they appear in the Hebrew Bible, subsequent authors and editors wrote additional materials including introductions, conclusions, editorial comments, liturgical insertions, and third person narratives.

Most critical scholars attribute the majority of the oracles in Amos to the prophet Amos, while its composition has been attributed to some group of editors. Composition in this sense is described as the initial stage(s) of the creation of a prophetic book when various disparate literary and/or oral traditions are brought together to form one large literary whole (Hadjiev 2009:1). For Hadjiev (2009:1), composition is more than a collection; rather, it creates a literary piece with its own structure, thought-flow and theme. Thus, it is suggested that the prophecies of Amos must have circulated orally, probably in fragmented form, before they finally reached the present form through the work of some group of editors (Soggin 1982:244; Stuart 1987:298). Scholars with the preceding view hold that the book of Amos is the result of a long process of redaction, which began with the words of Amos and underwent stages of development (Soggin 1982:244; Schmidt 1984:196).

Thomas (2003:3) identifies the preceding approach as diachronic. It sees the book of Amos as a rolling corpus which begins with Amos' eighth century BCE career and culminates two centuries later with subsequent updates (cf. Wolff 1977:106-113). In his classical but comprehensive commentary on the book of Amos, which was translated into English as published by the Fortress Press in 1977, Wolff (1977:106) holds that the book of Amos represents an assemblage of relatively short, independent speeches that can be isolated by form critical method. He further

opines that “even a cursory examination of the Book of Amos, forces one to posit behind it a long history of literary growth” (Wolff 1977:106; Thomas 2003:3-4).

Wolff (1977:107) recognises six different strata or layers behind Amos’ composition:

By combining analysis of the oldest elements of superscription with observations on the groupings of oracles and reports, we are able to distinguish with a high degree of probability three eighth-century literary strata, all of which for the most part derive from Amos himself and his contemporary disciples. Three additional strata can be recognized as later interpretations by their distinctive language and different intentions.

Wolff classifies the first stratum as “The words of Amos of Tekoa,” and it is largely found in Amos 3-6, which may represent the original collection of Amos’ own words. Wolff designated the second as “The literary fixation of the cycles.” These are the vision reports of 7: 1-8; 8:1-2; 9:1-4. Based on the autobiographical style, those vision reports can be traced to Amos himself, while the oracles against the nation in 1:3-2:16, according to Wolff, are fixed literarily at the same time as the visions (Wolff 1977:106-113).

The third level consists of “The old school of Amos” which functioned for two or three decades after the prophet’s death. Redaction and composition of such activities include 7:10-17; 8:4-14; 9:7-10; 5:13-15; 6:2; and 7:13, which also incorporate some original Amos’ sayings. Wolff captions the fourth level as “The Bethel exposition of the Josianic age,” which included the hymn–fragments of 4:13, 5:8-9; and 9:5-6, and inserted 3:14b and 5:6. The fifth level in Wolff’s (1977:106-113) classification is “The Deuteronomistic redaction” which added the oracles of Tyre, Edom, and Judah. He argues that Amos 2:10-12 has been reworked and a few words were added from the treasury of Deuteronomistic historical knowledge. Wolff reckons that Amos 5: 25; 3:16, and 8: 11-12 were added. He also argues that the words “who was among the Shepherd” in the superscriptions of 1:1 were added along with the names of the kings (Wolff 1977:106-113). The sixth and final level according to Wolff (1977:106-113), consists of “The post exilic eschatology of salvation,” a redaction activity that added 9:11-15 and the expression “Like David” in 6:5.

Wolff’s analysis of the composition of Amos no doubt has been contested by many scholars. Thomas (2003:5) for instance, argues that such an analysis would result in a splinter of biblical books to such a degree that the portion left to the ‘original’ author is too small to provide a sound basis for investigating his personal history or place in history. Melugin (1978:375-378) disagrees with Wolff’s position on the formation of the book of Amos by pointing out the lack of attention

to the structure and meaning of the book in the final form. It however suffices to say that Wolff's position has no doubt raised more questions than answers.

Mays (1969:12), like Von Rad (1969:105) and several others, assumes that most parts of the book of Amos are based on the oracles of Amos of Tekoa who prophesied in the days of Jeroboam II. He claims that, "The larger part of the material can be attributed with confidence to Amos." However, Mays designates other portions of the book which he does not attribute to Amos into five sections. The first section is designated the "Deuteronomic additions" and it includes the three oracles of Tyre, Edom and Judah (in chapters 1 and 2), the superscription, dating 1:1, (the words "in the days of Uzziah King of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel"), and the theory of prophecy in 3:7 which reads, "surely the Lord does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets." The second section which Mays does not attribute to Amos' authorship comprises of the hymnic poetry section of 1:2, 4:13; 5:8f, and possibly 8:8, which are said to come from a cultic source in Judah. The third section is classified as the "Disciples." These different sections of Amos, according to Mays (1969:13), provide the third person narrative concerning Amos and Amaziah, the priest of Bethel. Next is the Exilic or post-exilic section, which is comprised of the Oracle of Salvation at the end of the book —9:11-15. The last division contains the Fragments, which include the divine title, "God of Hosts," scattered explanations such as the time spent in the wilderness (2:10 and 5:25), and the identifications of the deities in 5:26 (Mays 1969:12-13).

Another critical spin to the authorship and composition of the book of Amos is a redaction study of the book championed, among other critical scholars, by Coote (1981:7). Coote presents a reconstructive redactional history of the book in only three stages. He recovers three successive stages in the composition of the book of Amos written in the eighth, the seventh and the sixth century, respectively. The three stages are classified as Amos A, Amos B, and Amos C. Amos A is ascribed to the eighth-century prophet, Amos, and it consists of forty verses that condemn, in a very harsh way, the ruling elites of Israel for inflicting economic oppression on the poor (Coote 1981:8-15). Amos B on the other hand, which is an addition to Amos A, is a new edition of Amos that "re-actualised" the prophet's message for a new age (Coote 1981:46-109).

Coote (1981:46-109) designates Amos B's writer as the "Bethel editor," probably a member of Josiah's court. He however views Amos C as a writing that belonged to the exilic period, because

its contents reflect a Midrash on Amos. The Amos C stage was written in the last third of the sixth century after the final destruction of Jerusalem and the final exile of its ruling class. The C stage appears to be an updated version of Amos B. The Amos C stage consists of the three oracles against the nations, while, Tyre, Edom, and Jerusalem, were added. Coote (1981:46-109) concludes that a new ending (9: 7-15) was added including the oracle of salvation.

Despite the divergent positions on the authorship of Amos, the present work agrees with Hayes (1988:38) as well as Andersen and Freedman (1989:3) that the book of Amos in its literary form is a product of the eighth century prophet, Amos. Although these scholars do not contest the possibility of a final hand or editor, they accept that such an editor or compiler must have been a disciple or an eyewitness of Amos, who eventually articulated the “*ipsissima verbal*,” the “very words” of the real Amos of the eighth century BCE in its finished state.

Anderson and Freedman (1989:3) insist that, “in so far as we can speak about the book of Amos, we can recognise one master hand.” They claim that even if Amos did not document his oracles himself, “at least an editor unified the text who must have been very close to his teacher and whose contribution was to arrange and integrate the prophecies that Amos himself produced” (Anderson & Freedman 1989:5). Anderson and Freedman therefore conclude that, “it practically amounts to the same thing” to say that Amos himself or someone very close to him produced the book. Of course, the present research does not deny that a third-person language is used in the book, an observation which could probably suggest a third person especially in the writing of Amos 7:10-17. Such a third party, however, may have been an eyewitness or as Hayes (1988:39) suggests, “someone in the audience.” Mamahit (2009:38) however suggests that that possibility should only be applied to the Amos 7:10-17 passages, with one or two minor exceptions, and do not apply to all parts of the book.

Paul (1991:6) is right to state that, “all of the arguments for later interpolations and redactions, including a Deuteronomistic one, are shown to be based on fragile foundations and inconclusive evidence.” While we do not argue that the book of Amos contains some inserted materials or emendations, which may have accounted for a beautiful, well-structured and carefully articulated composition, these inserted materials, according to Rosenbaum (1990:6), are “perhaps written down, shortly after they were spoken, thus making most suggestions for ‘redaction’ superfluous.” Of course, we must admit that the issue of the authorship of Amos is one that will keep recurring

in scholarship as long as an individual scholar comes with his or her different lens to read the biblical text.

From the above analysis, it is clear that the book of Amos has undergone some editorial processes. It is equally possible that the book did not exist as one entity at the beginning. However, that possibility does not imply that Amos did not author the entire book, since even in contemporary times, an author cannot be denied the right of authorship though the work undergoes an editorial process. At this point, we shall turn our attention to the profession of Amos before he was called into prophetic ministry.

4.2 AMOS' OCCUPATION

The book of Amos is not elaborate enough to give us a robust description of the man behind the book. Given that the text as it is, in its canonical form, is the focus of the present study, only two texts, Amos 1:1 and 7: 10-17, offer hints about the life and occupation of the prophet Amos. Moreover, no further information is available elsewhere in the biblical text, outside of Amos, for reconstructing the historical Amos. The book of Amos did not mention how old Amos was at the beginning of his ministry or how long that ministry lasted. There is also no information about his birth, parentage and death (Soggin 1987:8). Hence, we are left with the text of Amos to gain access into the life and occupation of the man behind the book. However, probing the character of Amos is not the focus of the present research. Besides, since all we know about Amos is the scanty information which the book itself supplies, there is no need to over-stretch the matter of Amos' character other than what the book provides. Mamahit (2009:38) has rightly suggested that, "it is necessary to be always reminded that an interpreter should not go far from what is written in the text to avoid subjective speculations." Hence, a brief sketch of the profession and call of Amos would suffice here.

The superscription in Amos 1:1 states that Amos was a Judahite from Tekoa, a place located southeast of Jerusalem (Soggin 1987:9). The Judean origin of Amos could also be inferred from 7:12 where Amaziah the priest of Bethel asks the prophet to return to Judah.

The name Amos means a "burden bearer" (Youngblood 1985:50). Although the text does not supply the meaning of the name, scholars like Watts (1966:387-388) and Byargeon 1993:13) have offered some suggestions. For instance, Watts (1966:387-388) suggests that the name could be a

shortened form of “borne by God” in which case, its parallel would be Amasiah. Folarin and Olanisebe (2014:244) wonder whether he (Amos) adopted the name by coincidence through divine direction because the prophet proclaimed divine judgment on behalf of Yahweh. Amos’ name is derived from the verb root ‘*amas*,’ which means, “to carry a load” or “burden bearer” (Byargeon 1995:13). There is no doubt that Amos lived up to the meaning of his name, as his preaching career reflected the deep-seated thought of despair and his revolutionary attitude against the social order of his day, and revealed the burdened state of his heart.

The description of Amos in 1:1 identifies him as a shepherd by profession. There are divergent views among scholars regarding the Hebrew word used for shepherd here in Amos 1:7 to describe Amos’ occupation. The word “*noqed*” used here is not the usual word for “shepherd.” Amos is variously described as a “*noqed*” נִקֵּד – “shepherd,” a “*boqer*” בִּקֵּר – “cattlemen” (7; 14), בֹּלֵץ *boles* – gouger (of sycamore figs) (7:14). These terms no doubt suggest that Amos came from an agricultural background, but the exact nature of his duties is in doubt (Willoughby 1992:203-212). Pre-critical scholarships assumed that Amos was a poor manual labourer, a shepherd and goatherd who, possibly off-season, worked as a dresser of the sycamore trees that grow in the lowlands in the Jericho valley (Willoughby 1992:203-213). It is believed that the occupation of a dresser of sycamore tree involved cutting the fruit while it was still on the tree so that it would ripen at the proper time. Willoughby (1992:214) comments that it was generally assumed that the figs were eaten by the poor, including Amos, who probably also cut figs in exchange for grazing rights.

On the pre-critical, traditional understanding of the humble and simple life of Amos, Thomas (2003:8) writes that, “The classical view until about three decades ago was that Amos came from humble origins. He was a simple shepherd and a dresser of Sycamore tree.” Thomas’ view was previously expressed by Soggin (1987:9) who held that since Amos was a champion of the poor and a critic of the wealthy, he must have had a modest upbringing.

However, the foregoing assertion has been challenged in recent scholarship. According to Hasel (1991:36; see Thomas 2003:8), there is a strong view among scholars that Amos was a member of some type of upper class or at least professional middle class in Judah. The ground for the argument is the understanding of the word used in Amos 1:1 to designate Amos’ profession, נִקֵּד translated “shepherd,” which only appears once in Amos 1:1 and in 2 King 3:4. It means “shepherd,” “sheep-

raiser,” “sheep dealer,” “sheep tender,” or simply “sheep breeder” (cf. Holladay 1988:245). Hence, Amos could be seen not just as an ordinary shepherd but a shepherd of high repute.

Eissfeldt (1965:396) sees Amos as an independent sheep owner rather than a shepherd, looking after sheep belonging to others. Based on the meaning of נקד, Thomas (2003:6) concludes that Amos was probably a dealer in large quantities of livestock, or he probably owned or managed large herds of sheep and engaged in the marketing of their products. Thus, Amos must have belonged to the “haves.” Craigie’s (1983:46) investigative study of the term נקד in Ugaritic, Akkadian, and Moabite shows that נקד refers to persons who are managers of sheep or sheep owners of appreciable economic independence and of high status in society in contrast to an employed shepherd. Hence, the foregoing would mean that Amos was independent economically and a man of means.

In an older study, Keller (1972:14) also noted that נקד is a rare word that describes those who tended a special variety of dwarf-sized sheep, which are highly prized for their wool, a variety still known among the Arabs. He further points out that נקד is used to refer to Mesha King of Moab in 2 Kings 3:4, where it means “sheep breeder” or “sheep owner.” Thus, Keller (1972:14) suggests that it was probable that Amos was the owner of flocks of sheep, and thus a man of some standing in his community.

It is noteworthy that although in the superscription the text discloses that Amos was a sheep-breeder (נקד), Amos himself confirmed his profession in Amos 7:14 through another term בקר, which has a different meaning from נקד. The former is considered the denominative form of בקר (cow, ox), which is usually used as a collective name for a herd of cattle, and so literally the word means “herdsman” or “cattleman” (Mamahit 2009:42). The difference in terminology, according to Mamahit (2009:42), creates a problem which exposes a contradiction between the title, בקר, and the use of נקד in Amos 1:1. Handling the difference has not been an easy venture among scholars. However, scholars have proposed possible answers to the problem. Kapelrud (1961:7) for instance considers the possibility of a “scribal error” in the use of the word נקד, because it is possible that the scribes interchanged some Hebrew characters, as in נ (n) to ב (b) or ד (d) to ר (r) in the process of copying the manuscripts. The implication therefore is that there must have been an emendation of the text.

The preceding view, however, does not hold water, as it appears grossly speculative since there is no valid textual evidence to back up such a claim. Paul (1991:247-48), on the other hand, argues that the term נקד has a broader connotation than sheep as it applies also to cattle. Consequently, there is no contradiction between נקד and בקר. If the two terms were therefore taken together, it would imply that Amos was involved in the raising of large and small animals (Byargeon 1995:7).

On his part, Wolff (1984:306-307, as cited by Mamahit 2009:42) attempts to find other possible ways to solve the problem, and suggests that “the reading of בקר as נקד might be influenced by the Septuagint reading in Amos 1:1, δισπολος (sheep), a reading which is possibly influenced by the use of this Greek word in Amos 7:14.”

Since it is difficult to resolve the contradiction between בקר and נקד, both of which describe Amos’ profession, Mamahit (2009:42) has suggested a comprehensive translation such as ‘livestock breeder’ (cf. Stuart 1987:376) as a good rendering and a way out of the problem. Stuart’s translation seems to be more appropriate as it covers all the significant nuances of the terms, which implies that Amos was probably the owner of both large and small sheep, thus justifying the application of both בקר and נקד to the prophet.

Again, Amos’ profession before his call suggests that he was not only a ‘sheep-owner’ or a livestock breeder but also a cultivator of sycamore trees, as mentioned in Amos 7:14. According to the narrative, Amos claims that he is not only a livestock breeder but also בולם שקמים. Understanding the meaning of the designation in relation to Amos’ profession has also proven difficult for scholars. Mamahit (2009:43), for instance, points out that the word *boles* that describes Amos’ activity with regards to *siqmin* is a *hapax legomenon*, the significance of which is unclear. The participle *boles* is derived from the verb meaning ‘gather fig’ or ‘tend figs’ (‘*balas*’ BDB 118). A probable suggestion is that it indicates one who gathers sycamore leaves and/or fruits to use as fodder for his sheep and cattle (Mamahit 2009:43). Hence, it is possible that the activity closely relates to Amos’ other occupation as a herdsman. The argument has been considered the most feasible interpretation of the term (Wright 1976:363; cf. Mamahit 2009:43.)

Keller (1972:14) describes the sycamore of Palestine as a type of fig tree that flourishes in the lowlands. It is a large tree with widespread branches, which grows in clusters attached to the bark of the branches near the trunk of the tree. By nature, the sycamore fig tree is small and insipid in

task. For Keller (1972:14), the word *bole*, ‘dresser’ or ‘pincher,’ could indicate an activity of “one who nips the unripe sycamore-fig (with nail or iron) in order to promote the ripening.”

Wright (1976:363) notes that it was a common practice in ancient time to speed up the ripening process by gashing the fruit and wiping it with oil, thus increasing the ethylene production, which brings about ripening. Therefore, “it cannot ripen unless it is scrapped, but they scrape it with iron claws; the fruit thus scraped ripen in four days.” Mamahit (2009:43) thus submits that the activity of “dressing” the sycamore fig would indicate a process in which the unripe sycamore fruits are slashed, pierced or cut at the tip to let the juice run out and enhance the process of ripening. Hence, it is possible that Amos must have “bruised the fruit with the stick to provoke them to ripen and make them edible” (Moore 1995:29, as quoted by Mamahit 2009:43).

However, irrespective of the interpretation, it is clear that Amos’ occupation was related to the sycamore tree, even though the nature of the relationship between Amos and the sycamore tree is not clear. One can safely suggest that Amos would have bred cattle and flocks, but in addition, owned sycamore trees which served as fodder during the dry season. Therefore, based on recent studies, there is an indication that Amos worked with both sycamores and livestock. For instance, Steiner (2003:120-122) argues that Amos perhaps leased his fields containing sycamore trees, possibly in the Jericho valley, to feed his animals in the winter. Since the sycamore is the only tree in the region that bears fruit in the winter and though much of its fruit is unfit for humans but good for sheep, the preceding view makes sense.

4.3 AMOS’ CALL TO PROPHETIC MINISTRY

In addition to paying attention to some historical issues about the prophet Amos such as his occupation or his place of origin, the issue of his call as God’s prophet is equally significant. The major debate about the prophetic nature of Amos’ call centres on the text and the report of Amos’ conflict with the high priest Amaziah in Amos 7:10-17. Andersen and Freedman (1989:775) have indicated that Amos 7:14-15, though brief, is Amos’ apologia and a succinct account of what can be identified as Amos’ call (v. 15). The point of dispute among scholars, however, is how to translate Amos’ response to Amaziah’s challenge in Amos 7:14. It reads:

לֹא־נָבִיא אָנֹכִי וְלֹא בֶן־נָבִיא אָנֹכִי

I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet

The question therefore is how should the preceding text be translated? The Hebrew rendition of the above text does not have any verb. It is regarded as a non-verbal clause. Grammatical analysis, as Mamahit (2009:46) has rightly observed, shows that the arrangement of the above statement is without a copula that connects the subject and the predicate. Moreover, since there are no tenses in Hebrew, “one must decide on the basis of the context whether the temporal reference intended is present or past” (Ward 1982:54). According to Hasel (1991:42), translations differ, reflecting the translators’ understanding of the ‘tense’ and/or the complexity of the issues involved. However, any translation we choose will create a different perspective of Amos’ profession as a prophet.

For Mays (1969:137), the interpretation of Amos 7:14 is the most debated issue in the book. The response of Amos to Amaziah presents two possible questions. In responding to Amaziah’s statement, is Amos denying that he is a prophet (נָבִיא), or does he say that he was not a prophet until Yahweh called him in verse 15? How should Amos’ response be translated—in the present tense or in the past tense? Mays (1969:137) observes that the problem with the above verses lies in the ambiguity of Hebrew syntax. In other words, the sentences are nominal sentences, which could be translated in either tense.

Hasel (1991:42-47) has highlighted five suggestions that have been made in various studies about the right translation of the text. The first suggestion is the past tense translation, which is used by JB, NAB, NIV and NKJV, and which reads, “*I was no prophet and neither was I the son of a prophet.*” The implication of the translation would be that Amos was not a prophet to begin with, but because of his call to prophetic activity he became a prophet, a position which harmonises with verse 15 (see Hayes 1988:235). The point being made here is that Amos was not a prophet at the time when Yahweh gave him the commission to prophesy to Israel. In Niehaus’ (1992:462-63) view, the verbless clause is best translated as a past tense (with the LXX *ἦμην*, “I was”) for two reasons: (1) because to translate it as present contradicts the fact that Amos is a prophet (see 3:3, 7-8), and (2) because it fits well with the context which recalls what Amos was before he became a prophet. The implication of what Niehaus proposes is that Amos was originally not a נָבִיא (prophet) but became one through an irresistible call of Yahweh which came to him (Amos 7:15).

Further, Hasel (1991:43)’s view represents the second proposition of the translation of the text, which is the present tense translation of the text as used in RSV, NRSV, NEB, JPSV, and NASB, thus, “*I am no prophet and neither am I the son of a prophet.*” In other words, Amos never claimed

to be a נָבִיא ('prophet') by vocation (Wolff 1984:312-312; Hays 1988:235; Smith 1989:239-240). In addition, the proponents of this second view hold that Amos never claimed to be a prophet in the sense that he was not a *hozeh* as Amaziah called him in 7:12, at least in the present condition. The foregoing, therefore, raises the issue of what נָבִיא means.

Those who support the present tense translation have taken נָבִיא as a reference to a professional/cultic prophet or seer (cf. Kapelrud 1961:11; Smith 1989:239; Hasel 1991:43). On the other hand, the expression, "son of a prophet," correspondingly is understood to mean a member of a prophetic guild or school. Kapelrud (1961:11) therefore argues that a cult prophet had a recognised position or role in the worship practice of the community. Bic (1969:20, as quoted by Hasel 1991:43) concludes that Amos was an *Opferbeschauer*, an "inspector of sacrifices." Reventlow (1962:14-24), on the other hand, had earlier asserted, that there was an "office of a prophet, which was not cultic-in nature." The 'office' was fixed, and Amos stepped, as it were, into the function of this fixed office to gain access to the rulers and the people. The problem with Reventlow's view is that it is quite speculative, as there was no such 'office' in ancient Israel.

Going by the present tense interpretation of Amos' objection to Amaziah's statement, Simundson (2005:289) asserts that Amos was protesting the assumption by Amaziah that he was a professional prophet, one who earned his living by providing such services, either for an individual or for the king. He insisted that Amos was denying that he was "a son of a prophet," a phrase used to designate certain professional guilds of prophets who learned their skills and then sold them to kings and others (cf. the four hundred prophets in 1 Kgs. 22:6; see Paul 1991:245-247).

Although the issue is yet to be resolved, Hasel (1991:43) presents the third possible interpretation of our text, that is, viewing the nominal sentences by taking the Hebrew negative particle *lo* ('not') as an interrogative particle, that is, the equivalent of *ha lo*. The implication of the preceding suggestion is that Amos would affirm the prophetic vocation by means of an "exclamatory negation" (see Driver 1973:107-114). Such affirmation by an exclamatory negation would read, 'Am I not a prophet and am I not a prophet's son?'

The preceding rhetorical question requires a positive answer (Hasel 1991:44). However, translating any sentence as a rhetorical question without any clear contextual guidelines, according to Paul (1991:244) is extremely hazardous. If, such attempts were possible, it would mean that

Amos is admitting that he is also a son of a prophet, “a member of a prophetic guide,” which is untenable (Paul 1991:244).

The fourth interpretation of Amos’ defence by other critics, as presented by Hasel (1991:44), is to take the first particle “*lo*” as an emphatic negative. Proponents of this interpretation include Cohen (1961:176), Hoffmann (1977:209-212), and Stuart (1987:369-370). The foregoing variant translation, which takes the first particle *lo* as an emphatic negative, renders the verse as, “No! I am a prophet, but not a son of a prophet.” Referring to Amaziah’s charge that Amos was a *hōzeh* (a *hōzeh*), Cohen (1961:176, cited by Paul 1991:245), suggests that the first *lo* be interpreted as an emphatic negative, which will thus present the meaning as, “No! [I am not a *hōzeh*] “I am indeed a prophet, but not a son of a prophet.” In the same vein, Zevit (1979:505-9) asserts that Amos was trying to establish that he was not a prophet enjoying royal patronage (i.e. a *hōzeh*, *hōzeh*) but “an independent prophet – my own man; nor am I the disciple of a prophet, working under his aegis and doing his bidding.”

The preceding suggestion indicates that Amos would be admitting that he is indeed a prophet, though not in the sense of a *hōzeh* or a professional one. It would mean therefore that Amos was objecting to the title “seer” that Amaziah applied to him. He is not a “seer” (*hōzeh*), which would be more like a “disciple of a prophet;” rather, he is a “prophet” or ‘*nabi*’ (Finley 1990:294). While it is possible to propose a grammatical reconstruction of the text as demonstrated in the foregoing, several factors weigh against the view. Finley (1990:294), for instance, observes three objections. Firstly, there is no indication from the text that Amos considers the office of a “prophet” (*nabi*) on a higher level than that of a “seer” (*hōzeh*) or the “disciple of a prophet.” Secondly, the parallel structure of the three sentences of verse 14 would be broken up if the first “*not*” is understood differently from the second. Thirdly, the proposed structure has Amos objecting to the title by which Amaziah called him rather than to the command to cease his prophetic work (Finley 1990:294).

Indeed, we can continue to debate the verb-less or nominal sentences with different variations and reconstructions, yet some objections will be raised to whatever position one holds. From the foregoing, it is apparent that the nominal sentences that captured Amos’ response to Amaziah’s challenge could be interpreted in either the past or present tense. It is clear however that whatever position is taken will remain speculative. In order to avoid such speculative conclusions, Mamahit

(2009:48-49), has rightly suggested that, “the interpreter should focus attention on the central point of the story, the conflict of authority, so that the absence of copula to express the time value of the nominal sentences of v.14 would not be a big problem.” For Gowan (1996:410, in Mamahit 2009:45), the issue at the heart of the confrontation remains the same no matter how verses 14-15 are read—Amaziah claimed authority over where Amos should speak. Amos refused to acknowledge such authority, for he was acting neither as a member of any prophetic group nor in his own authority.

In line with Mamahit (2009:49), therefore, it is possible to translate the nominal clauses in 7:14 in several different ways provided that attention is paid to the meaning of Amos’ reply, that is, to establish a sharp contrast, first, between a prophet by virtue of the office (נביא) and one called by Yahweh, second, between a “prophet’s disciple” (בן־נביא) trained by a prophet and one sent by Yahweh, and lastly, between a salaried cult official and his own independent activity sanctioned by Yahweh alone (Wolff 1984:313). Hence, Amos’ going to Bethel to declare the message of Yahweh was not of his own volition or as a representative of one of the prophetical guilds, but as a layperson under divine order to perform the function of a prophet.

4.4 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF AMOS

This section which probes the historical context of the book of Amos, will focus in particular on the socio-economic and the socio-religious contexts of the book.

4.4.1 Introduction

The historical context that informed Amos’ message is so profound that it demands investigation in order to appreciate the intensity and urgency of Amos’ message that made him so vocal about the issues of his time.

Although there has been much debate about the date and time of Amos’ message, the information in the superscription (Amos 1:1) provides a hint as to the possible date and time. The superscription indicates that Amos’ vision concerning Israel took place two years before the earthquake when King Uzziah (c. 783–742 BCE) of Judah (the southern kingdom) and King Jeroboam II (c. 786–746 BCE) of Israel (the northern kingdom) reigned. Some archaeologists have endorsed the preceding date. King (1988:22) and Scheepers and Scheffler (2000:69), for instance, note that the

earthquake mentioned in Amos 1:1 was attested to by Yigael Ya'din¹⁴ who unearthed tilted walls in stratum VI during his excavation of Hazor. The result of the excavation confirms the earthquake, which corresponds to the first half of the eighth century BCE. Besides, the earthquake, which is also mentioned in Zechariah 14:5, must have been a strong one for it to remain in the memory of the people of that time. Going by the chart that King (1988:8) documented in his book, one can safely conclude that King Uzziah reigned between 783-742 BCE and Jeroboam (II) between 786-746 BCE. Hence, it is plausible that Amos lived more or less at that time as well.

Furthermore, Smith (1989:1) has rightly observed that the prosperity of Israel, its sense of security (6:1-6), and its military victories (6:13) also point to a period in the reign of Jeroboam II when the monarchy was well established. Paul (1991:1) further points out that,

Although the exact duration of Amos' prophetic ministry cannot be dated, he must have completed his mission prior to 745BCE. The reason for the preceding assumption was due to the fact that, Amos' oracle made no allusions to the dramatic reversal in domestic political affairs after the death of Jeroboam II.

In addition, there was no reference whatsoever to the westward territorial expansion of Assyria under the reign of Tiglathpileser III, which occurred during this period. Again, no mention of Assyria is found in Amos' prophecies, while the nation that is mentioned several times in the book (e.g. 3:11; 6:14) as God's agent for punishing Israel remains anonymous (Paul 1991:1). Any information that may be extracted from the oracle against foreign nations (1:3-2:3), would point to the event that took place during the initial stages of Jeroboam II's reign or, more likely, to historical events prior to the time of the prophet—but by all means, pre-Assyrian (Paul 1991:1).

The reign of the duo of Jeroboam II in Israel and Uzziah in Judah witnessed a time of political and economic prosperity as well as independence for Israel. The period in history, that is, the middle of the eighth century BCE is described as the Golden Age of Israel's history (Paul 1991:1; Smith et al. 1989:1). During this period, Israel enjoyed, as it were, political stability and influence. Historically, there were also some political changes within the broader ancient Near East. For instance, Egypt was fragmented by Libyan and Sudanese kings and was no longer a strong influence in Palestine (Smith 1989:1).

¹⁴ Y. Yadin et al., *Hazor II: An Account of the Second Season of Excavation, 1956* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1960) 24:36-37.

However, Syrian and Assyrian involvement with Israel was more complicated because well before the time of Amos, Jehu had paid tribute to the Assyrians (ca. 841 BCE) (Smith 1989:1). Just after Jehu made the payment, the Assyrians became distracted by their northern neighbours in Urartu, and this subsequently opened the door for the Syrians to gain power and attack Israel. According to the record in 2 Kings 10:32; 12:17-18; 13:7, Israel was being treated mercilessly by the Syrian kings, Hazael and Benhadad. However, around 802 BCE, there was a turn in events when Adad-nirari III of Assyria subjugated Syria (Byargeon 1995:1). As Smith (1989:1) has pointed out, however, the atrocity committed against Israel by Syria (Aram) was noted by Amos who also predicted a further defeat of the Syrian forces (1:3-5). Pitard (1994:222) reported the eventual domination of the Syrians (Arameans) by Israel during the first half of the eighth century BCE (2 Kgs. 14:28).

Meanwhile, after the death of Adad-nirari III, the Assyrians themselves suffered internally from a series of extremely ineffectual and weak kings (Shelmaneser IV, 782-773; Asshur-dan III, 772-755 BCE; and Asshur-nirari V, 754-745 BCE). They were also threatened externally on their northern border due to the policies of territorial expansion of Urartu (present day Armenia), especially under the reign of Sardur III (810-743 BCE) (Paul 1991:2).

With the weakening of Assyria and the powerlessness of Syria, Jeroboam II of Israel and Uzziah of Judah became strong kings. Israel, which enjoyed peaceful relations with Judah during this era under the prosperous and benign reign of Uzziah, was able to re-assert itself and witnessed an unparalleled resurgence in all areas of life. Under Jeroboam II, territories taken from Israel were reconquered and repossessed (2 Kgs. 13:25), and eventually, Jeroboam II extended the border and influence of Israel to the Transjordan from Hamath in the north, and to the brook of the Arabah in the south (cf. Amos 6:14; Bright 1981:256).

The foregoing situation made Israel and Judah to become powerful nations, politically. Since there was no longer any external threat from Assyria or Syria, Israel and Judah began to experience dominance and political stability, which of course resulted in a buoyant economy. Thomas (2003:180) adds that the extensive reign of Jeroboam II (786-746 BCE) turned Israel into such a powerful nation, and that the vigorous territorial expansion program of Jeroboam II brought unprecedented material wealth to Israel (Thomas 2003:180). Jeroboam II had captured almost all the trade routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia, routes which connected the Mediterranean Sea

ports and passed through Israel and Judah. Thus, Israel became “the largest and most influential country along the eastern Mediterranean coast, and the name of Jeroboam II certainly was widely known” (Wood 1979:276, in Mamahit 2009:52). It must be added that while expanding and flourishing politically and socio-economically under Jeroboam II, Judah was equally enjoying similar material prosperity, and political stability. Judah was brought to the zenith of its power through expansion and military might under Uzziah, who has been described as an excellent administrator (Mamahit 2009:53). Although Judah remained a vassal to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, she (Judah) developed agriculture by establishing military-agricultural settlements in the Negev, which in turn protected its trade routes (King 1988:31).

The relationship between the two separate kingdoms—Israel and Judah under the two kings Jeroboam II in the north and Uzziah in the south—has been described as cordial and peaceful (Andersen & Freedman 1989:21; Finley 1990:109; Thomas 2003:180-81). However, one wonders whether the alliance between these kingdoms was a formal one or a strategic move by the two kings “to restore the classic boundaries of the united kingdom of David and Solomon” (cf. Anderson & Freedman 1989:21). Nonetheless, it is noted that the expansion of both territories was probably much larger than at any time before these kingdoms were separated. What can also not be denied, according to Finley (1990:109), is the healthy relationship that existed between the two kingdoms. Finley states that, “the book of Amos implies a time of peace and cooperation between the two nations, symbolised most vividly by Amos himself, who as a prophet from Judah preached in Samaria and Bethel” (1990:105). Amos himself spoke of free travel between the two kingdoms (5:5) and often linked them together in his pronouncements of judgment (1:2; 2:4-8; 3:1-2; 6:1). Moreover, Amos (9:11-12) foresaw and predicted the ultimate hope of restoration of the Davidic kingdom that would bring about the reunion of the divided people (Finley 1990:109).

One can therefore agree with several scholars that the reign of Jeroboam II (about 786-746) brought Israel to the peak of her political and economic prosperity, which made her a nation to be reckoned with.

4.4.2 Socio-economic situation

A detailed analysis of the socio-economic conditions that warranted Amos’ oracles is found in Thomas’ (2003:172) book, *Jeroboam II the King and Amos the Prophet*. The political stability and economic prosperity that manifested during the reign of Jeroboam II and Uzziah brought some

changes in the land, changes that eventually redefined the socio-economic landscape of the society. However, only a smaller percentage of the people experienced the dividends of such wealth or abundance. The much talked about prosperity of the land was confined to the top echelons of the society, while the ordinary people reaped nothing but exploitation. The scenario “created two nations in one—one for the very rich, and another for the very poor” (Vengeyi 2011:223-237). Thomas (2003:172) refers to this scenario as the “emergence of distinct economic zones.” What emerged was the socio-economic class stratification of a country consisting of a majority poor peasant farmers, who had barely survived the long years of Aramean oppression versus a few wealthy and privileged upper class, not more than two percent of the population, which lived in stark contrast to the ordinary citizens (see Blenkinsopp 1996:86).

For Thomas (2003:172), the emergence of the two economic zones, namely, the village economic zone and the urban economic zone, polarised the nation into two extremes of the haves and the have-nots. The village economic zone consisted of the peasant poor farmers who were mostly subsistence cultivators, providing for their own needs, not excluding of course, the production for rent and taxes. The urban economic zone on the other hand consisted of the cream of society, the upper echelon which thrived at the expense of the production of the farmers which entered the city as rent and taxes, probably in the form of agricultural produce (Thomas 2003:172-173).

As the nation began to experience stupendous wealth, on the one hand, so also did she begin to experience extreme poverty, on the other hand. While the urban economic zone lived a luxurious lifestyle to the extent of its dwellers owning winter and summer houses, the poor families of the village economic zone crammed themselves in single rooms together with their belongings, visitors and their animals at night and during bad weather (Thomas 2003:172-173; Vengeyi 2011:223-237). The rich flourished not necessarily from the sweat of their own labour but from the product of the labour of the rural peasant families. In Thomas’ words, “The urban zone was never to any degree economically independent of its rural environment.” It was indeed a case of, “*Monkey dey work, baboon dey chop,*” in local Nigerian Pidgin English parlance (Thomas 2003:172-173).

Another remarkable change that characterised this period in history was the change in the land tenure system. Prior to when the monarchy was introduced in Israel, families owned their own piece of land, which was of course, considered inalienable, as it was supposed to have been given

to them by Yahweh, who Himself is the supreme owner of the land. In fact, the land was their patrimonial domain which should not be sold (for instance, the case of Nabot's vineyard in 1 Kgs. 21). However, with the introduction of the monarchical system of government in Israel, land confiscation became the order of the day. In most cases, the poor peasants had their lands taken away from them after they had accumulated debt from the wealthy class—the ruling elites (Mosala 1989:101-153; Gottwald 1993:43-57). The unfortunate practice seemed to be the beginning of the corruption of Israel's traditions and values (Vengeyi 2011:223-237). It is against this background that Prophet Amos and indeed eighth century prophets in Israel protested against the ruling elites (cf. Amos 2:8b; 5:11a).

One can therefore understand the protest from prophets (Amos 2:6-8; 5:8-12; Isa. 5:8-10; Mic. 2:1-2; Hos. 4:2; 5:10; 12:7-8) who reported that during the monarchical period, small-scale farmers in Israel and Judah were particularly vulnerable to the wealthy, private and state sector landowners who made them debt-slaves and eventually confiscated their land (Coomber 2011:212-237). Hence, it has been suggested that Amos' oracles in 2:8b and 5:11a referred to debt and rent taken from tenants who resided on the officials' prebendal domain (Vengeyi 2011:223-237; cf. Mays 1968:143; Wolff 1977:230; Coote 1981:31-32; Lang 1982:50-59; Chirichigno 1993:125).

For Prophet Amos, the displacement of the peasantry from their land was unacceptable as it violated the provisions of Yahweh's covenant with Israel. In short, the dispossession of the peasant population was not merely the result of natural causes but was also actively engineered by the ruling class, a situation described as, "an outcome of the emergence of an inherently violent economic system" (Thomas 2003:181).

From the prophecy of Amos, one could surmise that one of the issues of social injustice that influenced the prophet's oracles was the economic problem emanating from the ownership of land—the benefits and the rights that went with it in the society. Clearly, land was being accumulated in estates and used to measure status and to generate surplus wealth. The people who lost their lands were eventually deprived of status, material support, divine possession and inheritance (Mays 1987:145, in Vengeyi 2012:22). The situation, no doubt, portrays a nation that celebrated inequality, abuse of power and wealth. The egalitarian values of living had given way to class-consciousness that had not previously existed in Israel. Israel was an "agrarian society." However, the ruling class members who were not more than two percent of the population received

the surplus of production usually amounting to not less than half of the total national income (Gottwald 1993:322). Thus, the wealth and abundance that Israel had, during the middle of the eighth century BCE did not trickle down to the ordinary person in the street. Rather, it was only experienced by a few people, mostly the ruling elites of Israel who were,

The monarch, members of the royal family, the chief officers of the main branches of government responsible for the chains of command that carried out decisions, and advisors to the court who might have official assignment or might be consulted on an ad-hoc basis. (Gottwald 2001:227).

The members of the elite class, who were very few, typically owned 50-70 percent or more of the land, and controlled by far, the greater amount of power and wealth in the society, even as their positions of power gave them control over the peasantry (Coote 1981:25, in Mamahit 2009:54).

The statistical analysis of the period that informed Amos' message reveals that the lower class in Israel, which was made up of mostly peasants, were probably 80-90 percent of the population (Vengeyi 2012:22). The gap between the rich and the poor became greater as the land was alienated, and the poor became permanently impoverished. It was against this background that Amos accused the rich of selling the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals (Amos 2:6b-8). One therefore agrees with Mamahit (2009:55) that during Amos' time, materialism had become prevalent, hedonism and selfishness had increased, and social disparity had intensified. Prophet Amos himself also described, "the luxury and extravagance of the wealthy, their summer and winter palaces adorned with costly ivory (3:15)," their gorgeous coaches with damask, and women likened to fat cows of Bashan (4:1), addicted to wine and without compassion for the poor and needy (cf. Kleven 1996:215-227; Mamahit 2003:55). The situation became worse at the marketplace where false weights of fraudulent merchandise, and exaction of exorbitant profits especially from the helpless poor (Amos 8:5-6), were the order of the day. Justice had indeed vanished from the land (Amos 3:10), for even judges were corrupt (3:12) "and they turned צדק (justice) into poison" and "the fruit of צדק (righteousness) into wormwood" (5:7).

The foregoing situation painted the picture of an oxymoron, a society with extreme poverty amid extreme wealth. The society that Amos ministered to was a society with a stark contrast between the luxury of the rich and the misery of the poor. It was a society where the rich enjoyed indolent, indulgent existence (4:1ff; 6:1-6) in winter and summer houses (3:13; 6:11), while the poor became a tempting target for legal and economic exploitation (2:6-8; 4:1; 5:10-12; 8:4-6). The rich and wealthy used their economic advantage gotten at the expense of the poor to exploit and dehumanize

them. They dispossessed the poor, who could not repay their debt, of their land and subjected them to slavery (2:6; 8:4, 6). Such was the socio-economic condition, among other things, that warranted Amos' prophetic oracles.

Amos' prophetic oracles were not only informed by socio-economic conditions of his time but by the socio-religious situation as well.

4.4.3 Socio-religious situation

The economic boom and political success that the nation of Israel experienced also brought about unprecedented increase in religious activities. The worship centres at Bethel, Dan, Gilgal and Beersheba were constructed and were being patronised by multitudes of worshippers who brought sacrificial animals. While the first two Israelite shrines at Bethel and Gilgal were considered the state temples, the last two at the high places of Gilgal and Beersheba provided spiritual identity to the nation (Amos 5:5; 8:1-14; cf. Mamahit 2009:56). Jeroboam II is said to be the architect behind these physical projects. He was closely related to Jeroboam 1, the first king of Israel and the founder of the cult at Bethel, according to Deuteronomistic traditions (Coote 1981:22). Amaziah was appointed as the high priest by Jeroboam II to oversee religious activities at the temple in Bethel.

However, the religious condition of Amos' time was grossly affected by its social conditions. It must be emphasised that the economic boom and splendour was only an outward manifestation because internally, the nation was morally and religiously corrupt. The people of Israel equated their religious awakening with economic success. For them, the economic boom was a proof of God's favour towards them. Going by the Deuteronomistic theology, it was a common concept to believe that Israel's success was a sign of divine favour. Ironically, the motivation was turned into self-satisfaction. The people, especially the elites, misconstrued the very values that their covenant relationship with Yahweh emphasised. While the ruling elites still carried on their elaborate religious activities at these worship centres, gross systematic oppression and denial of justice to the peasants, who were really downtrodden and poor, were taking place concurrently.

The implication of the foregoing was the entrenchment of religious hypocrisy. Stuart (1987:284) thus argues that, "Israel was a people often orthodox in style of worship but disobedient in personal and social behavior." Achtemeier (1999:170) puts it more bluntly, saying, "the conscience of the

rich (is being) placated by participation in an elaborate cultus.” The paradoxical situation justifies Amos’ reaction. One sees in Israel at this period, a situation of the co-existence of the economic and formal religious ascent with the moral and social decline. The more the people of Israel kept building their shrines and offering elaborate worship and sacrifices, the more they treated the poor and the powerless unfairly. Mamahit (2010:57) writes that, “Israel’s frequent attendance at the shrines to make sacrifices did not result in moral, spiritual and social uprightness. Amos witnessed a society that has a twisted theology.” Israel became so engrossed with religious formalities that they became blinded to the very core of the covenant demands of a sound ethical society.

The prevailing situations of social, political and religious ill attracted the prophet’s utmost attention and he, in no fair words, condemned the prevailing practices of the few high-class citizens, possessed with inordinate desire to acquire wealth for selfish purposes at the expense of the poor masses, and then later turned to hide under a “false” religion. Abusing their position and power and thinking more highly of themselves than they should, these elites were reduced by Amos to the degradable level of ordinary “cows of Bashan.” Amos raised his voice in protest against the religious and moral corruption of his day. He warned of national judgment on those refusing to change their ways. Amos vehemently condemned the sins of exploitation and oppression of the poor and needy (Amos 4:1; 5:1; 8:4, 6), corrupt and degenerate religious practices (Amos 2:4, 6, 8; 4:4), corruption of justice and honesty (Amos 5:7, 10, 6:12), excessive indulgence (6:4), and general disregard for the law of God (2:8; 8:5).

Confronting the sins of Israelite society, Amos warned of impending judgment (2:5, 13-16; 3:2, 11-15; 5:25-22), but he also called the people to repentance (4:12-13; 5:4-5). Amos insisted that true religion and godly morality were inseparable. He called the people to “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). The righteous person recognises God’s standard, treating others (rich or poor) equally before the law. Amos appealed to the people to let these two qualities characterise their dealing with God and with others. Only then would society function according to divine norms. Having unearthed the very important aspect of the socio-historical context of the text under study, this research will equally benefit from considering some of the social injustice issues of Amos’ day that led to his demand for social justice. Thus, the next section will engage some of the texts of Amos that condemn social injustice.

4.5 AN OVERVIEW OF THE THEME OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE PROPHECY OF AMOS

At this point, it is important to take a cursory look at some of the texts in Amos that deal with social justice. The intention here is to see how Amos used his prophetic ministry to demand social justice from the society of his day. It is interesting to observe that Amos uses the word **משפט**, which is the Hebrew word for justice, only four times, and **צדק**, righteousness and its cognates only five times. Although the words indicating justice are not frequently used, it is clear from the reading that the idea is there. Several texts in Amos address social justice (Amos 2:6-8; 3:9-15; 4:1-3; 5:7, 10-12, 14-15; 21-25; 6:4-7, 12; 8:4-8). The remainder of the book is mainly made up of descriptions of the punishment Israel is to receive, along with the introductory oracles against the nations (Strydom & Wessels 2000:137-240)

4.5.1 Abuse of power (Amos 2:6-8)

In Amos 2:6-8, the prophet clearly brought an accusation against the people. Amos' oracle on social justice in 2:6-8 forms part of Amos 2:6-16, which incidentally is the climax of the first two chapters of the book. In Amos 2:6-16, Amos began by prophesying against all Israel's surrounding nations, and then he focused his attention on his audience, the people of Israel (vv. 6-8). Mamahit (2010:64) sees Amos 2:6-8, as a sub-unit of the oracle against Israel (Amos 2:6-16), and a sub-sub-unit of oracles against the nations (OAN), while (Amos 1:3-2:16) is an independent literary unit. This section, as a complete unit, starts with the introduction, which is followed by the contents of the oracle, and ends with a conclusion. It is not the goal of the present study to conduct a rhetorical analysis of the passage which Mamahit (2009:64) has intelligently presented in his work. Rather, the study aims to examine the passage with a view to engaging Amos' cry for social justice.

Amos 2:6-8

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל-אַרְבָּעָה לֹא אָשִׁיבוּנוּ עַל-מִכְרָם בְּכֶסֶף צְדִיק וְאֶבְיוֹן בַּעֲבוּר נַעֲלָיִם:⁶

הַשֹּׁאֲפִים עַל-עֶפְרַיִם אֶרְלֵי בָרָאשׁ דָּלִים וְגִרָה עֲנוּיִם יָטוּ וְאִישׁ וְאִשׁוּ יִלְכּוּ אֶל-הַנְּעֻרָה לְמַעַן חָלֹל אֶת-נַשִּׁים קְדוֹשִׁי:⁷

וְעַל-בְּגָדִים חֲבָלִים יָטוּ אֶצֶל כָּל-מִזְבֵּחַ וַיֵּין עֲנוּשִׁים יִשְׁתּוּ בֵּית אֱלֹהֵיהֶם:⁸

⁶ Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes;

⁷ That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek: and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name:

⁸ And they lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.

Clearly, the sins that Amos condemned in 2:6–8 are largely sins that reflect the abuse of power—the poor and the needy are being exploited by the selfishly rich and wealthy. The word translated קִדָּשׁ “righteous” in the above passage is said to indicate the “honest one,” “innocent one” or “the poor” (Saviour 2012:19-20; Snaith 1946:37; Moffatt 1950:40). Snaith (1946:37) follows Moffatt (1950:40) in translating the word as “honest,” that is, one who is honest and law-abiding, and therefore likely in those days to be poor as well; but most commentators use the term “innocent,” which is one of the early senses of קִדָּשׁ, meaning one who is innocent before the law. However, in Israel, the innocent, who ought to have been vindicated, were sold into slavery.

From Amos 2:6-8, it is clear that Amos frowned at the exploitive manner of selling the innocent poor as slaves because they were not able to pay off their debt. Although Mays (1976:45) observes that it was legal to sell people for money or land in such a case, exploiting the innocent poor whose financial position would warrant further enslavement was unwarranted. Finley (1990:164) writes that, “Debt slavery was permitted in the Law of Moses, but only as a temporary condition (Exod. 21:7-11; Lev. 25:39-43; Deut. 15:12-15).” The master, however, needed to treat the indebted person as a fellow Israelite and to give him or her some compensation. In this regard, Strydom and Wessels (2000:171) further argue that, in many instances, the rich, often the influential landowners deliberately exploited the small landowners to worsen their position so that they could oppress the latter. He further asserts that the rich stretched the law to better their own positions and to get a hold on the innocent poor who were vulnerable and unable to defend or protect themselves.

Amos pointed out another injustice that was prevalent among the people in verse 6b. The needy were sold for a pair of sandals. Scholars have tried to understand the meaning of being sold for “a pair of sandals.” Hayes (1988:109) as quoted by Strydom and Wessels (2000:171) highlights four possible meanings:

- a. For as little as the price of a pair of sandals, judges are bribed to declare innocent people guilty;
- b. For as little as the value of a pair of sandals, someone is being sold as a slave;

- c. The property of the poor man which is in dispute, is worth nothing more than a pair of sandals;
- d. The transfer of a pair of sandals was symbolic of the transfer of land.

According to Gnuse (1985:76), the choice of sandals is appropriate since people would symbolically exchange sandals after a major transaction. For Jensen (2006:79), the phrase “and the poor for a pair of sandals” could possibly indicate a parallel expression to “they sell the just man for silver” which could connote a paltry sum, but more probably an idiomatic way of indicating a bribe.

Vengeyi (2011:228-229) also offers two possible explanations of how “selling the righteous for silver” took place. The first possibility is that the corrupt judge decided cases against the innocent in return for a bribe or for profit from a conviction. The breeding ground for the preceding situation was the abuse of the legal system that paved way for such an atrocity (see Houston 2006:67). The second possible explanation on how the innocent were being sold for silver is that the innocent, who was probably a property owner, was sold into slavery for non-payment of a debt and his property was confiscated.

Regardless of the interpretation, it is clear that the helpless landowner was exploited when sold as a slave and his precious piece of land taken away from him. It means that when the small farmer was dispossessed of his own land, he would become a tenant to an urban class member to whom he must pay rent for the use of the land, a fee that was often the lion’s share of the grain, which the land produced (Mays 1976:94). Unfortunately, the dispossession of the poor was perpetuated with the cooperation of the court. Amos condemned that practice as evil, unacceptable, and an act punishable by YHWH who is the Lord of history; hence, his call for justice.

Amos further highlighted another injustice in verse 7a,

הַשְׂאֵפִים עַל-עַפְר־אֶרֶץ בְּרֹאשׁ דָּלִים וַתִּטּוּ עֲנִיִּים יָטוּ (*“That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek”*). It is revealing that the verb שָׂאָה (“pant after”), which is the translation of *sa’ap* is rendered “trampled upon” in the NIV, a term which also occurs in Amos 8:4. However, the term דָּל, the Hebrew word for “poor” is placed in parallel with עָנִי (“meek”) in the next line (“afflicted” in RSV, and “oppressed” in NIV). Finley (1990:165-166) therefore prefers to see the scenario as a display of power by the rich over the poor—the rich and

powerful trampled on the poor and powerless or the helpless—which means that many of them were unrelenting in their cruelty towards the poor. As Robinson (1951:40) puts it, “they made the lower classes step aside for them.” While some interpret the verse as focusing on bribery and corruption in the courts, other scholars claim that Amos was speaking here, not of the judicial system, but of the arrogance of the rich (Snaith 1946:42–43). Mays (1976:46) argues that turning aside the way of the humble, is a locution for perversion of the legal system. The word rendered “way” in his analysis (cf. NIV), is a synonym for justice. Thus, verses 6a and 7b both indicate that the courts were used to oppress the poor instead of maintaining justice. The poor, whose plight already had become deplorable was further threatened by the rich who subjected him to insignificance. He, the poor, no longer had the opportunity to share in “the national cake”—the land that was promised to every one of them. To Amos, this situation was unacceptable because, according to the promise, every member of the society had a right to own a piece of his own land and to live independently (Strydom & Wessels 2000:172).

Another injustice that Amos condemned in verse 7c is the act of incest, in which a man and his father had sexual engagements with the same girl. Thus, verse 7c states: וְאִישׁ וְאָבִיו יֵלְכוּ אֶל־הַנַּעֲרָה לְמַעַן חַלֵּל אֶת־שֵׁם קְדוֹשִׁי (“*and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name*”). Paul (1991:124) observes that both a man and his father exploiting the same girl sexually points to the “lack of shame and promiscuity involved.” Furthermore, within the context of oppression and those it hurts, Amos uncovered the oppressive nature of the victimisation of the daughters of poor men, who were unable to pay their debts, and who were therefore taken as slaves by the rich landowners. Some scholars, however, are of the opinion that the girl in question may have been a temple prostitute who is being patronised by her worshippers (Driver 1907:149-150; Feinberg 1976:91; Barstad 1984:17-36). However, that argument does not hold water in the present textual context since the context indicates Amos’ reaction to oppression and injustice. Clearly, Amos condemned the fact that a ‘young girl’ or a female bondservant was turned into a concubine for both father and son, an act that was forbidden by the Law (Exod. 21:8-9; Deut. 22:30). Amos denounced promiscuity as unacceptable, pointing out clearly that such deeds profane God’s name.

Amos further pointed out another injustice practiced by the rich and the elites in the society in verse 8. He said, וְעַל־בָּגְדֵימָם חֲבָלִים יִטּוּ אַעֲזֹל כָּל־מִזְבְּחָם וַיִּין עֲנוּשִׁים יִשְׁתּוּ בֵּית אֱלֹהֵיהֶם (“*And they lay*

themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god”). When the rich lay next to the altar to participate in sacrificial meals in the temple, they lay down on garments taken in a pledge. Strydom and Wessels (2000:173) point out that it was the custom for a creditor to take a person’s garment as security for a loan. The same custom though, demanded that the garment must be returned before sunset, so that the owner could sleep underneath it. However, this was not the case, as the rich creditors did not comply with the law but kept the garments of their debtors and misused them by lying down on them. A further abusive act was that while participating in these sacrificial meals and lying on pledged garments, the creditors went on to drink wine which was taken from the poor through fines and taxes. I agree with Strydom and Wessels (2000:173) that the fines and taxes were another way of exploiting the poor further, by forcing them to either sell their property or sell themselves as slaves. Though the custom was that the products of one’s own labour should be enjoyed at these meals, the rich people ignored the custom at the expense of the poor. For Amos, therefore, the situation was a sacrilege and an unfortunate experience especially since it was carried out in the temple, the very place where divine order should have been the governing principle.

Amos thus pronounced the divine punishment that would befall the people in Amos 2:12-16. In verse 13, he declared that God would make the rich and the powerful to suffer as a wagon suffers under a full load: “The speed of the swift and the power of the strong will be to no avail, even the courage of a soldier will not help him to save his own life” (2:14). Thus, “Everybody, including the bravest among the soldiers, will flee on the day of God’s judgment” (2:16).

4.5.2 Amassing wealth by oppressing the poor and the needy (Amos 3:9-15)

הַשְׁמִיעוּ עַל-אַרְמְנוֹת בְּאַשְׁדּוֹד וְעַל-אַרְמְנוֹת בְּאַרְצֵי מִצְרָיִם וְאַמְרוּ הַאֲסָפוּ עַל-
הָרִי שְׁמִרְיֹן וְרֹאיוֹ מִהוֹמֶת רַבּוֹת בְּתוֹכָהּ וְעֲשׂוּקִים בְּקֶרְבָּהּ:

וְלֹא-יִדְעוּ עֲשׂוֹת-נִכְלָתָהּ נְאֻם-יְהוָה הָאוֹצְרִים חֶמֶס וְשָׁד בְּאַרְמְנוֹתֵיהֶם: ¹⁰

לָכֵן כֹּה אָמַר אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה צֹר וְסָבִיב הָאָרֶץ וְהוֹרֵד מִמֶּנָּה עֶזְבָּה וְנִבְזִי אַרְמְנוֹתֶיהָ: ¹¹

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה בְּאַשְׁרֵי יִצְלֵל הָרָעָה מִפִּי הָאָרֶץ שְׁתֵּי כְרָעִים אֹו בְדֹל-¹²
אֲזֶן כֹּו יִנְצָלוּ בְּגֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּשִׁמְרֹן בְּפֶאת מְטָה וּבְדַמְשֶׁק עָרֶשׁ:

שָׁמְעוּ וְהִעֲדוּ בְּבֵית יַעֲקֹב נְאֻם־אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַצִּבְאוֹת:¹³

כִּי בַיּוֹם פָּקְדֵי פִשְׁעֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עָלָיו וּפְקֻדָּתִי עַל־מִזְבְּחוֹת בֵּית־אֵל וְנִגְדְּעוּ קַרְנוֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְנִפְלְוּ לְאַרְצָא:¹⁴

וְהִפְתִּי בֵית־הַחֶרֶף עַל־בֵּית הַקִּיץ וְאֶבְלֹוּ בְּתֵי הַשֹּׁן וְסָפוּ בְּתִים רַבִּים נְאֻם־יְהוָה:¹⁵

⁹ Publish in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria, and behold the great tumults in the midst thereof, and the oppressed in the midst thereof.

¹⁰ For they know not to do right, saith the LORD, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces.

¹¹ Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; An adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled.

¹² Thus saith the LORD; As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus in a couch.

¹³ Hear ye, and testify in the house of Jacob, saith the Lord GOD, the God of hosts,

¹⁴ That in the day that I shall visit the transgressions of Israel upon him I will also visit the altars of Bethel: and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground.

¹⁵ And I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the LORD.

Again, we encounter another issue that borders on social justice in Amos' oracle. In verses 10- 11, Amos accused the rich and powerful of not knowing how to do what is right which is manifested in their untoward act of amassing wealth by oppressing the poor:

¹⁰ For they know not to do right, saith the LORD, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces.

¹¹ Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; An adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled.

Previously, in verse 9, God had summoned two neighbouring nations—Philistine (also referred to as Ashdod in KJV) and Egypt, Israel's traditional enemies, to witness the social oppression in Samaria, Israel's capital city. The degree of Israel's social injustice against her citizens in Samaria was enough to shock even these pagan nations. As Chisholm (1990:86) says, "Even to these pagan nations, who had historically been among Israel's worst oppressors, the degree of social injustice in Israel would be a spectacle to behold." Yahweh was therefore placing Israel on trial, and her neighbours were summoned to give evidence, if they had any, and to confirm the court's judgment on the offender.

Israel's sins are indicated in the words, מְהִימָה – (*tumults*), עֲשׂוֹק (*oppression*) (v. 9), חָמָס (*violence*), and שָׁד (*robbery*) (v.10). The Hebrew text for verse 10 is translated literally as, "who hoard

violence and *destruction* in their fortresses,” emphasising the means by which the rich in Israel gathered their stolen goods (Chisholm 1990:86). Hence, the text under investigation indicates the oppressive way in which the rich and powerful stored up goods and wealth taken from the innocent poor (v.10). Keller (1972:59) therefore explains that, “the meaning of verses 9b and 10b is that Israel’s prosperity depends upon robbery and oppression.” He further notes that the palaces of the wealthy were filled with goods that have been stolen or seized by violence.

Mays (1976:64-65) points out that the two words, *violence* and *destruction*, are used together frequently, and they become a single expression for the collapse of normal conditions (Jer. 6:7; 20:8; 48:3; Ezek. 45:9; Hab. 1:3). Strydom and Wessels (2000:173) assert that the terms *violence* and *destruction*, as indicated in verse 10b, are used in contrast to the terms *justice* and *righteousness*, and they designate sin and malpractices committed against people and property. According to him, the rich property owners exploit the poor landowners to such a degree that the latter eventually lose all their property—their houses as well as their lands. The rich then used proceeds from such ill-gotten wealth to build for themselves luxurious houses. In the process, the poor were rendered helpless and completely dehumanised.

The preceding situation caused Amos to bring a devastating charge against the rich and powerful of Samaria in verse 10, saying, וְלֹא יָדְעוּ עֲשׂוֹת נִכְלָהּ (“*For they know not how to do right*”). Keller (1972:59) sees the indictment by God as a description of a nation sick unto death. He notes that the last state of depravity has been reached when conscience ceases to do its work and the sinner can no longer distinguish between right and wrong. In other words, the rich and powerful of Samaria had lost all sense of rightness in terms of alleviating the plight of the vulnerable in the society. Instead of taking care of the needy and the poor, they exploited them to enrich themselves and amass even more luxury.

Thus, Amos announces the judgment of God on Israel in view of the ongoing atrocity. Chisholm (1990:86) points out that the announcement of Samaria’s judgment from verses 11-15 is filled with irony. Israel would have a taste of its own wickedness which would be meted out by other nations which Yahweh himself would choose. What Israel had done to others would be done to her. The entire storehouses where all the wealth and loots that were taken through oppressive means (v.10) were kept would be plundered by an enemy army. Further, verse 15 announced God’s direct

condemnation of Israel's luxurious house which must have been gotten through exploitation of the poor.

The references to winter houses, summerhouses, houses of ivory, and great house in verse 15 probably were to different luxurious houses, depicting the status of individuals who erected for them different seasons and tastes. Strydom and Wessels (2000:173) argue that the terms “winter” and “summer houses” possibly refer to either different residences, according to the season (1 Kgs 22:39), or to separate apartments in the same house (Judg. 3:20; Jer. 36:22). For Kaiser (2005:14), the ivory houses were probably so named because their walls and furniture were embellished by ivory plaques or by small ivory panels that were attached to the furniture and inlaid in the walls (cf. 1 Kgs 10:18; 22:39; Ps 45:8).

Amos therefore declares God's judgment of destruction against these luxurious houses of Samaria because of the acts of social injustice that characterised them (v.10). Like the altar in Bethel in verse 14, these luxurious houses would also be destroyed.

4.5.3 Oracle against the flamboyantly wealthy women of Samaria (Amos 4:1-3)

Again, we come to Amos' oracle against the flamboyantly wealthy women of Samaria in Amos 4:1-3, who were described figuratively as “the cows of Bashan.” Amos described the women in those words because they had enriched themselves at the expense of the needy and the helpless.

Amos 4:1-3

שְׁמַעוּ הַדִּבָּר הַזֶּה פָּרוֹת הַבָּשָׁן אֲשֶׁר בְּתֹר שְׁמִרֹן הַעֲשָׂקוֹת דָּלִים הַרְצָצוֹת אֲבִיוֹנִים הָאֹמְרֹת לְאֶזְנֵיהֶם הִבִּיאָה וְנִשְׁתָּה:¹

נִשְׁבַּע אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה בְּקֹדְשׁוֹ כִּי הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים עָלֵיכֶם וְנִשָּׂא אֶתְכֶם בְּצִנּוֹת וְאֶחָרִיתְכֶן בְּסִירֹת דֹּגָה:²

וּפְרָצִים תִּצָּאֵנָה אִשָּׁה נִגְדָה וְהִשְׁלַכְתֶּנָּה הַרְמוֹנָה נָאִם יְהוָה:³

¹ Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, “Bring something to drink!”

² The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness, each one straight ahead; when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks.

³ Through breaches in the wall you shall leave, each one straight ahead; and you shall be flung out into Harmon, says the LORD.

Undoubtedly, calling a woman or any human being for that matter a cow would appear to be an insult. In fact, Coggins (2000:116) initially held the view that such a phrase, that is, “cows of Bashan” was an offensive phrase. However, after an extended comparison of the term and equating it with the term “bulls of Bashan” in Psalm 22:12, he concludes that the term referred to the well-endowed physical features of these women. Hence, calling these women, “cows of Bashan,” was not an insult in itself. Bashan, according to Keller (1972:64), was the name given to the fertile region east of the Sea of Galilee whose luxurious pastures and fine breed of cattle had become proverbial (Deut. 32:14; Ps. 22:12; Ezek. 39:18). Strydom and Wessels (2000:174) add that Bashan was a place known for its beautiful fields and its fine cattle, thus, a place that connoted quality. Calling the women “cows of Bashan” therefore implied that they were from the higher social classes, the noble women esteemed in the society.

Wax (2013:156, quoting Jeremias 1998:63) that Amos’ reference to the women of Samaria was not about their outward “appearance of corpulence” or even their outward expression of “vanity and arrogance,” but about “their gross self-indulgence that fueled their perpetual need for extravagant revelry.” Wax (2013: 156) further reasons that, for these women, maintaining their extravagant lifestyle placed an enormous amount of pressure on their husbands resulting in the increased exploitation of the poor in order to sustain their lavish lifestyle.

Over the years, scholars have debated the identity of those referred to as פָּרוֹת הַבָּשָׁן (“cows of Bashan”) in our text. Who were these people? Of course, פָּרָה (“cows”) are females, as indicated in the feminine Hebrew gender. The question is thus, is the group they represent in the figure of speech necessarily female also? What seems clear however, according to Andersen and Freedman (1989:408) is that, the “cows” signified people who were in mount Samaria, and like others located there, were guilty of serious crimes, especially against the poor and the powerless (cf. Amos 2:6-8; 8:4-7, among other texts). Irwin (2012:232) also points out that the mixture of masculine and feminine forms in the verse has led many interpreters, beginning with the Targum, to view the term “cows” as referring to the elite citizens of Samaria, male and female, who conspired with their rulers (“their lords”) to plunder the poor.

Barstad (1984:37-47) argues that the term “cows of Bashan” is here used in the prophetic diatribe “as a determinative for the apostate people” of Samaria. In other words, the term refers to the whole people of Israel in their fallen state, a view which has attracted further criticism.

In Irwin's (2012:231-232) view, the phrase "cows of Bashan" refers to the elite women of Samaria (v.1b), and the demands that they made of "their lords" were part of an overall characterisation of these women as perpetrators of injustice (v. 1c-e). Specifically, he contends that in verse 1e, the prophet accused these women of attempting to overturn the prevailing patriarchal social order, which Amos understood to be the mechanism by which social stability and justice were maintained. However, the popular view among interpreters supports the interpretation that Amos referred in this instance to the elite women of Samaria (Mays 1969; Wolff 1977; Jeremias 1998; Paul 1991).

For Wolff (1977:205) these women were likely to be the wives of court officials or wealthy owners of large estates (5:11-12) and of merchants (8:4-6). Hayes assumes that the women were probably associated with the royal courts and the administration (1988:138). Mays sees a strong connection between the women and the royal culture, placing them at the upper echelons of society and exercising extensive influence over their husbands (1969:72). Though they were not directly the perpetrators of oppression in society, they were a key factor in driving the oppression perpetrated by their husbands through their insatiable greed (Mays 1969:73). He holds them responsible for the oppressive power behind the corrupt courts in 5:10 and the business malpractices highlighted in 8:4 (Mays 1969:72). By determining the extent of their own revelry, which showed no signs of abating, they had a direct influence on the increasing levels of oppression in the society.

According to Paul (1991:129), these women were privileged and pampered and they lived self-indulgently at the expense of the poor and the needy. Their "incessant demand upon their husbands to provide for their gluttonous needs to carouse and feast" were the primary cause of the increasing oppression of the poor and so are ultimately responsible for "the exploitation of the underprivileged classes" (Paul 1991:128). Whatever they demanded, of the best of food, drink and luxury items, their husbands ensured a constant supply at the expense of the entire social fabric (Thomas 2003:230).

In a society where the necessities of life were a luxury of a particular class of people, while affluence and indolence could be a way of life for the extremely privileged people, Amos believed that nothing less than the judgment of God, in the form of a terrible reversal of their condition, was imminent (Kleven 1996:215-227). Thus, because in their laziness they oppressed the poor, the

wealthy women of Samaria had one of two destinies ahead of them—either to be slaughtered as fattened cattle, or to be herded out of the city and taken out of the country (Amos 4:1-3).

4.5.4 Corruption and the miscarriage of justice (Amos 5:7, 10-12)

Without doubt, Amos chapter 5 contains some of the most striking and profound statements on social justice. In Amos 5:7, 10-12, Amos again identified the unforgivable sins of the injustice carried out by the people of Israel. Strydom and Wessels (2000:175) explain that verses 7, 10-12 addressed the corrupt judicial system of the day. The court is supposed to be the last hope of the oppressed and a place where justice prevails. Sadly, the reverse was the case in Israel as vividly described in verse 7:

הַהֹפְכִים לְלַעֲנָה מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה לְאַרְץ הַגִּיחֹן:⁷

“O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth!” (RSV)

Amos decries the fact that the very same people who are responsible for the administration of justice, namely, the court officials and judges, have become the agents of perversion of justice in Israel. As Martin-Achard (1984:42) has rightly explained, “It might be possible to regard verse 7 as an introduction to the development of verses 10ff, for it seems above all that it is the judges who are responsible for the perversion of justice in Israel.” It was the task of the court to make decisions whenever there was a dispute, and these decisions must result in justice being done. However, according to Amos, justice was turned to wormwood, and righteousness was trampled on the ground. The use of the metaphor, לַעֲנָה (“wormwood”), by the prophet indicates a bitter substance, unpleasant to the taste (Hayes 1988:160). Strydom and Wessels (2000:175) describe it as a plant, which has a bitter taste, and is often used as a metaphor to describe the bitterness of a disaster and calamity.

Similarly, Saviour (2012:68) asserts that the metaphor לַעֲנָה refers to the corruption of the society and the bitterness that had crept into, especially the lives of the poor, because justice, which is the way of life intended by YHWH, had been set aside. Hence, Amos accused them of turning justice into poison, something that is bitter. Consequently, the poor and the oppressed of Amos’ day, were subjected to the bitter wormwood of injustice, meted out by the very people, the court officials and

judges, who were supposed to uphold justice and truth. One cannot but agree with Saviour (2012:68) that:

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.

The pairing of *מִשְׁפָּט וצִדְקָה* (justice and righteousness) in verse 7 is central to the theme of social justice in Amos. The word pair, *מִשְׁפָּט וצִדְקָה* occurs elsewhere in Amos (5:24; 6:12) and rather frequently in the Old Testament (cf. Gen. 18:19; 2 Sam. 8:15; 1 Kgs. 10:9; 1 Chron. 18:14; 2 Chron. 9:8; Ps. 72:1-2; 89:14; 119:121; Prov. 1:3; 2:9; 8:20; 16:8; 21:3; Isa. 1:21; 5:7; 9:7; 28:17; Jer. 22:15). In many of these texts, the terms and their referents are a special concern and responsibility of God and the king, who establish and uphold *מִשְׁפָּט* and *צִדְקָה* (Hayes 1988:160). Wolff (1969:287-88) also remarks that this word pair is not found anywhere in the legal collections of the Pentateuch, and it seems to have its origin in the wisdom tradition (cf. Prov. 1:3; 2:9; 8:20; 16:8; 21:3). However, Andersen and Freedman (1989:485) point out that the word pair of *מִשְׁפָּט* and *צִדְקָה* has a negative tone in both Amos 5:7 and 6:12b, whereas, in 5:24, it has a positive connotation. In their words:

...Amos 5:7 forms a boundary with 6:12b, for the two verses are built around the traditional -and, in Amos, a vital pair: *מִשְׁפָּט* and *צִדְקָה*. They also point to the middle unit in 5:24, where there is a positive expression of the same terms – the well-known exhortation, ‘Let justice roll on like the ocean, and equity (righteousness) like a perennial stream.’

Further, Andersen and Freedman (1989:485) opine that in 5:7, as in 6:12b, the statement has a negative tone and attacks those who turn (the fruit of) *מִשְׁפָּט* and *צִדְקָה* into wormwood and thrust them down or place them on (literally, “to”) the earth. Both Marlow (2009:127) and Amissah (2016:127) see the turning of justice and righteousness into poison as a clear case of the total negligence of social justice. Hence, for them, social injustice is against both the natural and the divine order.

The use of *מִשְׁפָּט וצִדְקָה* (“justice and righteousness”) in this particular text probably refers to right and proper order in society. However, to define justice and righteousness here, merely in terms of the legal and juridical system of Israel, is to hold too narrow a view of Amos’ concern (Hayes 1988:160). Hayes (1988:160) argues that, although, lack of justice in the legal system was one of Amos’ concerns (cf. 2:6b-7), justice and order in the larger political and social realms were even greater matters for him. Jeremias (1995:67-68) affirms that justice was seen not just as an ideal to

be attained in Israelite society, but as a God-given quality of life. For Amos therefore, the disregard for justice and just practice is condemnable. Amos did not hold back in accusing and condemning the Israelites and especially the judicial officers who allowed the corruption of justice to persist in the land and in the lives of the weaker members of the society. That situation was of course contrary to the demands of YHWH.

Amos 5:10-12

שָׂנְאוּ בַשָּׁעַר מוֹכִיחַ וְדֹבֵר תְּמִים יִתְעָבוּ:¹⁰

לָכֵן יֵעַן בּוֹשְׁסֵיכֶם עַל-דָּל וּמִשְׁאַת-בֶּר תקַחוּ מִמֶּנּוּ בְּתִי גִזִּית בְּנִיתָם וְלֹא-תֵשְׁבוּ בָּם כְּרַמִּי-תִקְמַד נִטְעַתֶּם וְלֹא תִשְׁתּוּ אֶת-יַיִם:¹¹

כִּי יָדַעְתִּי רַבִּים פִּשְׁעֵיכֶם וַעֲצָמִים חֲטֹאתֵיכֶם צָרָה לִי צָדִיק לִקְחֵי כֶּסֶף וְאַבְיוֹנִים בַּשָּׁעַר הָטוּ:¹²

¹⁰ They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth.

¹¹ Therefore because you trample upon the poor and take from him exactions of wheat, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine.

¹² For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins— you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate.

In verses 10-12, Amos returns to his central theme of the demand for justice in the affairs of humans. Some interpreters assume that verse 10 could have been joined to verse 7 (Wolff 1969:271-73; Saviour 2012:68).

Given the corrupt legal system, anyone, who defended what was right and spoke the truth, was hated and despised (v.10). The reason for this, Strydom and Wessels (2000:175) say, is that “the courts, more specifically the judges, are favoring the rich and the influential members of the society by giving judgment in their favor, even when they are the guilty party.” Thus, if one pointed out the truth and defended the innocent, who in most likelihood, was a poor person, the judge would be forced to convict the the poor (Strydom & Wessels 2000:175). Consequently, Amos took up the case of the dispossessed and oppressed in the name of YHWH to re-enact the long abandoned traditional values.

Amos accused the court officials of perverting justice in the gate. The use of the expression בַּשָּׁעַר (“in the gate”) is complex and needs clarification. According to Thomas (2003:200), this could

refer to a number of rooms built into corridors along the city's wall where public and legal hearing took place. For Niehaus (1992:421), the gate is the place where intense discussion took place and disputes were arbitrated and settled. Keller (1972:78) had earlier affirmed that in ancient Israel, the courtrooms were the open gate at the entrance to the walled city. It was there that the elders of the city sat as judges, to rule on cases that were brought before them (v. 15; cf. Ruth 4:1-12). However, Hayes is of the opinion that it is highly unlikely that ancient Israelites associated the terms "in the gate" or "justice in the gate" with local court proceedings as the location was more likely associated with general public activity (1988:162). Whatever the divergence in opinions shows, it is most likely that the term *בִּשְׁעַר* ("in the gate") is a place for some form of administration of justice, among other things.

Amos regarded the corruption of legal justice at that time not only as abnormal, but unacceptable. Hence, in verse 12, he accused the court officials and judges of the innumerable sins and crimes. He describes them as those *צָרְרִי צְדִיק לְקַחֵי כֶּפֶר וְאַבְיוֹנִים בִּשְׁעַר הַטֹּו* ("who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate") (v. 12b). The same people who should protect the vulnerable and the weak in the land, had become the enemies of the weak and the righteous—the innocent poor. Rather than make fair judgements by convicting the guilty, who in this case, were the rich and the elites, the judges took bribes, thereby, circumventing justice. The reason for this, according to Strydom and Wessels (2000:176), is that the guilty parties could afford to bribe the judge so that they would be declared innocent. Consequently, the poor were not granted justice but they were "afflicted," that is, treated as if they were guilty. It is therefore sad to note that where justice should have prevailed and where wrongs should have been righted, corruption and dishonesty were the order of the day.

To "turn aside the needy in the gate" (*וְאַבְיוֹנִים בִּשְׁעַר הַטֹּו*), according to Keller (1972:78), simply means to deny them a fair trial. Often, the case of the poor person was not only turned away because the court would not convict the person who exploited him; the poor person also was considered guilty (Strydom and Wessels 2000:176). The poor was then fined and taxed, and made to pay tributes, in the form of corn, which was taken from him forcefully (v. 11). The proceeds from these taxes and fines were then used by the rich to build themselves big houses of hewn stones and to plant vineyards (Strydom & Wessels 2000:176).

Thus, against the preceding background, Amos pronounced God's judgment on Israel's unjust judges, saying, בָּתֵּי גִזְיֹת בְּנֵיהֶם וְלֹא־תִשְׁבּוּ בָּם כְּרִמֵּי־תְּמָד וְנִטְעָמָם וְלֹא תִשְׁתּוּ אֶת־יַיִנָּם (*"You have built houses of hewn stones, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine"*) (v. 11b). He who denies others justice will not live to experience the fruit of justice. Amos announced unambiguously to the corrupt officials and the wealthy that they would not live in those houses, nor would they drink wine from their vineyards, for YHWH would repay them for the numerous acts of injustice, which they had committed.

4.5.5 Carefree extravagant opulence in the midst of abject poverty (Amos 6:1-6)

In Amos 6:1-6, Amos witnessed a profound irony of life as the upper class and the wealthy people of Samaria and Zion lived such a stupendously wealthy and luxurious lifestyle, while ignoring the abject poverty that was prevalent in the land. Amissah (2016:136) describes the scenario in these verses as "carefree extravagant opulence in the midst of abject poverty." According to him, judging by the overall context of the social injustices condemned in the text, Amos denounced the luxurious lifestyle of the rich, which was funded by the wealth acquired unjustly from the poor and the needy. Hence, their insensitivity to "the ruin of Joseph" mirrored their indifference towards the plight of the suffering masses.

Early in verse 1, Amos condemned the rich and the upper elites of the capital city of Samaria for their false sense of security and their arrogant self-confidence that made them think that all was well and spurred them to live such an extravagant lifestyle. Scholars claim that the two expressions "those at ease," and "those who trust" in verse 1, denote the false security of the upper class and the carefree lifestyle of the prominent citizens of Israel (Wolff 1977:274; Paul 1991:200). Indeed, Amos pointed the attention of the people especially the leaders and the upper elites who lived in the false security of their affluence, to consider Yahweh's judgment.

At this point, the study shall turn attention to the crux of Amos' message, which is, to allow justice and righteousness to take the centre stage in the nation's life.

4.6 EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE THEME OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN AMOS 5:21-24

This section presents an exegetical verse-by-verse analysis of social justice in Amos 5:21-24.

4.6.1 Introduction

Following the brief overview of the theme of social justice from some selected texts in the book of Amos, the present section will present a critical and exegetical study of our text, Amos 5:21-24 especially in relation to Amos' call for social justice. It will examine critically the text of Amos 5:21-24, as it appears in the Masoretic Text of Amos found in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS). A verse-by-verse exegetical analysis of the pericope will be done taking into account the various methods of criticism. The chapter will conclude with a brief summary.

4.6.2 Text and translation

4.6.3.1 *The Hebrew Text: BHS*

שְׂנֵאתִי מִאֲסֹתַי חֲגִיכֶם וְלֹא אֲרִים בְּעֶצְרֹתֵיכֶם:²¹

כִּי אִם-תַּעֲלוּ-לִי עֹלֹת וּמִנְחֹתֵיכֶם לֹא אֲרַצֶּה וְשָׁלֶם מְרִיאֵיכֶם לֹא אֶבִּיט:²²

הִסֵּר מֵעָלַי הַמָּוֶן שִׁירֵיךָ וְזִמְרַת נְבִלֶיךָ לֹא אֶשְׁמָע:²³

וַיָּגֶל כַּמִּים מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה כְּנֹחַל אֵיתָן:²⁴

4.6.3.2 *The English Translation*

²¹ “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon.

²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (NRSV).¹⁵

¹⁵ I have chosen the NRSV translation in the main text because it is closer to the Masoretic Text while, at the same time, its language is friendly to modern day Bible readers. The NRSV on the other hand, is wholistic and inclusive in terms of the gender aspect of translation while at the same staying true to the integrity of the Masoretic Text. In few cases however, allusions will be made to other translations where necessary for the sake of further exegetical clarity.

4.6.4 Exegetical analysis

As indicated previously, the crux of Amos' message in 5:21-24 is that social justice is imperative to the demonstration of true religion. Amos' observation and concern were that Israel had gratified herself in religious formalities to the detriment of the ethical and moral demands of the law of YHWH. Amos showed that the people had allowed themselves to be caught in the web of religious hypocrisy. They claimed to be outwardly devoted to YHWH with their elaborate sacrifices and flamboyant worship, while neglecting the covenant demand of justice and righteousness. This theme of misdirected religious zeal, according to Finley (1990:249), came to a climax in the present segment of Amos.

While responding to the popular beliefs of his day, Amos vehemently and boldly refuted their significance and importance. According to Paul (1991:188), Amos, through his oracle in 5:21-24, unleashed his most uncompromising attack against the lavishness of the official monotheistic cult, utterly rejecting Israel's extensive ritual praxis—holidays, festival gatherings and sacrifices, with their accompanying hymns, melodies, and musical instruments. Amos' intention, Paul (1991:188) reveals, was to destroy Israel's "idle worship." Hence "to all this ritual mayhem (v. 23 הֵמֹן) he [Amos] replies that God demands justice and morality and not the minutes of the cult: Not rite but right is demanded: devotion not devotions" (Paul 1991:188).

Interestingly, some scholars have noted some thematic and ideological connections between this pericope (Amos 5:21-24) and Isaiah 1:11-15 (Paul 1991:188; McComiskey 1992:431; Romero 1997:23; Coggins 2000:131; Lafferty 2010:104; Groenewald 2019:2). Noticeable in the two pericopes are the remarkable similarities, for instance, in Amos 5:21 שְׁנֵאתִי and Isaiah 1:14 (נִפְשִׁי) מִנְחֹתֵיכֶם, v. 21, עֲצֹרֹתֵיכֶם and Isaiah 1:13; עֲצֹרָה, v. 22, עֲלֹת and Isaiah 1:11, עֲלֹת, v. 22, מִנְחֹתֵיכֶם (also Amos 5:25) and Isaiah 1:13 מִנְחֹתֶיךָ (שָׁנָא), v. 22; מְרִיאֵכֶם and Isaiah 1:11, מְרִיאִים, v. 23 הֵסֵר מֵעָלַי and Isaiah 1:16 הֵסִירוּ... (מִנֶּגֶד עֵינַי), v. 23, לֹא אֶשְׁמַע, and Isaiah 1:15, אֶינֶנִּי. Compare also v. 21 חֲגִיכֶם ("your festivals") and Isaiah 1:14 חֲדָשֵׁיכֶם וּמוֹעֲדֵיכֶם ("your new moons and fixed seasons"); v. 22, לֹא אֶבִּיט

(“I shall not look”), and Isaiah 1:15, אֶעֱלִים עֵינַי (“I shall hide my eyes”); v.22, לֹא אֲרַצֶּה (“I do not want”), and Isaiah 1:11, לֹא תִהְיֶה לִּי מְנוּחָה (“I have no delight”) (Paul 1991:189).¹⁶

4.6.4.1 Amos 5:21

It is interesting to note that on three occasions in Amos chapter 5, Amos spoke of hatred (5:10; 5:15; 5:21). In the first text, Amos pointed out that the elders under trial hated (שנא) anyone who would render a just decision by reproving the one who was guilty (v.10). The implication is that the elders hated justice. Whereas in verse 15, Amos declared the commandment of the Lord, שְׂנֵאוּ רָע וְאָהֲבוּ טוֹב (“Hate evil and love good!”), a commandment that indicated the displeasure of YHWH in the practice of misplaced justice by the judiciary. However, in verse 21, Amos pointed out YHWH’s own hatred, שְׂנֵאתִי מְגִלָּתְכֶם (“I hate ... your festivals”). As Finley (1990:249) rightly observes, the connection between the three references to hatred is quite obvious in that, since the Israelites chose to hate justice rather than evil, YHWH Himself held in contempt their efforts to please Him through their ceremony. On the connection between the three references to hate, Carroll (1992:245-246) writes that, “The people ‘hate’ truth and integrity (5:10) when they should ‘hate’ evil and embrace the good (5:15); Yahweh ‘hates’ their religion.”

¹⁶ For ease of reference, I have captured in the Table below the parallels between Amos 5:21-23 and Isaiah 1:11-15, as identified by (Paul 1991:189):

Amos		Isaiah	
5:21	שְׂנֵאתִי	1:14	שְׂנֵאתִי (נִפְשִׁי)
5:21	עֲצָרְתִּיכֶם	1:13	עֲצָרָה
5:22	עֲלֹת	1:11	עֲלֹת
5:22 (also 5:25)	מְנוּחָתִיכֶם	1:13	מְנוּחָתִי (שְׁוֹא)
5:22	רִיאֵיכֶם	1:11	מְרִאִים
5:23	הַסֵּר מִעָלַי	1:16	מִגֵּד עֵינַי... הַסִּירוּ
5:23	לֹא אֲשַׁמֵּעַ	1:15	אֶיִנִּי
5:21	מְגִלָּתְכֶם (“your festivals”)	1:14	חֲדָשֵׁיכֶם וְמוֹעֲדֵיכֶם (“your new moons and fixed seasons”)
5:22	לֹא אֲבִיט (“I shall not look”)	1:15	אֶעֱלִים עֵינַי (“I shall hide my eyes”)
5:22	לֹא אֲרַצֶּה (“I do not want”)	1:11	לֹא תִהְיֶה לִּי מְנוּחָה (“I have no delight”)

The verse starts with two very strong, but forceful verbs juxtaposed asyndetically in a first-person address, *שָׁנְאַתִּי מְאַסְתִּי* (“I hate, I reject”), with a direct object, *חַגֵּיכֶם* (“your festivals”). The use of the strong verbs in *שָׁנְאַתִּי* (“I hate”), which is a Qal perfect, first person, common singular of the root word *שָׁנָא* (BDB 2010:971), and *מְאַסְתִּי* (“I reject”), a Qal perfect, first person, common singular of the root word, *מָאס* (BDB 2010:588), indicates a shift into a “first-person speech.” The first-person address form, opening this unit of verses 21-27, indicates that YHWH was the speaker in this passage, although the concluding speech formula in verse 27b demonstrates that the prophet conveyed YHWH’s speech (Sweeney 2000:240). The direct object of YHWH’s vexation and extreme rejection was the people’s meaningless festivals—*חַגֵּיכֶם* (“your festivals”). Paul (1991:189) notes that the substantive *חַג* is the technical term originally employed as the name for the three pilgrimage festivals (Exod. 23:14-16; 34:22, 25; see also Sweeney 2000:240). However, the juxtaposition of the two verbs *שָׁנְאַתִּי מְאַסְתִּי* (“I hate, I reject”) in the first part of the statement indicates how unambiguously YHWH detested and abhorred the basic elements of the Israelite cult. Garret (2008:168) also confirms that, “The anarthrous seconding of the first verb with another, near-synonymous verb eloquently expresses the disgust of someone who is weary of something tedious and irksome.” Hence, YHWH’s dissatisfaction and outright renunciation of northern Israel’s feast days was expressed unequivocally in the first part of the text.

The second part of verse 21, *וְלֹא אֶרִיחַ בְּעִצְרֹתֵיכֶם*, (“and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies”), no doubt, again, indicates the intensity of YHWH’s total disgust for the continuous religious errors of the people of Israel. It begins with a conjunctive *waw* plus a negative particle, *וְלֹא*, the combination of which serves to “continue the train of thought begun by the preceding verbs that express negative emotions and serves to intensify the phrase that follows” (Lafferty 2010:61). The word *אֶרִיחַ* is the Hiphil *yiqtol*, first person, common singular of *רוּחַ*, the verb which means “to smell” (Garret 2008:169). However, in this text, it is used in the negative to indicate YHWH’s outright displeasure. Paul (1991:189) puts it more clearly thus:

The Hebrew *לֶרִיחַ בָּ*, a term originally applied to the ‘smelling,’ that is, ‘receiving favorably,’ of sacrifice (for example, Gen 8:21; Exod 30:38; Lev 26:31; 1 Sam 26:19) here extended to apply to the disfavor of the Lord toward Israel’s ‘festal gatherings’ (*עִצְרֹתֵיכֶם*), which were popular assemblies for the purpose of prayer and sacrifice during holidays or times of trouble; see Lev 23:36; Num 29:35; Deut 16:8; 2 Kgs 10:20; Isa 1:13; Joel 1:14; 2:15; Neh 8:18.

Therefore, Amos expressed YHWH’s disapproval of Israel’s solemn assemblies. The implication was that YHWH would not smell the soothing odour of the sacrifices that the people offered to

Him in their solemn assemblies. The question that immediately comes to mind would be, why would YHWH refuse to savour the aroma of the very institution of worship which He Himself established; institutions which had technical significance within the cultic centre.[?] However, from the text, it is obvious that YHWH does not refrain from quickly rejecting with utter hatred any religious institution or gathering that is not fulfilling its purpose. It appears that the people had become mechanical in their religious worship, that the soothing aroma of their sacrifices no longer smelled right before YHWH. What YHWH was more interested in, though, were their hearts, and not their baseless sacrifices. Thus, “the Lord affirms that because their hearts have turned from him and they use religion only as a mechanical means of pleasing (or appeasing) their God, he has no interest in the people’s attachment to the cultic system that he himself instituted” (McComiskey 1992:430). Rather than producing a pleasant smell, Israel’s worship produced a bad smell, which YHWH abhors. Arnold (2012:148) asserts that, “Israel’s current worship, especially vis-à-vis her cultic gatherings for sacrificial purposes, rather than creating a pleasing odor, left a malodorous stench. Hence, the offerings of the rich are unacceptable to Yahweh.”

4.6.4.2 Amos 5:22

Verse 22 begins with *אֲנִי אֶמְעָלֶיךָ* (“Even though you offer me”), a Hiphil *yiqtol*, second person masculine plural of *עלה* preceded by *אֲנִי* which if translated literally, would mean “for if” (Garrett 2008:170). There is much speculation among scholars as to how the interpretation of the introductory particles *אֲנִי* should be done (Hayes 1988:173; Paul 1991:190; Carroll 1992:246; Coggins 2000:131). Carroll (1992:246), for instance, explains that some have understood *אֲנִי* “concussively,” in which case, it would be interpreted (“even if”); while others prefer the “emphatic” interpretation (“surely if”). The third consideration (Coggins 2000:131) is the conditional interpretation of *אֲנִי* which would be (“for if” or “even though”). The argument of the proponent of the concessional interpretation is that since the phrase *אֲנִי* comes after a negative (v. 21), it should carry a concessive function (as in Amos 3:7). However, there is no indication that, “the two words must be interpreted in such a fashion” (Paul 1991:190). For Carroll (1992:246), “whether *אֲנִי* is understood “concussively” (even if) or emphatically (surely if) the interruption by its length serves to underline the contrast between Israel’s intent... and Yahweh’s repulsion.” The conditional interpretation of the particles would be preferred here, that is, “*Even though* you offer... I will not accept them.” The preceding statement indicates that the action of the people did not align with YHWH’s requirement, for their action does not justify their intention.

Consequently, YHWH rejected their sacrifices and offerings completely because their actions were displeasing to Him.

Amos highlighted YHWH's rejection of the three fundamental offerings, which were prescribed in the Law to sustain Israel's covenant relationship with YHWH. McComiskey (1992:481) notes that YHWH declared that he was rejecting with utter hatred,

... Israel's religious observances. Now he expresses this thought in a concise protasis-apodosis structure. He tells them that if they offer whole burnt offerings, grain offerings, or offerings of well-being, he will not take pleasure in them or even regard them.

It must be noted that the aforementioned offerings were original aspects of Israel's Levitical heritage.

In verse 22, there is a repetition of the second person, plural pronominal suffix used to emphasise Yahweh's rejection of Israel's offerings—"even though *you* offer *your* grain offering, *I* (YHWH) reject them" (Lafferty 2012:62). The deliberate use of *you*, *your*, and *I* are quite instructive. With such grammatical devices, the text makes a clear distinction between the action of the audience (Israel) and the reaction of the speaker (YHWH) (cf. Lafferty 2012:62). In other words, the action of the people in relation to their attitude towards sacrifice did not correspond with YHWH's expectations. Hence, YHWH was indifferent to the cultic actions of the wealth and powerful.

It is not unusual to see associate such second person pronominal suffixes with cultic activities and festive celebrations in the biblical text. However, Amos' use of such grammatical devices indicates a disconnection between the people's celebration and Yahweh (Lafferty 2012:62; cf. Jeremiah 1998:103). The implication is that the people's celebrations did not have any positive effect on YHWH whenever Amos used the pronoun, "*yours*" (Lafferty 2012:62).

Klingbeil and Klingbeil (2007:11) describe the foregoing scenario as "a negative divine evaluation" of the people's cultic action, since it was Israel that offered burnt offerings and meal offerings (and any other offering for that matter). YHWH's responsibility was to react at the end of the sacrifice either with a response of approval or a response of disapproval. In Amos 5:22, the prophet presented them with "a negative divine evaluation."

Three offerings were rejected by YHWH in the present text (v. 22). They are עֹלֹת ("burnt offerings"), the מִנְחָה ("cereal offerings"), and שְׁלָמִים ("peace offerings"). The term עֹלֹת ("burnt offerings")

offerings”) is a cognate accusative with the verb עָלָה (תַּעֲלֶה) (McComiskey 1992:431). As one of the Levitical offerings, it was commonly used to refer to the whole burnt offering (Gen. 8:20; Exod. 32:6; Lev. 14:20; Deut. 12:13-14). The phrase מִנְחֹתֶיכֶם (“your cereal offerings”) refers to *gift* (McComiskey 1992:431). Reference to the preceding is found in Jacob’s gift of domesticated animals to his brother Esau (Gen. 32:14-16 [13-15]), as well as Israel’s gift to his son Joseph (cf. Gen. 3:11). However, when it is used with reference to sacrifices, it is viewed as a gift offered to God (Gen. 4:3-5; Num. 16:15, 1 Sam. 2:17, 29). In a specific sense, it connotes grain or cereal offering (e.g. Exod. 29:41; Lev. 2:1; Num. 4:16; see also Lev. 2). The third offering is שְׁלָמִים (“peace offering”). It is interesting to note that שְׁלָמִים is used here in the singular. It is rendered several times in different translations of the Bible as peace offerings (RSV), fellowship offerings (NIV), or offerings of wellbeing (NRSV). Paul (1991:191) has noted that although this is the only instance in the Bible that the familiar שְׁלָמִים (“sacrifice”) appears in the singular, there is no need to doubt its authenticity or to amend it to the plural (שְׁלָמִים). The peace offering was accompanied by a communion meal in which a sacrificial animal was eaten (see Exod. 20:24; 24:5; cf. Lev. 3; cf. McComiskey 1992:431). Hence, מְרִאֲכָלָם (lit. “your fattened calves”), when used together with שְׁלָמִים, connotes “the peace offering of your well-fed calves.”

In the Levitical prescription, the burnt offering, which involved the sprinkling of blood, after which the pieces of the animal were burned, was the most frequently offered sacrifice (McComiskey 1992:431). The grain or cereal offering, on the other hand, accompanied the animal sacrifices. One handful of the grain was burned, while the priest kept the rest. Peace offering or offering of wellbeing was a communal offering which required animal sacrifice and was followed by a communal meal. All these were YHWH’s instituted offerings for the Israelites to make atonement as well as to engender fellowship and harmonious living between YHWH and his people.

However, from our text, Amos expressed YHWH’s refusal of their offerings. The “negative divine evaluation” is expressed by the two verbs in the verse. The first אָרְצָה (לֹא) (“I will [not] accept”) is an ordinary cultic verb, which is the most frequently used term during cultic activities to express either the acceptance or rejection of a sacrificial gift (Lafferty 2012:63). The root רָצָה is a frequent cultic word employed in Leviticus when the officiating priest declares whether a sacrificial animal or some specific ritual action, is acknowledged by YHWH (Wolff 1989:263; Jeremias 1995:102-3; Arnold 2012:141; Lafferty 2012:63). Amos’ use of the language of the cult here is quite revealing, as it does indicate a clear disapproval.

Lafferty (2012:63) points out Amos' use of the borrowed cultic vocabulary and the way it is used by the priest in Leviticus:

A major difference between the priestly use of the verb in Leviticus and YHWH's use of it here in Amos is that, while the priest issues a ruling on an individual gift, animal, or prayer, YHWH rejects Israel's entire ritual activity, and does so using traditional cultic vocabulary.

The first negative statement by YHWH is followed immediately by a second verb *לֹא אֶבִיט* ("I will not look upon"), which expressed YHWH's rejection of not only the burnt offering and the grain offering, but also the peace offering or offering of well-being and fatted animals. Paul (1991:190) points out that the root *בט* (Hiphil) is never used in a cultic context except in the present text (cf. Wolff 1977:263). For Wolf (1977:263), the word customarily designates watching and paying attention to people (cf. Pss. 13:4 [3]; 33:13; 80:15 [14]). Put more succinctly, the negative expression of the word renders the religious activities of the people unacceptable (Lafferty 2012:63). Lafferty (2012:63) also writes that, "The use of the verb [as it occurs in the statement] recalls the phrase, *וְלֹא אָרִיחַ* in v.21, with its connotation of '(not) accepting'." Furthermore, YHWH refused to subscribe to the people's sacrifices or look at them. Thus, the roots *בט* and *רוח* in both cases fit the context in that they expand the idea of verse 21, to show that YHWH now used his sense of sight to signify his refusal of the gifts of the people.

It is noteworthy that even though the offerings were an important aspect of Israel's Levitical heritage, they had lost their value before YHWH, as Israel had made them to become ends in themselves. The very core aspects of the law—love for one's neighbour, caring for the poor and needy, and caring for the widows and orphans—had been trampled underfoot. The people (wealthy class and officials) thought that by their continued observances of religious rituals YHWH would be appeased and would consider them favourably. Notwithstanding,

The presence of the poor and oppressed, however, witnessed to their failure to please God. The neglected widow and their poor child in dirty rags were theological statement condemning the attitudes of the oppressors. Amos viewed the scriptures as objects of God's hatred because they furthered the spiritual ignorance of the people by giving them a false sense of security (McComiskey 1992:432).

4.6.4.3 *Amos 5:23*

Yahweh had not only rejected Israel's feast days and solemn assemblies (v.21), burnt offerings, grain offerings, and meat offerings (v. 22), He also rejected their songs and the lyrics of their music. The first part of verse 23 reads, *הָסֵר מֵעָלַי הַמָּוֶן שִׁירֶיךָ* ("Take away from me the noise of your

songs”). The statement starts with הִסֵּר, which is the Hiphil imperative masculine singular of the primitive root word, סָר, translated literally as “to turn off” or “take away” (Strong’s 1996:98; Garrett 2008:171).

The next word, מֵעָלַי, which is a prepositional phrase with מֵן and עָל, in a first person common singular suffix (Garrett 2008:171), could be translated “from upon me.” The text reveals YHWH’s continuous denunciation of, not only the people’s cultic practice but also also, their music and songs, which had become a heavy burden on him. Garrett (2008:171) argues that the proposition עָל gives an impression that the people’s music had become an unbearable burden in the ears of YHWH. Lafferty (2012:64) affirms that “YHWH commands the people to remove their music and singing מֵעָלַי ‘from upon me,’ thus suggesting that the weight of songs and music are heavy objects that are a burden to him.”

It is troubling to note that YHWH regards the sound of their songs as “noisy” (הִמְיוֹן), which according to Paul (1991:263), is a word also used to describe the din of battle (see 1 Kgs. 20:13). Besides, it is used in the text as a singular masculine construct noun modifier to indicate a “noisy” sound. In its simple form, the meaning of the term הִמְיוֹן ranges from “murmur” to “tumult,” hence, Paul (1991:263) has suggested that the use of הִמְיוֹן here, most likely implies the sheer, ecstatic tumult of the singers at the harvest festivals. Whereas both Weiss (1995:207) and Lafferty (2012:65) suggest that, given its association with singing, the allusion to הִמְיוֹן would be to the volume of the songs, whichever way it is viewed, it is obvious from the text that Israel’s music or songs, regardless of how melodious and beautiful, was only “noise” in the ears of YHWH. The imperative particle הִסֵּר (“take away”), which is a command, only serves to paint the outright rejection of Israel’s singing, which was perceived as noise by YHWH.

A further corroboration of the divine disapproval of Israel’s noisy songs is the second object of YHWH’s disgust. The phrase, וְזִמְרַת נָבָלֶיךָ (“even the melody of your lyres”), which begins with the emphatic *waw*, suggests that YHWH would not listen to the people’s songs or even to their music. זָמַר in its root זָמַר does not necessarily refer to songs, but to the playing of notes, or as Paul (1991:192) has suggested, “it refers to music accompanied by an instruments.” Hence, Weiss (1995:208) claims that the noun זִמְרָה connotes the music or melody that is played. Whereas נָבָל, as used here, could be identified variously as a harp, lute, or lyre. Wolff (1989:264) describes נָבָל as “a stringed instrument, apparently with an angular yoke and a bulging resonance chamber.” He

notes that נָכַל is the oldest and most important stringed instrument in Israel and that it could have as many as ten strings (Wolff 1989:264). Even though music and the singing of psalms were essential aspects of Israel worship, in this instance, it became something that YHWH detested and would not listen to. Thus, “Music, which generally contains beautiful harmony and melodies with a soothing effect, is now experienced as burdensome by Yahweh” (Wax 2013:193). YHWH had decided not to listen to the music of their harps. The phrase אֲשַׁמַּע לִי is a Qal *yiqtol*, first common singular of שָׁמַע, which is translated “to hear” (BDB 2010:1033). According to Garrett (2008:172), the use of the first person *yiqtol* does not indicate a simple statement of the future, but rather, a forceful refusal to listen to such music. The implication of the preceding is that YHWH had made up his mind not to listen to such “annoying and soulless” music.

Interestingly but sadly, Amos expressed YHWH’s total rejection and dissatisfaction of Israel’s cultic activities through the use of anthropomorphic expressions to portray YHWH’s total shutting off, of his senses of smell, sight and hearing to Israel’s sin. Paul (1991:192) asks the reader to “note that this total disavowal of the cult is expressed anthropomorphically by the Lord’s shutting off, so to speak, several of his own senses: smell (v. 21, אֲרִיחֹלָא), sight (v. 22, אֲבָיִט), and hearing (v. 23, אֲשַׁמַּע לִי).” Du Preez (2001:95) describes it as YHWH holding his nose, shutting his eyes and closing his ears to Israel’s ceremonies, indicating YHWH’s total disinterest and rejection of Israel’s religious activities, which had only become a mere jamboree and distraction.

4.6.4.4 Amos 5:24

In Amos 5:24, Amos confronted his audience with the demand of YHWH for justice and righteousness, in order to maintain order in society (Hayes 1988:174). Coggins (2000:132) refers to the demand as a positive requirement against which the condemnations in the previous verses are to be set. וְיָגֵל (“but let...roll on”) is from the root גָּלַל (“roll down, roll along”) (McComiskey 1992:432). Verse 24 begins with a *Nifal* imperfect יִגֹּל (“let roll down”), preceded by an adversative *waw* וְ (“but”), with a jussive force, and contrasts the soulless religiosity in verses 21-23 with the desired ethical and moral action (Garret 2008:172; Leliovskiyi 2015:16). In other words, the jussive form of the verb accentuates the contrast with the message of the three preceding verses (i.e. vv. 21-23) (Lafferty 2012:66). Indeed, the harsh tone of “I will not” that marks the preceding verse is replaced by a positive and encouraging tone of “let justice roll down...” (Osugwu 2016:113). YHWH is therefore seen as issuing a command for the people to take a specific action that would

result in a positive outcome. The verb גָּלַח (“let roll down”), according to Lafferty (2012:66), “anticipates the water-based similes that follow.” Interestingly, the root of the preceding verb is גָּלַל, which is also the root of other Hebrew words for “water” such as גַּל (“wave”) (Job 38:11; Ps. 42:8; Isa. 51:15; Jer. 5:22; Ezek. 26:3; Jonah 2:4; Zech. 10:11); גַּל, “fountain” (Song 4:12); and גֵּלְיָה, “spring” (Josh. 15:19; Ecc. 12:6; cf. Paul 1991:192; Lafferty 2012:66-67). Paul (1991:192) describes the use of the term here as an interesting play on the word.

In a chiastic structure, YHWH, therefore, demanded that Israel should let מִשְׁפָּט (“justice”) roll down like waters and רִצְדָקָה (“righteousness”) like an ever-flowing stream (Leliovskiy 2015:16). In a beautifully structured parallelism, the prophet Amos declared the expectation of YHWH to Israel. Here the prophet used a pair of metaphors to bring to climax his message: כַּמַּיִם מִשְׁפָּט וְרִצְדָקָה כְּנָחַל אֵיתָן (“justice like water; and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”) (Lafferty 2012:67). Hyman (2002:4) observes that in the poetic style used, “the parallelism of 5:24 is not only chiastic (ABBA), it is based on the contiguity of the key words “justice (מִשְׁפָּט)” and “righteousness (רִצְדָקָה).”” According to Hyman (2002:4), the two words מִשְׁפָּט וְרִצְדָקָה (“justice and righteousness”) appear together back-to-back to form a word pair. The word pair of מִשְׁפָּט וְרִצְדָקָה as used by Amos, here, varies in meaning from the way it was used previously in the book. As established earlier in 4.7.5 of the present work, the prophet made use of the word pair in only three verses—Amos 5:7; 6:12b and 5:24, but only in Amos 5:24 did Amos use מִשְׁפָּט וְרִצְדָקָה (“justice and righteousness”) as a positive command.

Andersen and Freedman (1989:485) had earlier asserted that the word pair of מִשְׁפָּט and צִדָקָה has a negative tone in both 5:7 and 6:12b, whereas, in 5:24, it has a positive expression. Further, in 5:7, as in 6:12b, the statements have a negative tone and attacked those who turned (the fruit of) מִשְׁפָּט and צִדָקָה into wormwood and thrust them down or placed them on (literally, “to”) the earth. מִשְׁפָּט וְרִצְדָקָה are related in the context of Amos’ oracle. Amos’ use of מִשְׁפָּט “justice” in this context, “encompasses reparation for the defrauded, fairness for the less fortunate, dignity and compassion for the needy” (Finley 1990:251). Garrett (2008:172) views מִשְׁפָּט “justice” in the context of the text as referring “to putting an end to the oppression of the poor,” while רִצְדָקָה (“righteousness”), on the other hand, connotes the conditions that make justice possible. These conditions, according to Finley (1990:251), include “attitude of mercy and generosity, and honest dealings that imitates the character of God as He has revealed Himself in the Law of Moses.” In other words, רִצְדָקָה connotes “living in a right relationship, treating everyone with fairness, generosity and equity”

(Hollaway 2016:1). Thus, the prophet explained that what YHWH wanted to see was not the elaborate “expression of devotion in the form of self-serving religious activity but a new state of social order” (Garrett 2008:173).

The prophet further used two imageries namely מים (“water”) and נחל (“wadi”), along with an adjective איתן (“ever-flowing”), to describe how justice and righteousness should be established in the land. According to Hayes (1988:174), the metaphors used to describe justice and righteousness draw on the imagery associated with water. The use of the imageries was no accident however, since a central motif of the Fall festival was the coming of the autumn rains and the renewal of streams (Hayes 1988:174). Finley (1990:251) also remarks that the association of justice and righteousness with the imagery of water could have come from Amos’ vast knowledge of the importance of water for the land through his profession as a sheep dealer and a cultivator. Amos, therefore, must have evaluated the devastation caused by drought (1:2; 4:7-8; 7:4) “and the life-giving properties of the hills that are saturated with water from springs and streams (9:13)” (Finley 1990:251). Consequently, מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה (“justice and righteousness”) in 5:2, are depicted as liquids that engendered healing for the land. The first metaphor, מים (“water”), in reference to justice (Lafferty 2012:69) is a generic term that is used to describe both sea and fresh water. It represents a major body of water that does not dry up or evaporate. It is meant to bring cleansing and refreshing. In the same token, YHWH demands that justice should roll down like water to bring healing, refreshing and cleansing to the land continuously.

Various suggestions have been offered about the proper translation of נחל. Niehaus (1992:432), for instance, has observed that the English word “stream,” used for נחל in some translations, does not sufficiently capture the idea that ‘a “wadi” is a subterranean channel that transports torrents of water during the rainy season and dries to a trickle during the summer and is characteristic of the Middle East’ (see also Lafferty 2012:69; Wax 2013:194). However, with the introduction of the adjective איתן (“ever-flowing”), “wadi” assumes a fresh meaning. Wolff’s (1977:264) rendering of the adjective איתן to mean “flowing voluminously” has become a widely accepted position (cf. Coggin 2000:132; Wax 2013:194). The implication of Wolff’s translation is that even though a “wadi” is seasonal by nature and has the tendency to dry up during the dry season, the use of the adjective איתן (“ever-flowing”) suggests that righteousness should be allowed to flow voluminously and unimpeded. For Hammershaimb (1970:90), איתן could also be expressed as a

“permanent” or “lasting” phenomenon (cf. Andersen & Freedman 1989:528). The implication of the preceding translation is that unlike the stream which only flows in the rainy season, the virtue of righteousness from the people should be allowed to flow continuously. Both translations of the אֵתֶל correspond with Amos’ message in our text, which is, that justice and righteousness, like a wadi that never runs dry, should be allowed to flow abundantly and perpetually so as to sustain life in a society that was starved of the water of justice and righteousness (Coggin 2000:132).

The value of the imagery of water employed by the prophet vividly portrays YHWH’s expectation of justice and righteousness to flourish within the community of the covenant people. From the foregoing exegetical analysis of Amos 5:24, Amos’ message is clear. Amos 5:24 is considered the pivot around which the whole book revolves. In the verse, the message of social justice, which is the central theme of the book, is succinctly presented in the command, “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Snyman 2012:19; Udoekpo 2017: xvii). Amos 5:24 is a call for a sound social order that will engender right human-human relationship and human-God relationship. This study agrees with Hyman’s (2002:4) position that, “Amos 5:24 with its complex construction is a plea, an expressive exhortation to the people of Israel, in particular to the members of the upper class, to act justly and righteously instead of corruptly and immorally.” Hyman (2002:4) further argues that within the context of prophetic chastisement, Amos 5:24 is a call for social justice. Besides, 5:24 serves as a reminder to reject social injustices, which the prophet had consistently warned against in his oracles, and embrace justice in order to avoid imminent doom (Hyman 2002:4).

Consequently, Amos 5:24 brings to light the reason YHWH was against the elaborate cultic activities in the previous verses (vv. 21-23). Having seen through the motives of his people, especially the upper class, YHWH proclaimed his utter rejection of their public display of worship and festive assemblies, not because those cultic activities were wrong in themselves, but because they were not founded on justice and righteousness. As a result, the people of Israel, and especially the upper class, failed to meet YHWH’S expectation of acting with מִשְׁפָּט וצֶדֶק (social justice) since they mistreated the disadvantaged in the society (Lafferty 2012:71). It is clear that Amos 5:24 did not deem the cultic worship in the previous verses unnecessary and undesirable. On the contrary, Amos maintained that, “the emphasis on ritual can be corrupting and inconsistent with the Lord's direction toward moral behavior” (Hyman 2002:4). In other words, bringing offerings

to the Lord and singing ritual hymns are acceptable only when they accompany social actions that are consistent with the Lord's commandments on social justice and righteousness (Hyman 2002:4).

4.7 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

In the first part of this chapter, some historical issues in the book of Amos were critically examined. The issues explored bordered on the authorship of the book, the person and profession of Amos, as well as the historical context behind the oracles of Amos. Hence, the historical-critical method was used to analyse the theme of social justice in Amos 5:21-24. The historical-critical method also played a critical role in the analysis of the Life-setting of eighth century BCE Israel in relation to the historical, socio-economic, and socio-religious conditions at the time of the composition the book of Amos. An overview of the theme of social justice in the book of Amos was presented, focusing on some passages in Amos that deal with the theme of social justice such as 2:6-8; 3:9-15; 4:1-3; 5:7, 10-12, 14-15; 21-25; 6:4-7, 12.

From the exposition of the preceding texts, it is clear that the sin that Amos vehemently condemned was the social corruption of justice and righteousness. Prominent among the sins against YHWH was the absence of social justice, for instance, as the rich trampled over the poor and took the little that the poor had. The powerful in northern Israel were accused of using their power to abuse those who were doing right under the law. They accepted and took bribes, and turned away those in need. Amos further revealed that the wealth of the nation was concentrated in the hands of the upper class, who in turn, marginalised the others and dispossessed them of their property. Consequently, Amos pronounced, in God's name, the imminent judgement of YHWH if the people refused to change.

The last section of the present chapter presented a critical and exegetical study of our principal text, Amos 5:21-24, especially in relation to Amos' call for social justice. The text revealed YHWH's utter disgust and rejection of northern Israel's worship activities since they (the powerful and the rich) had failed to allow *מִשְׁפָּט וצִדְקָה* ("justice and righteousness") or social justice to flow perpetually through every segment of the society. In view of the high levels of social injustice and religious hypocrisy prevalent in northern Israel, YHWH pronounced his utter disgust and rejection of the people's worship activities. The powerful and rich people of northern Israel failed to allow *מִשְׁפָּט וצִדְקָה* (in this case, social justice) to flow perpetually through every part of the society.

The text reveals that the people were more concerned about their religious activities at the cult than building a just society. Such religious activities, according to Amos, were false and hypocritical, because they focused on the self-interest of the powerful and not on the true worship of YHWH (5:21-24; cf. Groenewald 2019:6). Amos, speaking on behalf of YHWH, made it clear that the continuous offering of sacrifices, singing of songs and meticulous observance of religious rituals for the sake of religion, are not true religion. Hence, as Groenewald (2019:6) argues, performing the preceding religious acts, when the society was corrupted by social injustices, is nothing but hypocrisy, and rendered their worship invalid. Consequently, any religious or cultic activity that is not accompanied by social justice, in YHWH's view, is unacceptable.

The crux of the text (5:21-24) is that YHWH is deeply concerned with social justice and therefore elevates it above Israel's religious expression. In that context, the oracle of Amos highlighted YHWH's response to the cry of the poor, oppressed and marginalised, who are YHWH's objects of concern and care. YHWH desires that the poor and the vulnerable receive justice from the powerful, whether in business dealings, political actions, or judicial decisions (Simundson 2005:155; cf. Mamahit 2009:187).

It is important to see how the present text with its theme of social justice can be read in a twenty-first century context like the Nigerian context. Thus, a contextual reading of Amos 5:21-24 will be carried out in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

THEME OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN AMOS 5:21-24 IN RELATION TO THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, a re-reading of the theme of social justice in Amos 5:21-24 will be done from an African biblical hermeneutical perspective vis-à-vis the role of the prophetic ministry in The Apostolic Church LAWNA, Nigeria in order to promote social justice in the Nigerian society. The ancient text of Amos 5:21-24 will be brought into dialogue with the modern Nigeria context. The chapter will probe the relevance of the oracle of Amos to the Nigerian society. A biblical reflection from the perspective of the prophet Amos on the socio-economic and socio-religious situation in the eighth century BCE Israel will be carried out vis-à-vis the current situation in Nigeria.

5.2 AFRICAN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Chapter 4 analysed the text exegetically in order to determine what the text meant to the original audience. A sound hermeneutical endeavour takes into consideration two major objectives—the scientific understanding of the text during the period it was first used, and secondly, the interpretation of that text as understood by the interpreter within his/her interpretive context. In other words, it is the responsibility of the interpreter of a biblical text to decipher what a particular text meant to the original hearer and what the text means to the contemporary reader. In coming to terms with what a particular biblical text meant to the immediate audience during its production, the interpreter is conscious of the difference in time, language and culture of the original audience vis-à-vis the context of its application. Thus, it is not just sufficient to uncover what biblical texts meant to the original audience, but it is important also to understand what such texts say to the present reader within his/her particular context. The approach that helps the interpreter do this is called the contextual approach (West 1993:12).

The Bible is a living and dynamic text which speaks to every age and time, but it, no doubt, speaks to people differently and contextually. Hence, the Bible must be understood in the African context with African culture and worldview in mind. In the past, Western interpreters monopolised biblical exegesis and interpretation. In recent times, however, African scholars, on the continent and in its Diasporas, have engaged biblical texts against their contextual background. Thus, the goal of such

a hermeneutical and contextual approach, “is to establish a move from what the text meant to its original audience to what it means to Africans in their context” (Nyirawung 2013:1). It is in line with the preceding understanding that the present chapter seeks to apply the method of African biblical hermeneutics to analyse the theme of social justice in the Amos 5:21-24. The message of Amos, as documented in the Hebrew Bible, not only did speak to the situation of northern Israel and other nations mentioned therein, but its message also relates to the African context. Agboluaje (2007:1) therefore has rightly affirmed that the Old Testament prophets “still speak to our age with tremendous challenge.”

Using African biblical hermeneutics or what Ukpong calls inculturation hermeneutics, will, hopefully, help us to relate the text of Amos 5:21-24 to the Nigerian context. Inculturation hermeneutics is defined as an approach to biblical interpretation that makes the African social cultural context the subject of interpretation (Ukpong 1995:3; 2001:24 Adamo 2005:6). Inculturation hermeneutics makes “the past to collapse into the present, and exegesis fuses with hermeneutics” (Ukpong 2002:18). The preceding approach means that the contemporary interpreter of biblical text reads and interprets a given text through the lens of contemporary reality. This is because no interpretation of a particular text is done in a vacuum. All interpretations, according to Adamo (2005:6), are carried out with a particular context in mind. Given that no particular context can claim monopoly of a particular biblical text, it is reasonable to assume that the text under investigation can be related to the Nigerian context.

Ukpong views the notion of culture in a more inclusive way as the totality of life of a human community, which includes, the political, economic, social and religious ways of viewing life. For Ukpong, inculturation hermeneutics adopts a holistic approach to culture. In that case, the Bible is read in the religious and economic, social and political contexts of Africa (Ukpong 1995:12, 2001:24 see Masenya (Ngwan’a Mphahlele) 2016:1). Such an approach, according to Masenya (Ngwan’a Mphahlele) (2016:1), enables Ukpong to acknowledge the contribution of the ordinary and the commonplace in knowledge production. Moreover, within the sphere of inculturation hermeneutics, a variety of justice issues such as gender, race, social, economic, political and religious oppression and issues of indigenous cultural identity, customs and practices, are raised.

Consequently, African Biblical hermeneutics insists that an interpreter of a scriptural text does his or her analysis from the perspective of the African worldview and culture (Ukpong 1995:3; Adamo

2005:6). Put more precisely, “African Biblical hermeneutics is rereading the scripture from a premeditatedly Afrocentric perspective” (Adamo 2015a:6; 2015b:33). Rereading the biblical text Afrocentrically would indicate that one (that is, the African reader/interpreter) has accepted his or her socio-historical situatedness. The approach allows one to take seriously the plight of the African people in all that they do, which includes their hermeneutical endeavours (Masenya (Ngwan’ a Mphahlele) & Ramantswana 2015:4). For the purpose of this research, the Nigerian context is the immediate context within the broader African context that is under investigation.

Over the years, African scholars, on the continent and in the Diaspora, have examined the relevance of the Old Testament to their contemporary contexts. Using the socio-historical, socio-economical, socio-religious and socio-political context of Africa, scholars in the Nigerian context have related the text of the Old Testament to present-day issues. In particular, scholars have probed the relevance of the book of Amos, which is the focus of the present work, specifically, of the theme of social justice, to the contemporary socio-political, socio-economical, and socio-religious situation in Nigeria (Agboluaje 2007:175; Ugwu 2007:209; Oguntoye 2007:216; Olanisebe 2007:22; Opajimi 2009:235-242; Folarin & Olanisebe 2014:243; Okunoye 2014:10; Udoekpo 2017:114; Umeanolue et al 2018:182). The goal of this study is not to rewrite what has been written by these scholars, as such, it will present a brief comparison of the socio-historical context of Amos and the Nigerian context with a view to challenging the prophets of The Apostolic Church, LAWNA Nigeria to confront social injustice in Nigeria.

5.3 NIGERIA’S SOCIO-POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

5.3.1 The socio-political context

Clearly, Amos’ oracles, among other things, decry the broken political structures in Israel. The situation eventually gave rise to the distinction between the extremely wealthy and extremely poor masses as well as between the oppressor and the oppressed.

The socio-political situation in Nigeria from the time of independence in 1960 has not been a stable one. From the bloody coup d’état of January 1966 to the bloodless coup of 1983 which marked the beginning of the longest and most brutal military rule in the country, it is clear that Nigeria has suffered a great setback economically (McGowan and Johnson 1984:5). The long years of military intervention did incalculable harm to the national psyche and polity. Had the military not

completely corrupted the whole system, perhaps, Nigerians would have had a different story to tell today. Kukah (2010:5) graphically paints the devastating effects of the consistent military intervention on Nigeria thus:

By dabbling into politics, military lost its professional sense. By resorting to banditry and looting of the nation's wealth, it lost its concentration and the moral authority to administer. By creating a climate of violence, it succeeded in traumatizing and militarizing the nation. By abandoning the vocational duty post, it has left its flanks open and various foot soldiers have therefore moved in searching for territory to conquer and control... The social cost of military rule can be calculated on the basis of the new identities which have merged: tribal war-lordism, secret societies, cults, ritual murders, human traffickers, street children, area boys, to name a few.

With the inauguration of the democratic regime in 1999, Nigerians were optimistic that things would turn around for good, but now in the twenty-first year of a new democratic rule, the prospect seems dim, especially given the untold hardship being experienced by the masses and the inhuman character of the subsequent administrations. As Udoekpo (2017:118) has rightly noted, the instability in political leadership has given rise to different shades of social vices ranging from “incessant tension, rivalries, Boko Haramism, drugs and child trafficking, abduction of Chibok school girls, tribalism, military intervention, abuse of office, bribery and corruption and the widespread violence of fundamental human rights.”

The democratic dispensation in Nigeria has not been much different from military dictatorship. Good governance and development, which are two basic dividends of a democratic government, are found only in the realm of imagination in Nigeria. The situation, we are told, is “due to the flagrant disregard for the rule of law and due process occasioned by the quest for personal advantage” (Ogundiya 2010:205). Greed and self-aggrandizement continue to be the identifying marks of many politicians in the land. Sadly, the form of democracy that is being practiced in Nigeria is bereft of social and economic responsibility, which of course has hampered the country's development (see Ogundiya 2010:201-208). The electoral system in the country is manipulated by an inconsiderate political class which has hijacked the process for its selfish ambition. The selfish “winner takes it all” attitude of most of the politicians dictates the country's political landscape. Violence, hate, thuggery and buying of votes are recurrent decimals at all levels during elections, beginning from the registration of voters to the actual voting. Even when there is relative peace and a conducive atmosphere for the exercise, registration forms and the materials would be in short supply or presumably lost in transit, while ballot boxes are stolen by politicians. Rigging has become part of Nigerian politics. The political parties in power are unwilling to relinquish power

due to what is called the “sit-tight syndrome.” In the bid to perpetuate themselves in office, incumbent politicians use any means possible to entrench themselves in office, even against the wishes of the masses.

It is unfortunate that after twenty years of democratic government, Nigerians are yet to enjoy the dividends of democracy (Mohamed 2019:1). The rich continue to become richer while the poor continue to slide into an irredeemable abyss of abject poverty. The national coffers are systematically looted by greedy politicians at the echelons of power. Recently, over \$10.3bn was reportedly recovered as looted cash and assets from some corrupt politicians by the current government (Aljazeera 2016:1). The Nigerian people are continually exploited, robbed and dehumanised by these gangs of criminals in political garb. As these ravenous politicians who are never satisfied, continue to live in affluence, the majority of Nigerians continue to go hungry and endure trauma in a country that, by world standards, is rich and well endowed. Ogunديya (2009:240) sums up the atrocities of these greedy and selfish politicians who feed fat on the nation’s wealth that was meant for the common good of all Nigerians thus:

Nigerian political elites, almost without exception, have an insatiable capacity to steal from the commonwealth and leave the people more impoverished. Unrestricted by any real accountability to the electorates, many of those who come to power through fraudulent elections have committed abuses against their constituents and engaged in the large-scale looting of public resources.

The situation of greed and corruption, among others, accounts for the continuous affluence of the political class at the expense of poor masses. Although Nigeria got her independence from British colonial rule in 1960, the reality in the country shows an unfortunate twist. Although Nigeria became free from “external colonialism,” she continues to suffer from “internal colonialism,” which is even worse than her experience under the former colonial masters six decades ago (Uchegbue 2013:144). Since her independence, Nigeria’s wealth and political power have been controlled and maintained by a small group of rich and powerful Nigerians at the expense of the mass majority of the entire population (Uchegbue 2013:144). It has been argued that the corruption of leadership by the political class is the bane of Nigeria’s socio-political and economical breakthrough (Abogunrin 2007:396). In other words, the perpetuity of corruption and embezzlement by political elites is the reason that many Nigerians and the nation as a whole are unable to enjoy economic buoyancy. The corruption on the part of public officials has plunged the country into an unfortunate situation of scarcity of jobs, gross retrenchment, abject poverty and the meagre provision of infrastructure.

5.3.2 The socio-economic situation

The deplorable political situation described above created economic inequalities. The trend of corruption, abuse, and self-seeking power in the country's socio-political institutions resulted in economic exploitation.

Like the Israel of Amos' times, Nigeria is rich in abundance of human and natural resources. Many of its mineral resources are yet to be tapped and annexed (Olanisebe 2015:484). However, socio-economic life in Nigeria has suffered much degradation. Many Nigerians are experiencing hardship, which has led to the insecurity of life and property in the country. Many employ crooked means to get what they want; they claim that such means makes life a bit meaningful for them. Those at the helm of affairs are insensitive to the plights of the people. The economic sector is unhealthy. The cost of living soars every day, and many are so poor that they live below the poverty level. Nigerians continue to experience gross misappropriation of public funds in all facets of the society. Embezzlement is open and rampant. Many people see nothing wrong in looting properties and amenities placed there for the common good, and most of the time, they are never brought to judgment. There does not seem to be a middle class in the Nigerian society as the gap between the rich and poor keeps widening. As in the days of Amos, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. This causes the poor to seek any corrupt means to fend for themselves and their families. Good education is reserved for the children of the rich who could afford it, and the public schools which have become the solace for the poor are in a deplorable state, while the government does nothing about it due to bad leadership.

Furthermore, social injustice has become a cankerworm which has eaten deep into the fabric of our society. The national wealth and amenities are never evenly distributed. The environmental situation in the oil producing areas of the country also is deplorable, even though Nigeria owes her wealth to these areas. Bribery and corruption have become a way of life. It is unsurprising then that Nigeria is always listed among the most corrupt nations of the world (Olokor 2019:1). It is difficult to get things done without having to give bribes, especially in government offices, higher institutions of learning, in encounters with the security officials on the highway, and so forth. Whereas the government workers are poorly paid, members of the senate and the house of representative allot huge salaries to themselves to the detriment of the poor masses.

Nigeria's political and socio-economic situation that is described above appears to resonate with that of Israel during the eighth century BCE, which Amos addressed. Hence, the message of Amos to ancient Israel is deemed relevant in addressing the scenario in the Nigerian society, described above.

5.4 AMOS 5:21-24 AND THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

In the previous chapter, an exegetical analysis of Amos 5:21-24 was carried out to unpack the meaning of the text in its context. The historical-critical method was applied to enhance the understanding of the text in its historical context. To understand fully the meaning of a text for today, first, it is imperative to uncover what the text meant to its original audience. In this regard, the historical-critical method is helpful in calling the interpreter of biblical texts to a diligent study of biblical texts and to faithful interpretation. Hence, Amos' call for social justice in the context of his eighth century BCE northern Israel in Amos 5:21-24 was foregrounded through a justice-seeking lens. Our task in this chapter is to understand how the same text can be related to the Nigerian context.

5.4.1 Amos 5:21 and the Nigerian context

In view of the high level of injustice displayed in northern Israel, which was marked by the oppression and exploitation of the poor, and the insensitivity of the rich and powerful to the plight of the poor, Amos, in 5:21 declared YHWH's utter disregard and distaste for the flamboyant but hypocritical religious festivals performed by the people. As earlier shown, the two verbs שָׂנֵא ("to hate") and מָצָא ("to reject") in 5:21 form a hendiadys that amalgamates YHWH's denunciation of northern Israel's religious festivals with its solemn assemblies (Wax 2013:188). Yahweh's denunciation of their festivals and his disapproval of the solemn assemblies form part of the section that is generally included in the prophetic criticism of the cult in Israel (Klingbeil & Klingbeil 2007:171; Lafferty 2010:61; Udoekpo 2016:3; Boloje 2019:3).

The prophet's criticism exposed the failure of the people of Israel to understand the symbiotic relationship between the vertical dimension of their relationship with YHWH and the horizontal dimension of their relationship with their fellow Israelites. Boloje (2015:1) argues that, "If the cult is understood to be the vertical dimension of the law and the ethics its horizontal dimension, one would notice that these dimensions go together, both are expressions of God's will." Therefore, if

there is a strain or dysfunction in the horizontal dimension (social justice, etc.), then, the vertical dimension (worship, offering, and sacrifice) will be grossly affected and vice versa (Boloje 2015:1; see Groenewald 2019:9). In other words, for Amos, YHWH's denunciation of and utter disgust for Israel's extravagant and flamboyant festivals and sacrifices (which in the sight of YHWH were hypocritical) was as a result of the people's insensitivity to the pains and plight of the weak and helpless in the society.

The text indicates that YHWH did not only שנא ("hate") and מאס ("reject") their festivals, he also would "take no delight" אָרְיֵה in their solemn assemblies. As noted in the previous chapter, the verb אָרְיֵה ("take no delight") refers to the action of smelling, a cultic word, which in its ordinary context would indicate the "smelling of sweet aroma." However, in this instance, rather than produce a sweet aroma to YHWH, Israel's solemn assemblies had only become an irritating odour to him. The people of Israel probably thought that by the continuous observance of religious activities and the patronage of the worship centre, they could manipulate YHWH to bless them even though they had neglected the inner requirements of the covenant (Finley 1990:249). What YHWH required, above all else, according to Amos, was for the Israelites to seek the promotion of social justice in all dimensions; this involved the fair treatment of the poor, orphans, widows, and the oppressed in the community.

If Prophet Amos were to live in Nigeria today, he would still have spoken the way he did to his audience, for the sins that Amos condemned in his day are very much alive in the contemporary Nigerian society. Folarin and Olanisebe (2014:259) agree that the situation of Israel at the time of Amos and the situation in the contemporary Nigerian society are similar. They argue that, "oppression of the poor and the righteous, immorality, rejection of divine messages, pretentious religiosity, corruption in business, and idolatry, mark the two situations" (Folarin & Olanisebe 2014:259). Similarly, Babalola (2014:91) highlights some of the indicators of social injustice in Nigeria, which include police brutality, genocide, use of child soldiers and child suicide bombers, poverty, discrimination, bullying, child labour, corruption, child prejudice, oppression, racism, cartelism, and sexism.

Umeanolue (2018:187) confirms that as in Amos' time, the situation in the Nigerian society is such that land, money and wealth rotate in the hands of the "high and the mighty" to the detriment of the poor. The implication is that the poor and the vulnerable survive only at the mercy of the few

wealthy individuals. The population of Nigeria, according to the recent census, is above 200 million, but only about 10 percent controls the entire wealth of the country (Umeanolue 2018:187), thereby, leaving the vast majority of the populace in abject poverty. Umeanolue, in comparing the social injustice in Amos' time and the contemporary Nigerian society, identifies the various dimensions of social injustice in the contemporary Nigerian society such as socio-economic injustice, socio-political injustice, socio-religious injustice and socio-judicial injustice (2018:187).

In relating the text of Amos 5:21-24 to the Nigerian context, therefore, one basic correlation between the two contexts is that "both the audience of Amos and the contemporary Nigerian society are religious to a fault but their religion is not positively reflected on their moral" (Folarin & Olanisebe 2014:243). Mbiti's (1999:1) observation that Africans are notoriously religious is true of Nigerians, as religion permeates every aspect of the society in Nigeria. Nigerians are so religious that they would hardly take any major step in life without consulting the Supreme Being. Like the audience of Amos' time, the overwhelming enthusiasm of many worshippers at the centres of worship in Nigeria is quite remarkable. Unfortunately, though religion is flourishing in Nigeria, social injustice, corruption and poverty are on the increase. One would not have expected that a nation as zealously religious as Nigeria, would be classified among the three most corrupt nations in the world. As Udoekpo (2017:121) has shown, the situation in contemporary Nigeria is characterised by the "proliferation of churches, as well as a pluralism of religions (in particular Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion [ART])."

Like the audience of Amos' time who were condemned for their religious patronage of the cult and their flamboyant lifestyle at the cultic centre without any proof of morality, most religious¹⁷ centres in Nigeria are also heavily patronised by worshippers who use religion as a mask to perpetuate their evil. The religious hypocrisy that Amos condemned in northern Israel is similar to that of the Nigerian context. Most of the vices and unethical behaviours being witnessed are carried out by the same people who claim to be highly spiritual at the worship centres. Religion is expected to turn a society around positively and help improve a person's behaviour and lifestyle (Adeyanju and Babalola 2017:24-25). However, the reality in the Nigerian society is that religion has produced the opposite. Rather than produce the fruit of righteousness, what is evident is the fruit of "inequality, injustice and atrocities that one rarely encounters in the godless Scandinavian

¹⁷ Three religions are recognised officially in Nigeria namely Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. The emphasis here is on Christianity.

societies” (Adeyanju & Babalola 2017:24-25). Indeed the religious corruption in Nigeria is at an alarming stage.

Amidst the social injustice and moral decadence during Amos’ times, Amos revealed to us a conspicuously religious people. Amos saw a people who were zealous in the worship of YHWH and actively involved at the various worship centres in Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba (Amos 5:1-17, 5c, 27), but who, ironically indulged in the unethical behaviours proscribed by the law. Amos ministered to a people who were religiously zealous but ethically and morally deficient. He delivered his message to a people who were enthusiastic to appear always before YHWH but who never sought the welfare and liberation of their fellow human beings. For this error, Amos unequivocally announced YHWH’S rejection and abhorrence of their religious feasts and solemn assemblies (Amos 5:21). For Amos, the religiosity of the people of his time was nothing but hypocritical.

The Nigerian situation is not different. It is common to see people patronize worship centres in their droves. Presently, churches continue to spring up at every corner in the cities, and even in the villages. A recent survey in Abuja, the national capital, has shown that there are about 1078 churches in the city (Otuibo 2003:67). Nigeria ranks among the nations with the highest number of churches in the world (Adeyanju & Babalola 2014:24). A good example of the proliferation of churches is found on the Lagos-Ibadan expressway in the south-west of the country. It is gradually becoming the headquarters of many churches. There are so many churches along the highway that there is often heavy traffic congestion on what is supposed to be a freeway. In the last decade, the expressway has become a sort of Jerusalem to many Christians.

Some of the world’s largest single church auditoriums are in Nigeria. Recently, a church in Abuja, Dunamis Christian Centre, built a 100 000-seater auditorium, becoming the second 100 000-seater auditorium after that of The Apostolic Church in Lagos. There are also churches with large tents seating about 1.5 million people and others between 700 000 and 1 000, 000 people such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, respectively. Worshippers visit these worship centres in their hundreds of thousands for vigils, crusades, breakthrough services, and conventions. What therefore is worrisome is that many of those in attendance are top government officials, political leaders, and people in privileged positions who are behind the oppression and injustice in the society. Most of these people go to church with the

aim of getting God's blessing, but religion is seen only as a tool for carrying out their selfish purpose. Udoekpo (2017:122) reveals that at some of the worship centres, occasional violence that sometimes result in the kidnapping of children, loss of lives and property have been recorded. Disturbingly the perpetrators of such violence justify their unethical actions as 'worship.'

More worrisome is the fact that most of the so-called prosperity preachers use religion to suit their own selfish ends and purpose. These are fraudulent people having religious aura, who preach nothing but prosperity, and promise healing and miracles. They propagate a religion devoid of sacrifice and suffering. Many of the preachers and promoters of prosperity gospel control the minds of their worshippers, exploiting them for their own selfish purposes (Abogunrin 2007:274). They manipulate religion for ulterior motives, and this ugly trend has resulted in the abuse of accepted religious norms and traditions. The quest and craze for prosperity and material wealth is the major factor in the deplorable state of religion in the Nigerian society today (Abogunrin 2007:274). Some pastors and priests of most of the denominations have now become morally bankrupt and mislead the people with their religious garbs. Corrupt men and women are everywhere in the churches. They donate large sums of ill-gotten money, perhaps, thinking that by so doing, they could bribe God, as ancient Israel did, copying other religions.

Unfortunately, religion has been used dangerously and it continues to be used for political advantage. From all indications and in different ways, God, the focus of religion, has been reduced to a vehicle for material success. Religion, therefore, seems to lose its central goal of stimulating a spiritual communion with God. The value of religion has been eroded to serve mundane and selfish purpose of men and women who exploit it in different ways. Religion is no longer an instrument of hope, but a way of seeking political and economic power.

The question that most critical observers ask therefore is, with the proliferation of churches in Nigeria and with the high level of religious activities that take place in each of these centres, why is the country still in a deplorable state? Why are corruption, social injustice, kidnapping, oppression, and violence on the increase in the country?

5.4.2 Amos 5:22 and the Nigerian context

Amos' criticism continues in the subsequent verses of 5:22-23, in which Amos further announced YHWH's sharp displeasure at Israel's religious activities, this time, in "a concise protasis-apodosis

structure” (McComiskey 1992:431).

Verse 22 says,

כִּי אִם־תַּעֲלוּ־לִי עֹלֹת וּמִנְחֹתֵיכֶם לֹא אֶרְצֶה וְשִׁלְמִם מְרִיאֵיכֶם לֹא אֶבִּיט: (“Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon”). Remarkably, the three basic offerings which were to be “a soothing aroma to Yahweh” (Lev. 1:13; 2:9; 3:16) have turned out to be unpleasant to YHWH (Finley 1990:250). Originally, the three offerings, עֹלָה (“burnt offerings”), מִנְחָה (“cereal offerings”), and שִׁלְמִם (peace offering), were intended to enhance a smooth vertical relation between YHWH and his people, but in the context of Amos 5:22, they (the offerings) had lost their value before YHWH. According to Finley (1990:250), the preceding offerings, when presented properly and with an attitude of devotion on the part of the worshipers, were received by YHWH as a sweet smelling savour that brought atonement for sin (Lev. 1:4) as well as expressed love and devotion to YHWH.

However, Amos expressed YHWH’s disapproval of the offerings because the people (especially the upper class and the elites in northern Israel) continued to oppress their neighbours and refused to seek justice (Finley 1990:250). As noted earlier, YHWH’s utter displeasure in and rejection of these offering was not because the offerings were not prescribed by YHWH himself, rather, the offerings were offered hypocritically in this case. In view of the injustices perpetuated by the offerers of these sacrifices, YHWH would have nothing to do with their offerings. YHWH let them realise that because love and concern for their neighbours were lacking, he would not accept their offerings, no matter how abundant or robust the offerings were. The audience of Amos would have thought that by patronising the worship centre and presenting their offerings to YHWH, whilst continuing in their evil of exploiting the poor and vulnerable amidst them, they could appease YHWH to favour them. They were wrong, as YHWH further declared that he would not look upon the offerings of their fatted animals. The phrase, לֹא אֶבִּיט (“I will not look upon”), confirms the negative divine evaluation of the people’s offerings. The verb expresses YHWH’s determination to ignore the offerings as well as the offerer, in this instance, the rich and powerful people of northern Israel who thought that by their offerings, they could compensate for the injustice they meted out to their neighbours.

In addition to Amos’s announcement of YHWH’s disgust for and rejection of Israel’s festivals as well as his displeasure for Israel’s solemn assemblies, YHWH announced that he would not accept their offerings. However, the rejection of the offering must not be understood to mean that the

offerings were wrong or not needed. Rather, what was condemned was the abuse of the offerings by the worshippers. For YHWH, the offering is not as important as the offering of love, justice and righteousness that must reflect in their relationships. Like the audience of Amos, most worshippers in the Nigerian context have used their offerings and gifts to show off their wealth, most of which was acquired either through fraudulent means or through shady businesses. In some instances, some politicians came to church to offer stolen money in order to canvas for votes during the election into public offices. Udoekpo (2017:122) writes that:

One challenge or abuse at worship centers that we often ignore—perhaps due to indifference to poverty or to greed—is the distribution of cash, cars and expensive material item to a few religious leaders by public office holders in the name of worship, when teachers and civil servants in their countries, local government areas, states and nations have not been paid basic salaries for months.

Most churches today have become fund-raising centres, where various types of offerings are being raised under the guise of meeting the needs of the church. Such offerings include first-fruit offering, thanksgiving offering, redemption offering, breakthrough seed, prophetic seed, battle seed, offering for new beginning, most of which end up in the pastor's pocket. In such congregations, the pastor or the leader lives in affluence, while the majority of the congregation wallow in their misery. Unfortunately, because of their greed, such pastors do not care how some of their members make the money which they bring to church.

Abogunrin (2007:276) cites a startling incident that took place in a particular church in Lagos State, Nigeria, which was published in News Magazine, Vol. 26, No. 23 of June 2006. According to the story, a young hotel worker stole millions of Naira from his employer and donated it as a seed offering to his church because the pastor of the church had earlier told the congregation that anyone who wanted a hundredfold return from God should donate money to the church. Eventually, the young man was arrested and he confessed that he brought the (stolen) money because he wanted the hundredfold return from God that his pastor promised. When confronted, the church leader agreed that the church received the money, but he refused to return it on the grounds that the donor was not forced to give (Abogunrin 2007:276). The incident is one out of the numerous cases that confirm the greed and selfish attitude displayed by both the worshippers and the leaders in some churches in Nigeria. It is common, as in the case of the audience of Amos' time, to see worshippers give so passionately in churches, not because they love God or want to do His will, but because they believe that they can appease God to help them fulfil their own selfish agenda. Worse still, is the case of some church leaders who have become fetish and diabolical to

the point of raising offering (money) through devilish manipulation (Abogunrin 2007:275). Regarding that scenario, Abogunrin (2007:275) writes:

The way many of them raise money is quite dubious. You can go to a church with a car and good shoes, but return home barefooted, and with nothing. After donating all the money a person has on himself [or herself], he is encouraged to sow seed by parting with his car, shoes, bag and jewelleryes.

Clearly, the gross abuse that accompanies how the offerings are given and administered in some of the churches in Nigeria shows that the message of Amos relates well to the Nigerian context. The God of heaven would certainly not accept such an offering neither would he legitimise its wrongness.

5.4.3 Amos 5:23 and the Nigerian context

In the verses examined above, Amos announced YHWH's utter rejection of Israel's festival and solemn assemblies (v. 21). He also announced the rejection of their offerings (v. 22). In verse 23, Amos now noted YHWH's repulsion of their songs and the music of their lyres. The verse begins with a harsh expression, הָסֵר מֵעָלַי הַמָּוֶן שְׁגִירָה ("Take away from me the noise of your songs"). Songs and music were part of the liturgy of worship, expressing the devotion of the people to YHWH as shown in Exodus 15:1-18; Deuteronomy 31:30-32:43; and Judges 5 (Finley 1990:250). The sharp injunction to "take away from me" by YHWH portrays a sense of urgency, which "demands that the worshippers should immediately stop their celebration" (Osuagwu 2017:147).

The pronouncement clearly exposes the extent of the degradation that accompanied Israel's religious activities. Songs of praise that should bring them into a harmonious relationship with YHWH had become repulsive to YHWH. In fact, YHWH regarded not only their songs as repulsive, but also the sound of their songs as a "noise." The sound of the cry of injustice and oppression of the poor masses by the powerful and wealthy had overshadowed whatever sound was being made at the worship centre. To YHWH, the songs that came from the cult were nothing but noise. Osuagwu (2017:147) explains that, "the metaphor of noise was used to describe the unacceptable behaviour of the people which contravenes Yahweh's relationship with the people of Israel."

Thus, the very 'soul' of their music, which was the practice of social injustice, had been snuffed out. What remained, according to Wax (2013:193), was nothing but a "soulless music." Even though the people showed great zeal and devotion outwardly through their music and songs, as far

as YHWH was concerned, the lack of genuine commitment to issues of social justice only made their music, nothing but “noise.” The verse closes with another severe injunction, *וְזִמְרַת נְבִלָיִךְ לֹא אֶשְׁמָע* (“and I will not listen to the melody of your harp”). Since Israel would not cultivate a sound social relationship as stipulated in the Torah, YHWH also would not listen to their so-called melodious music. The more the people produced music and melody in their worship of YHWH, the more they displayed their hypocrisy. In view of their “disharmonious social relationships” (Wax 2013:193), YHWH strongly abhorred their songs and would not listen to the music of their lyres.

It is important to emphasise that also Amos did not have an issue with festivals and offerings in themselves or hate music as such. His critique of their songs and music was due to the soullessness. We have made the point that the positive role of music in the liturgy of Israel cannot be overemphasised. However, since the very essence of worship had become mere formalities and the music made to YHWH were rendered by the very people who prevented justice and fair play in the society, then, Amos’ sharp denunciation of Israel’s music is understandable. The people of Israel thought that by continually making elaborate worship and singing beautiful and melodious songs at the worship centre, they would wheedle YHWH’s favour and he would overlook their sins of oppressing the poor and the vulnerable among them.

Rather, YHWH unequivocally told them to take away from him the noise of their songs. YHWH also condemned their music and refused to listen to the melody of their harps because the people of Israel did not match their faith with their ethical responsibilities. No doubt, singing songs and playing musical instrument are critical aspect of church life. As Mattera (2017:1) notes, “Worship and music have always been an integral part of both the Christian and Jewish faiths.” Modise (2018:13) therefore describes Christianity as a singing faith.

The above observation is true also of Nigerian Christianity. The Nigerian worshippers express their faith in God majorly through songs and music. Nigerians are loudly expressive as far as the use of musical instruments is concerned. A visit to any of the churches in Lagos will reveal the sophistication of musical instruments in use. Churches invest heavily in the purchase of sound systems and musical instruments to the point that it has become a competition among some pastors as to which church has the best equipment (Ogunkunle 2017:7). As Amos mentioned the noise of songs and the melody of harps during his own time, the noise of musical instruments is heard also

in most places of worship in Nigeria (Umeanolue 2018:187). Praise and worship night events are held in most churches and ministries with large attendance. It has been observed that musical concerts, praise nights, are more largely attended than any other church program such as prayer meetings, Bible study or evangelism.

Many churches organise great meetings solely as musical concerts. A case in point is the hosting of the annual world's largest gospel musical concert tagged "The Experience Lagos" by the House on The Rock Church in Lagos. The event, which debuted in December 2006, is an annual interdenominational gospel concert featuring both local and international artists with state of the art musical equipment. The event, which holds every December, has been pooling worshippers from all over the country and abroad. With a consistent record of over 700,000 (seven hundred thousand) attendees, which include top government officials and church leaders, the event has worshippers singing throughout the night (Pulse.ng 2018: n.p.).

Similar to The Experience Lagos is the world's longest non-stop annual gospel musical concert inaugurated in 2012 by the youths of The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) to honour the General Overseer of the church, Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye. The event which is tagged "Marathon Messiah's Praise" was organised with two objectives, "as a birthday gift to appreciate God for His mercies and faithfulness over the life of Pastor E. A. Adeboye, and as a gospel musical event that will birth a new pattern of worship in this dispensation," (Temidayo 2019:1). The event is organised in such a way that the number of hours of praise corresponds to the age of Pastor Adeboye. It started with 70 hours of Marathon Messiah's Praise in 2012 when Pastor Adeboye turned 70 years' old. Since then, the number of hours of praise increase by one hour every year (with each hour representing a year of the General Overseer's life). The concert, which takes place at the youth centre of the Redemption Camp along Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, records an attendance of over 100,000 worshippers who gather to worship God with all manner of musical instruments. These two events only illustrate the several gatherings of worshippers who sing praise with various musical instruments.

The question that comes to mind is how does the music at these numerous centres translate into the desired social change in Nigeria? Like the audience of Amos, it appears that most of those who go before God do not submit to the transformational power that true spiritual and acceptable worship produces. Regarding the purpose of praise and worship in the church, Munroe (2000:10)

asserts that church worship is to help change and transform the worshipper. He explains that when we gather to praise and worship, the transformational power of the Lord should change us from inside out, both as individuals and as a community (Munroe 2000:10). In other words, it is expected that when we come together in praising and worshipping God, we should leave changed, with a fresh revelation of who God is – holy, good, merciful, loving and just.

Most of the elites who sing and make music at the various worship centres are still involved in corruption, embezzlement of public funds, impoverishment of the poor, and ostentatious living at the expense of the poor masses. The Nigerian audience therefore must be made to know that God hates and denounces any act of worship and music which are replacements for the right form of personal and social relationships (Agboluaje 2007:183).

5.4.4 Amos 5:24 and the Nigerian context

Amos 5:21-23 expresses YHWH's negative evaluation of Israel's religious activities. Amos, speaking on behalf of YHWH, lashed out "against those who have become rich at the expense of the poor and against the public – but hollow – displays of piety" (Thomas 2019: n.p.). The point has been made earlier that the negative divine evaluation in vv. 21-23 was not against the cult itself, but against its abuse. YHWH was angry because the same people who trampled on the poor, robbed the innocent of justice in court, and lived in luxurious buildings (which they built from the ill-gotten money from the poor), were bold enough to come before YHWH at the worship centre to present their offerings, making loud music in pretence of their piety. The act only amplifies their religious hypocrisy. Thus, regarding the verbs used to express, in strong terms, YHWH's displeasure of the cult as stated in verses 21-23, Romero (1997:23) writes:

In fact, Yahweh's rejection of the cult is expressed in terms of its unacceptability to the senses that underscores, in a somewhat anthropomorphic fashion, the gravity of the sin of cult abuse. For example, in verse 21 the verb translated as "take delight in" generally applies to the sense of smell. In verses 22-23 the verbs "to look favorably" and "listen" round out the sensory basis for the assault.

If the abuse of the cult therefore caused YHWH to shun the people, what then did he require of them? What was that missing link that strained their relationship with YHWH to the point that he could no longer listen to their worship? The answer to the preceding questions lies in the verse that holds the key to the entire message of Amos—verse 24. Amos 5:24 holds the key to what YHWH actually values, which contradicts the religious sacrifices and feasts that the people value. YHWH's expectation is his positive demand for justice and righteousness from the people.

Osuagwu (2016:113) notes that the harsh tone in “I will not,” in the previous criticism of the cultic activities, is replaced by a reconciliatory and positive encouraging tone in וַיָּגֵל כַּמַּיִם מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה כְּנָחַל אֵיתָן (“but let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”).

The first word “but” indicates a contrast between what is to follow the previous negative divine evaluation of the people’s hypocritical religiosity. For Amos, the missing ingredients of justice and righteousness must be allowed to flow perpetually and unhindered. Amos 5:24 is a divine call to the ruling class, the high and mighty, who have neglected the plight of the vulnerable in the community, to promote social justice in the society. The centrality of the verse to the entire message of Amos’ call for social justice is understood against the background that earlier in the chapter (Amos 5), Amos had rebuked Israel for turning מִשְׁפָּט (“justice”) into wormwood and bringing צִדְקָה (“righteousness”) to the ground, and juxtaposed this with his call to establish מִשְׁפָּט (“justice”) at the gate.

The call for מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה (“justice and righteousness”), as noted in the previous chapter, demanded a “change of direction from the status quo of maintaining the hierarchy in society, to a new era where the wellbeing of the vulnerable in society is paramount” (Amissah 2016:155). As far as Amos was concerned, cult and in fact the religious life of the people should be evaluated in connection with social justice. Furthermore, life is not polarised into secular and sacred (Finley 1990:107). The people’s actions in the marketplace or the way issues are judged at the gate must reflect their religious practice. In other words, whatever affects their relationships with their fellow citizens would affect their relationship with YHWH. Therefore, Finley’s (2015:1) argument that when the people of Israel defrauded the poor, they were viewed as defrauding YHWH himself is valid.

Amos not only demanded that justice and righteousness be allowed to permeate the entire life of the society, he uses the metaphor כְּנָחַל (“like a wadi”) together with אֵיתָן (“ever-flowing”) to indicate the perpetuity and the intensity of the demand. Hence, for Amos justice and righteousness must be allowed to flow unimpeded “like a wadi that never runs dry,” whether in dry or raining season, and like a “voluminous” stream (Wolff 1977:264; Wax 2013:194). The demand for justice and righteousness to roll down in the text is less a divine supply (contrary to Berquist’s 1993:57) than human performance. It is more a human responsibility than a divine responsibility. I agree

with Amissah (2016:155) that justice and righteousness which are advocated in Amos, and particularly in our text, constitute social justice. For Amissah (2016:155; see also Mamahit 2009:67; Hyman 2002:4), מִשְׁפָּט וִצְדִיקָה (“justice and righteousness”) cannot be the sole action of YHWH as it is also demanded of human beings. The preceding argument is premised on the fact that elsewhere in his oracles, Amos established human beings played an active role either in the abuse of מִשְׁפָּט וִצְדִיקָה (“justice and righteousness”) or in its establishment. For instance, in Amos 5:7 and 6:12, the people were condemned for corrupting מִשְׁפָּט וִצְדִיקָה (“justice and righteousness”). In Amos 5:15, they were commanded to establish מִשְׁפָּט (“justice”) at the gate.

The point therefore is that if human beings can be condemned for corrupting מִשְׁפָּט וִצְדִיקָה (“justice and righteousness”) or commanded to participate actively in establishing מִשְׁפָּט וִצְדִיקָה, then מִשְׁפָּט וִצְדִיקָה should not be regarded as the sole action of YHWH (Amissah 2016:155). Although מִשְׁפָּט וִצְדִיקָה (“justice and righteousness”) are a trait and gift from YHWH, they are required of human beings and must be allowed to permeate every aspect of their lives. For Amos, the phrase מִשְׁפָּט וִצְדִיקָה implies social justice. In his demand for social justice, YHWH expects the rich and the powerful, who oppress, cheat and dehumanize the vulnerable to allow justice and righteousness to roll down in abundance and perpetually.

The verse of Amos 5:24 reports Amos’ demand to let justice roll down like water and righteousness like and ever-flowing stream. In the previous verses 21-23, Amos, speaking on behalf YHWH, had denounced and rejected the people’s hypocritical and meaningless worship. Amos evaluated the religious life of his audience and found that it lacked ethics and morality. YHWH would have nothing to do with the people who only worship him with their mouths and not with their hearts. He would not accept people who kept coming to him with elaborate worship and sacrifices while oppressing the poor, denying the poor masses of justice at the gate, mistreating the widow and living in large houses built with ill-gotten wealth. Amos declared that religious expressions, no matter how elaborate and flamboyant, would not buy YHWH’s favour. What YHWH demands therefore is the fruit of justice and righteousness in their relationship with each member of the society. Any worship that is not backed by a real concern for the poor is nothing but a mockery of God.

Amos’ positive call for justice and righteousness becomes a relevant charge in addressing the sin of social injustice in the society. The call for justice and righteousness is clearly understood as a

call for social justice. As stated earlier in this work, human beings have a role to play in the restoration of justice and righteousness in the society. In other words, restoring justice and righteousness should not only be seen as a divine initiative rather, it is an action involving human beings. The understanding is that for any vertical relationship (human–God) to be intact, the horizontal relationship (human–human) must not suffer any strain. Consequently, the perpetrators of social injustice in the Nigerian society, like the audience of the northern Israel prophet, are called upon “to partner with [God] in establishing social justice, which involves actions done on behalf of the disadvantaged” (Amissah 2016:173).

Authentic worship therefore must be matched with acts of kindness, justice, and righteousness. These virtues, as demanded by Amos, must be allowed to flow voluminously and perpetually, like a stream, to marketplaces and the margins of the society. Udoekpo (2017:125) helps to put this section in perspective. He observes that, “In Nigeria, where religion has been repeatedly used as an instrument of oppression and characterised by religious violence, division, and acts of injustice rather than redemption, unity, and salvation, citizens should turn to the prophecy of Amos.”

Thus, the call for the role of prophetic ministry in The Apostolic Church LAWNA, Nigeria should be extended to promote social justice in the Nigerian society.

5.5 PROPHETIC MINISTRY IN TAC LAWNA AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN NIGERIA

As mentioned in the objective of the present work, the major thrust of the thesis is to engage the prophetic ministry of Amos to challenge prophets of TAC LAWNA to rise up as the mouthpiece of God to confront the social injustices that are prevalent in the Nigerian society today.

Over the years, not only has the book of Amos become an inspiration for contemporary struggles against social oppression and injustice, the life and ministry of the prophet himself has become a model for pastors/prophets and crusaders of justice and righteousness today. In view of the prevailing social injustice and oppression in the Nigerian society, the present day prophets are called upon to be as fearless and audacious as the eighth-century BCE Israelite prophets were, in raising their voices both within and outside the faith community to demand for a right and just society.

Notably, the situation in Nigeria today can be likened to that of northern Israel during the time of Amos, in terms of the alarming levels of social injustice. The exploitation and oppression of the

poor masses by the upper class of the society is unjustifiable, while the widening gap between the rich and the poor seems to be unbridgeable. Poverty and corruption at various levels of societal life are also on the increase.

The message of Amos therefore becomes relevant in efforts to conscientise the people of Nigeria to make the country a better place where people can live together in peace and harmony. In view of the prevailing social injustices and other social vices which are fast eroding the moral values in the Nigerian society, it is important to engage all available resources and machinery to address and reverse the current situation and maintain order. Consequently, the church, which is regarded as light and beacon of hope of the society, needs to lend her prophetic voice to challenge the ruling elites, by demanding for social justice in the land. As the salt and light of the earth, the church is summoned to influence the course of events of the world in order to create a just society where social justice and peace can reign (Adekoya 2018:52).

The question therefore is can we find prophets today who will rise to challenge the prevailing social and economic injustice in the Nigerian society? The present study therefore seeks to challenge the prophets of The Apostolic Church in Nigeria to deploy their prophetic ministry to speak out in God's name against the social evils of the day. There is a need for prophetic voices that will not only promote social justice in Nigeria but also speak out on behalf of the victims of injustice.

The Apostolic Church LAWNA through her prophets is therefore called upon to come out of her hiding and become the moral beacon of hope that she is designated to be. Similarly, Pillay (2017:2) has called on the church in Africa not to limit herself within her four walls but to go public with her message of social transformation and change. The church therefore has a prophetic role to play in salvaging the nation from her abysmal fall. As the conscience of the nation, she is saddled with the responsibility of ensuring and fostering social justice through her God-given message of justice and righteousness. The church is to be at the forefront of denouncing any policy and programme that seeks to tamper with ethical values and cause economic devastation in the society. On the other hand, she is to support "the state where it implements policies and programmes which are in agreement with the deepest values of truth, justice, peace and human dignity" (Naude 1996:255).

The mandate of the church is to be the salt and light of the earth, which means she is expected to act as an agent of social change and transformation by preserving morality, seasoning human

behaviour, and beaming her searchlight on the evils of corrupt practices and other societal ills (Nwaomah 2007:14). Contrary to the question of whether the church should concern herself with matters of social justice (Bosch 1991:401), the consensus among scholars is that the church has a mission to ensure the sustainability of social justice in the land by confronting unjust practices and acts of injustice. Although the church should not have any active role in partisan politics, as Meyer (1991:11) has rightly argued, she can infiltrate politics with the love, principles, spirit and power of Christ. Thus:

[the church] does not take sides [in politics], except for the poor, oppressed and suffering; it takes sides in the sense of championing the poor regarding the gospel's demands of change in structures towards justice, equality, peace, compassion, reconciliation and restitution (Meyer 1991:11; see also Nwaomah 2007:14).

It is important to remark that though the church in Nigeria has not been completely silent on issues of social justice, her voice has not been loud enough. I agree with McEntire (2018: n.p) that the church is expected to be at the forefront of social action by using her spiritual authority to engage in spiritual battle against the powers behind social injustice and raising her voice in solidarity with the voiceless in the society.

Given the abovementioned prophetic role of the Church in stemming the tide of social injustice in Nigeria, the present work focuses specifically on The Apostolic Church, LAWNA Nigeria, and in particular, calls on the prophets of this denomination to use their prophetic ministry to demand for social justice in Nigeria. The reason for the choice of the context by the researcher is twofold. Firstly, the researcher is not only a member of the TAC, he is also an ordained pastor, and one who has been troubled by the inaudible character of the church's prophetic voice on national issues that relate to social justice. Secondly, as reported in Chapter 3 of this study, The Apostolic Church Nigeria is a leading Pentecostal church in the nation, with branches in almost all the cities and villages of Nigeria. TAC is arguably one of the largest denominations in the country. It has the world's largest church temple in Lagos which is the headquarters of The Apostolic Church Nigeria with a sitting capacity of 100 000 worshippers at a time (Vanguard 2011). Given her size and presence, the church should be able to influence the country positively through her prophetic ministry; but that has not been the case.

As a denomination, the church believes firmly in the ministry of the apostles and prophets as part of the ascension leadership gifts to the church in Ephesians 4:11-12. According to the doctrinal belief of the church, the government and administration of the church are on the shoulders of the Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers (TAC Ministers' Manual 2009:2). Of these five-fold ministry gifts, the office of the prophet is significant in the running of the affairs of the church. Hence, the prophetic ministry has played a vital role in shaping and growing the Church in Nigeria.

Sakpo, the first prophet of The Apostolic Church LAWNA, asserts that God certainly speaks today through His prepared and sanctified vessel – the prophet (Sakpo 1988:14). Prophets in TAC LAWNA are ordained ministers of God who are called and set apart with identifiable gifts of prophecy to declare the mind and will of God to the people. Hence, prophets are regarded as the mouthpiece of God in the church and society (Sakpo 1988:14). Through their prophecies, they guide, instruct, and direct the leadership of the church in making any administrative decision. The prophets also are charged with the role of calling people to a right walk with God. The question to ask is: To what extent have the prophets of The Apostolic Church LAWNA stood as agents of social change within the Nigerian society?

Prophets in TAC LAWNA are charged with the responsibility not only to ensure that God's people walk in obedience to God's will, but also invoke God's judgment on those who are disobedient to God's instruction. Like the eighth century prophets, they are to ensure that in the society, inequality, exploitation and oppression of the poor, the widows and the orphan, corruption and perversion of justice as well as a general disregard for the law of God, have no place.

The situation in the country does not permit the church to ignore the socio-political and economic injustices that are rampant in society. Hasting (1985:24- 25) states that, "the church is to be aggressive... in condemning sin, in advocating for justice, and in fighting 'the battle of the poor, the hungry...' against a system that 'too often turns deaf ear to their appeals'." Like Amos' the prophetic ministry of TAC therefore should be involved in dealing with the problem of injustice and oppression in the quest for socio-economic liberation in the country.

The Old Testament prophets, especially the eighth century prophets, did not confine their prophetic ministry to the cultic centres, but exercised their prophetic calling to address national issues with a view to producing social change (emancipation). The question therefore is where are the Amoses

of our time who will roar in God's name against the prevalent social injustices in the Nigerian society? It is not enough for prophets of The Apostolic Church LAWNA to use their prophetic searchlight within the church; they are to stand also as the spiritual and moral conscience of the nation. Callaway (2011:1, in Uchegbue 2013:141-154) asserts that the church should not distant herself from the society. Rather, she is to live out her calling as the light, salt and moral beacon of the earth.

Going by the definition of a prophet, as one who is called and commissioned by God to declare His message to the people, a prophet is an authorised spokesperson for God in whom a divinely communicated power resides (Folarin 2004:11). In other words, a prophet is one who functions as a descending intermediary between God and the people he or she is sent to. Prophets do not speak of themselves but say what they are commanded to say. The Old Testament offers a clear understanding of the function of a prophet. The prophets of Israel were called of YHWH to announce YHWH's word. The prophets spoke for YHWH and their messages carried the authority of the one who had given the message (Folarin 2004:11), which makes the prophets essentially intermediaries between the human and divine worlds, as noted above.

In short, prophets are channels through whom divine messages reach the ordinary world and through whom humans can gain direct access to the divine. This understanding thus makes prophecy a social phenomenon. The prophets of Israel were involved in the social, economic, religious and political life of the people of their day. They were actively involved in shaping the course of their society. Folarin (2004:11) identifies five roles of the prophets. Although his discussion is not comprehensive, it offers a summary of the roles. The roles are interpretation of divine will, prediction of the future, advocacy, social criticism, and inspired leadership (Folarin 2004:11). Prophets therefore are God's agent of transformation in any society. Prophets are God's conscience in the society within which they live. Hence, it is the role of the prophet to conscientise the people on what is the demand of God in a given period.

Over time, prophets of TAC have played significant roles in both the spiritual and social transformation of the members. The prophets through their prophetic ministry have warned the people of God to shun the oppression and social injustice that pervade the Nigerian society. TAC Prophets have been at the vanguard of preaching against the oppression of the poor and the needy in the church. Fatokun (2017:12) states that the Lord had warned his people, through prophetic

injunction to be honest, just and caring, and not to be self-indulgent. On several occasions, the prophets have warned the members of the church to avoid taking or giving bribes to secure favour in their business dealings (Fatokun 2017:12). Similarly, Akindele (2018:12) recalls an instance when God warned the saints to treat others well, giving them the value they deserve as individuals created by God in his image and never to assume that certain groups have more rights or more value than others.

The observation of the researcher is that although the prophets of TAC LAWNA do speak against issues of social justice, corruption, poverty, inequality in Nigeria, such messages have only been heard by the body of believers within the four walls of the church. The powerful outside the church who should also hear such a message have not been reached sufficiently. Carter's (2000:113) argument is appropriate here. Carter (2000:113) contends that if the contemporary church would adopt the tradition of the Old Testament prophets of persuading the government to do the right things, upholding justice and righteousness, then, she needs to raise her prophetic voice louder to give direction and to challenges the wrongdoings of the leaders (see also Mbachirin 2007:311). In view of the prevailing social injustice and corruption in the society, the prophetic ministry of the church should not remain silent, since the church is called to be a public witness through its prophetic role in the society (Ishaya 2017:89).

It is important, therefore, to engage the prophetic ministry of Amos to challenge prophets of TAC LAWNA to take their message of social justice to the powerful in the society and become a voice to the voiceless. TAC LAWNA prophets should use their prophetic ministry to convey the will of God and to unsettle the rich and the perpetrators of social injustice by insisting that society upholds social justice. As the mouthpiece of God, the prophets of TAC LAWNA should revisit their theology of sharing an 'inward-looking' message that seeks to focus only on the body of believers and consider an 'outward-looking' message which seeks to influence the public audience.

5.6 AMOS' POSITIVE CALL FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE (AMOS 5:24)—A MODEL FOR PROPHETS IN TAC LAWNA

The ministry of Amos during the eighth century BCE is an inspiration for contemporary prophets in TAC LAWNA, Nigeria. Amos was clearly called by God and he spoke unapologetically and courageously in God's name to challenge the socio-economic injustices that prevailed in the eighth century BCE Israel. An analysis of the text of Amos 5:21-24 uncovers the issue addressed by the

prophet—that justice and righteousness must permeate the lives of the Israelites; and according to YHWH, such a disposition was more important than the practice of the cult. This message, which promotes compassion towards one’s neighbours as indicative of one’s regard for Yahweh, flows throughout the Old Testament passages that emphasise the importance of just and righteous behaviour for the Israelites.

Amos 5:24 captures the core message of the entire book. In the verse, Amos shows that true worship of God and social justice are inseparable (Umeanolue 2018:186). Decades ago, Kelly captured the implication of the preceding statement in his commentary on Amos 5:21-24, saying, “Amos caught the vision of a just society, a society in which religion was no longer a matter of rites and ceremonies, but where the true service of God was the service of the poor and the oppressed” (Kelly 1973:84). For Amos, the God of justice is not found in wealthy religious festivals where justice is neglected, but he demands equality among human beings.

The prevailing situations of social, political and religious ills during Amos’ time attracted the prophet’s attention, and in no fair words, he condemned the evil practices of the few high-class citizens, possessed with inordinate desire to acquire wealth for selfish purposes at the expense of the masses and then later turn to hide under a “false” religion. Abusing their place and power and thinking more highly of themselves than they should because of a sense of superiority, Amos reduced them to the degradable level of ordinary “cows of Bashan.”

Amos therefore raised his voice in protest against the religious and moral corruption of his day. He warned of national judgment on those who refused to change their ways. Amos then became the first prophet to consider social morality a factor in national destiny (Kaufman 1960:365). Amos vehemently condemned the sins of exploitation and oppression of the poor and needy (Amos 4:1; 5:1, 8:4, 6), corrupt and degenerate religious practices (Amos 2:4, 6, 8; 4:4), corruption of justice and honesty (Amos 5:7, 10; 6:12), self-indulgence (6:4), and general disregard for the law of God (2:8; 8:5). In dealing with the sins of the Israelite society, Amos warned of impending judgment (2:5, 13-16; 3:2, 11-15; 5:25-22), but he also called the people to repentance (4:12-13; 5:4-5). Amos insisted that true religion and biblical moralities are inseparable. He therefore called the people to “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24).

The present study holds that the justice that Amos advocated is to be understood from the perspective of the demand of YHWH from humans to their fellow humans. In other words, we think that the *hendiadys*, משפט וצדקה (“justice and righteousness”) in the Hebrew Bible should be understood in relation to the modern term, social justice. The social justice advocated by Amos contradicts the view of the upper class. To the upper class, social justice would be the preservation of the status quo; whereas to Amos and the rest of the eighth century BCE prophets, social justice would have meant, “promoting the welfare of society, especially the needy and vulnerable” (Amissah 2016:241).

During the period Amos delivered his oracle, the ruling elites and the powerful in Israel found it strange to part with their resources to ensure the welfare of the needy, neither were they interested in protecting the interests of the vulnerable in the society. Their selfish interests did not only strain their relation with their neighbours, but also impeded a harmonious relationship with YHWH. Social justice, for Amos, is acknowledging firstly YHWH as the authority in social justice, and secondly, accepting the responsibility of humans to ensure the wellbeing of society, protect the vulnerable from oppression and abuse, and support the needy and vulnerable to live a comfortable life with access to a fair share of the resources of the community (Amissah 2016:241).

Consequently, Amos insisted that it is the responsibility of the ruling elites and other individuals, who had the resources and influence, to collaborate with YHWH to establish social justice in the land. There could not be a harmonious society and, by extension, a sound relationship with YHWH, if the ruling class and the wealthy people of the society failed to cooperate with YHWH to carry out social justice.

The summary of Amos’ message in 5:24 is that no matter how religious a people are, without the selfless love for others that brings about harmonious relationship, such religiosity is empty and useless. Any worship or religious activity that is devoid of social justice, love, concern for the poor, the underprivileged, the marginalised, and sincerity in one’s dealing with the neighbour, is unacceptable (Umeanolue 2018:186).

The prophets of TAC LAWNA need to use Amos’ model in addressing the prevailing social injustice in the Nigerian society. As noted previously, Nigerians are incurably religious yet morally and ethically bankrupt. Amos’ message therefore can play an important role in a context where

most of the perpetrators of social injustice are members or even leaders of the faith community. In this regard, Umeanolue (2018:186) writes that:

The underprivileged and the downtrodden in our villages and city slums are Nigerians and adherents of these faiths. At the same time the oppressors who collude with trans-national corporations to exploit Nigerians, the pen-robbers in the banks and financial institutions and the fraudulent men and women in our establishments are people who claim allegiance to either religion.

Thus, it is the responsibility of the prophets of TAC to challenge the body of believers in the church to match their faith in God with their pursuit of social justice. TAC prophets also need to use Amos' model to enlighten and challenge the government, political leaders as well as the wealthy members of the community to respond to their divine duty to take care of the poor and needy in society in a way that would preserve their dignity.

The prophets of TAC are invited to learn from the prophetic ministry of Amos not to confine their prophetic ministry to the church, but they should raise their voices against the prevailing acts of social injustice in Nigeria. Amos did not confine his ministry to the cult but raised his voice against surrounding nations and the political powers in northern Israel. Amos condemned anyone who trampled upon the right of another, be it a powerful nation or an individual (Umeanolue 2018:186).

The message of Amos is quite appropriate to the rule of law in Nigeria. Leadership at all levels must be characterised by integrity and honesty. The voice of Amos on leadership should be echoed loud in Nigeria. The society must be ever conscious that there can be no human solidarity in a situation where human rights are trampled on, and where human dignity is treated as a natural privilege of a few citizens. It is impossible to function and live peacefully in a situation where there is no respect for the rule of law.

Consequently, leaders must rise up to the challenge of ensuring equality and equity at all levels. Leaders must ensure equal distribution of the so-called 'national cake.' Just as Amos was a social crusader in a society replete with corruption and exploitation, TAC prophets are called upon to challenge the powerful to denounce every form of injustice and defend the right of the ordinary citizen. Those at the helm of power should become God-fearing and create job opportunities for the teeming group of the unemployed men and women in the nation today. Leaders should implement policies and projects that are people-centred. The majority of the Nigerian populace live in abject poverty (Ogunode 2015:27). The concern of those occupying political positions

should not be how to store up wealth but how to improve the lot of the people they lead. It is often said that people do not care how much one knows until they know how much one cares.

5.7 CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER

It is evident from the discussion above that the situation in Nigeria today is comparable to that in the Israel of Amos' time. The nation today is saddled with many socio-economic, moral, political, and religious problems. Social injustice pervades the land, and leadership crisis is a reality in the country where a wide gap exists between the rich and the poor. Corruption at the highest level continues to characterise national development. Amos witnessed and challenged similar situations in eighth century BCE ancient Israel.

The message of Amos therefore becomes relevant in efforts to make Nigeria a better place where people can live together in peace and harmony. It challenges religious leaders in the society to act as the torchbearers of the moral and spiritual life of the nation. Priests, pastors and imams, like prophet Amos, should be uncompromising in denouncing the evil perpetrated by many of the so-called men of God and political leaders in the society.

Furthermore, the reality of poverty in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. One cannot close his or her eyes to the problem of poverty and wish it would vanish. The church therefore needs to take responsibility when it comes to eradicating poverty from the land. Governments and lawmakers are called upon to create just laws and equitable social structures. In view of the increasing level of poverty in the land, the message of Amos becomes relevant in the eradication of the social inequalities that exist in Nigerian society.

Since the church is the beacon of hope and conscience of the society, through the clergy, she needs to amplify her voice against any act of injustice and corruption within her space. Prophets of TAC LAWNA, as the mouthpieces of God and promoters of morality, have the capacity to influence political leaders and those at the seat of government to uphold social justice in the society. Like Amos, prophets of TAC LAWNA should use their prophetic ministry to challenge members of the church to lead an exemplary life by shunning acts of exploitation and the oppression of the poor, widows or orphans in the church and in the society. The prophets of TAC LAWNA should use their prophetic ministry to equip and direct the members of the church, and to stir the church on issues that pertain to social justice.

Moreover, the prophets should be bold enough to take their message to the corridors of power to challenge the corrupt judicial system where corrupt judges misuse their powers to pervert the course of justice through their unfair treatment of the innocent. It is time to hear the prophetic voice of TAC LAWNA as the voice of the voiceless and the moral conscience of the nation.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

The aim of this last chapter is to summarise the findings of this thesis and to make recommendations for further studies.

6.2 FINDINGS

The main research question of the present study, as stated in the first chapter is: If re-read through a justice-seeking lens, and informed by a justice-denying Nigerian context, could the theme of social justice as reflected in the text of Amos 5:21-24 challenge the prophets of The Apostolic Church (LAWNA) to proclaim a liberating and empowering message to the powers that be (political establishment), in solidarity with the poor and marginalised people of Nigeria? In view of the main research question, the proposed hypothesis was formulated thus: Going by a thorough reflection on the demand for social justice in Amos 5:21-24, and in view of a justice-denying Nigerian context, prophets of The Apostolic Church LAWNA, Nigeria are urged to employ their prophetic ministry to proclaim a liberating and empowering message to the powers that be (political establishment), in solidarity with the poor and marginalised people of Nigeria. The findings especially in Chapter 5 of this thesis have validated the hypothesis.

Chapter 2 presents a literature review of the works of different scholars who have engaged the theme of social justice in Amos 5:21-24 from different perspectives and contexts. The findings from literature review revealed that the text of Amos 5:21-24 has been approached largely through the traditional diachronic or historical-critical method and synchronic readings of the text by various scholars, both Western and African alike. It was observed, though, that the pattern among Western scholars is to focus outrightly on the text with little or no application to the modern-day contexts. Such an approach therefore denies the contemporary society the benefit of making the biblical texts to speak to current issues and challenges which in many cases compare with those presented in the biblical context.

On the other hand, a number of studies by African scholars also relate the text of Amos to the Nigerian context. However, no known work relates the theme of social justice in Amos 5:21-24 to

TAC LAWNA and its context. The study therefore set out to fill that gap in literature. It was argued that as Amos engaged his prophetic voice to demand for social justice from his eighth century BCE Israelite audience, the prophets of TAC LAWNA should use their prophetic ministry to confront the social injustice prevalent in the Nigerian society.

Chapter 3 provided a historical overview of the prophetic ministry of The Apostolic Church LAWNA. The history of the church shows that TAC LAWNA recognises the ministry of the prophet as a cardinal ministry in the church, and that the church cannot be all that God wants her to be, unless the five-fold ministry or the leadership gifts of the ascended Christ namely, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are in place. These five ministry gifts are in full operation in TAC LAWNA, but the office of the prophet stands out as designated at the foundation of the church and in close association with the office of the apostle. While apostles exercise administrative powers, prophets, on the other hand, provide guidance and direction, whilst edifying and equipping the body of saints. The prophet is recognised as the mouthpiece of God and the conscience of the people. In his leadership role, the prophet can promote social justice through preaching, and offering guidance and instructions to the church. Furthermore, we have shown the impact of the prophetic ministry on social justice in the Old Testament, but prophets in TAC LAWNA have not been forceful and tenacious enough in confronting the public about social justice issues. Rather, much emphasis has been placed on building the faith of the members.

In Chapter 4, the study presented an exegetical analysis of Amos 5:21-24 by uncovering the meaning of the text in its historical context. While this study is contextual in nature, it also examined what the text meant to the original audience. Thus, through a justice-seeking lens, Chapter 4 foregrounded Amos' call for social justice to his eighth century BCE northern Israelite audience. The message at the heart of the text of Amos 5:21-24 is that social justice is an imperative demonstration of true religion. Amos' concern was that Israel had gratified herself with religious formalities to the detriment of the ethical and moral demands of the law of YHWH. Earlier in the chapter, an analytical overview of some selected texts in the book which demonstrate Amos' protest against social injustice, was carried out. By examining those texts in their historical context, we reason that Amos' denunciation of acts of social injustice of his time could serve as a model for contemporary prophets to address social justice issues today.

Chapter 5 provided an African biblical hermeneutical re-reading of Amos 5:21-24. Employing African cultural hermeneutics, the ancient text of Amos 5:21-24 was made to engage with the modern context of Nigeria. It needs to be reiterated that the study recognises the authority of the Bible as well as the correct interpretation of the same. In other words, the researcher believes that the biblical text must be understood and interpreted accurately within its historical context, through every apparatus of historic-critical method. In other words, the biblical text must be allowed to speak for itself. This concern was addressed already in Chapter 4. In addition however, and in agreement with several scholars of African biblical hermeneutics, this study considers that the Hebrew Bible can be engaged to relate to the contemporary situation. Chapter 5, therefore, demonstrates that the text-oriented approach (in this case historical-critical methodologies), and context-oriented approaches (the African inculturation hermeneutical approach) could be engaged without any difficulty.

Since the Bible is a living and dynamic text, it has the capacity to speak to society at any time and in different contexts. Through a sound and careful hermeneutical endeavour, the text of Amos 5:21-24 was brought into dialogue with the Nigerian and TAC LAWNA contexts. A comparison of the socio-historical context of Amos with that of the Nigerian context reveals that the problem of social injustice that Amos addressed is very much alive in the Nigerian context. Hence, there is a need to engage the ministry of Amos to challenge the contemporary TAC LAWNA prophets to use their prophetic ministry to demand social justice in Nigeria.

6.3 CONCLUSION

The findings from this study show that if there was a time that the message of the ancient prophets should come alive in our consciousness as a church and the society, it is now. The fact that social injustice permeates the Nigerian society today cannot be doubted. The prevalence of corruption at various levels of development is obvious. Bribery, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, acts of violence, favouritism, stealing and daylight robbery, oppression of the poor, are prevalent in today's Nigerian society. Economically, the poor and vulnerable are being trampled upon by the rich and highly placed people in the society. Politically, the situation is deplorable. Political leaders who are elected to serve the populace and deliver good governance are corrupt and inept. Religious leaders are not left out either. They are not concerned about spirituality but prosperity. Religiosity

fills the atmosphere, but morality and ethical standard that allow for harmonious living in society are in short supply.

In the light of the above, Nigeria needs prophets who will stand to condemn the social injustices in her land. Like the prophet Amos who stood as a ‘watchman’ and visionary in ancient Israel, Nigeria needs prophets of such integrity and courage, who will speak truth to power. Like Amos, Nigeria needs prophets who can fearlessly denounce evil in the society, who, as agents of change, would stand for justice and the liberation of the oppressed.

The prophets of TAC LAWNA therefore should live up to this responsibility to present a nation that is void of social injustice. They should declare the mind of God without fear or favour, and challenge, in God’s name, those who make laws that allow the poor to be exploited. Through their prophetic ministry, they should arise also to purge the church of all corrupt practices.

6.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings from this study should challenge the prophets of TAC LAWNA to see their calling as the mouthpiece of God not only to the body of believers but also to the Nigerian society and humanity at large. As the conscience and watchdog of the society, they are to raise their voices to confront corrupt practices that oppose biblical principles in the society.

The study will equally be a useful tool for African biblical hermeneutists who wish to relate the biblical text to the African context. Since the study sees the value in bridging the gap between the academia and society, the hermeneutical endeavour in this study could help biblical scholars to interact with the society through Bible study or seminars on topics about social justice, by using biblical narratives, as this study has done. In view of obvious social issues in the Nigerian society, a study of this sort also could assist scholars to relate the biblical text to the Nigerian context in new ways.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study has shown that the church has a duty to use her prophetic mandate as the light of the world to address certain social issues that affect the society. Gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS, Child trafficking, Drug abuse, Corruption, Poverty and so forth are challenging issues that require the intervention of the church. Whilst some churches like the Redeemed Christian Church of God,

the Catholic Church, Winners' Chapel, and the Anglican Church, among others, are doing a great job in this regard, The Apostolic Church LAWNA, a foremost Pentecostal church in Nigeria, does not seem to engage her prophetic voice in addressing the social problems that are prevalent in the Nigerian society. The church needs to live up to her prophetic responsibility by addressing the aforementioned issues. This study therefore urges upcoming scholars especially those within TAC LAWNA to see this gap as a fertile academic area to explore.

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