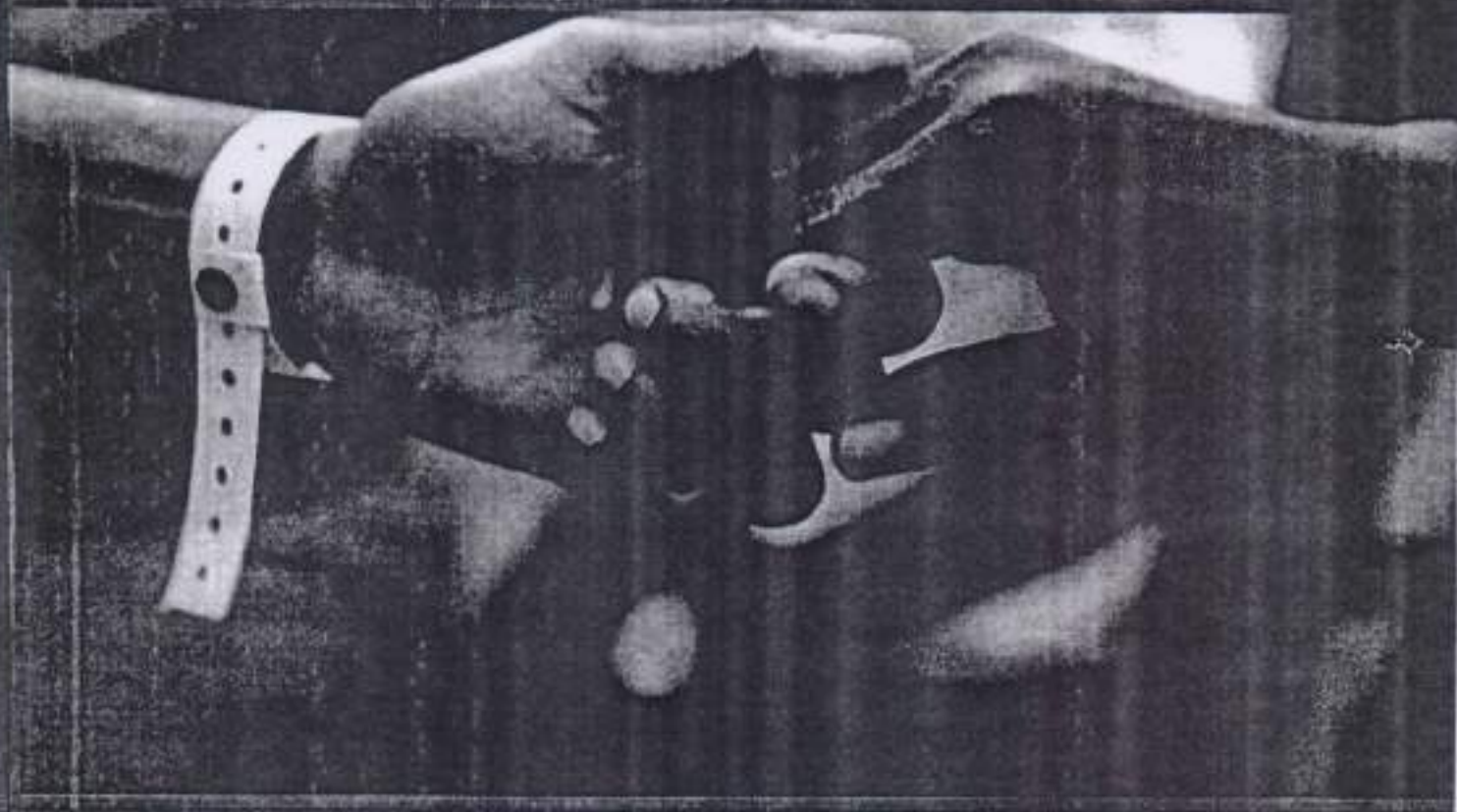




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Amos' Oracle on Injustice in Amos 2:6 and Its Implications for Leadership in Nigeria

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Abstract

Prophets were restless whenever people and nations were not in right standing with Yahweh. Prophetic vocation comes to the fore when people abandon the way of Yahweh. Amos' message for Israelite leaders on injustice in the eighth century BC has been cited as the most explicit, detailed and timely prophetic warning in the Bible to the leaders, and the reflections of the issues addressed by him in any nation have been treated with utmost caution. Existing studies on injustice in the book of Amos have doubted the cause of injustice in bad governance with little or no attention paid to the socio-economic dimension which are central to the understanding of injustice begun perpetrated by the leaders in Nigeria today. This paper examined the socio-economic dimension of injustice in Amos 2:6 with the view of establishing parallel between the socio-economic landscape in ancient Israel and contemporary Nigerian society. This is done through the use of the inductive method which many African scholars believe to be the way of making the Bible relevant in any generation. It was discovered that the situation in Amos' time was similar with the present Nigerian society. There is oppression, injustice and moral decadence in Nigeria. This is as a result of greed, bad and corrupt leadership. The rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. The church and her leaders who are supposed to play the role of the prophets in Nigeria have failed because they are beneficiaries of the system of corrupt and bad leaders in the society. This situation has hampered development in the land. For any nation to experience meaningful development, the human resources must be properly built up. In this building process, acceptable social norms and values must be operational. It is only with these we can build a new nation.

Key words: Amos' Oracle, Social Justice, Prophets, Leadership, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Justice has become a prominent issue of concern among humans in nations around the globe. This is the reason why debates on inequality, social, political, economic, dignity of man and the likes have dominated most of the discussions in the world today. In other words, in the contemporary times, the concept of justice has become a key matter of debate in legal, philosophical, theological and religious circles. According to Wilson, "Justice has been used frequently in connection with social problems and social upheavals. In our days, minority races and classes have demanded justice; members of the women's movement want justice. Proponents of every social concern, from population control to the end of war to ecology, use justice as their rallying cry" (2001: 5). This view is supported by Lamb when he asserted that injustice is rooted in five areas all over the globe. They are: distribution of wealth, oppression of women, ethnicity, religion and undue exploitation of physical, chemical, biological and ecological nature (1985: 103).

Besides, Clifford (2000: 1) and Donistek (2001: 2) maintained that justice is fundamental in Bible discourse as it is being considered as one of the attributes of God. Creating from the Bible, God is the source of justice and he hates injustice of any form. God is always on the side of the oppressed

(Isaiah 2: 23-25; 3: 7; 4: 4). It should be noted that prior to the commencement of monarchy, the notion of justice had been properly entrenched in the Israelite society (Morris, 2000: 5). The prophets in the Old Testament served as the watchdogs of the nation as well as the pressure group that was in constant opposition to the leaders, speaking vehemently on acts of injustice in the land. The prophets in ancient Israel were always calling on the leaders and the elite in the society to ensure justice and equity for all and sundry.

Amos was one of the prophets called and commissioned by Yahweh to preach against sin and injustice in the land. In the time of Amos, there were inequalities, oppression and moral decadence in the society, which hampered meaningful development in the nation. This paper examines the socio-economic dimension of injustice in Amos 2: 6 with the view of establishing parallel between the socio-economic landscape in ancient Israel and contemporary Nigerian society.

2. Prophets, Social Justice and Leadership Examined

Prophets are persons appointed by Yahweh to watch over His people and nations. They are expected to receive and deliver oracles without alteration. It is clear from biblical literature that prophetic oracles have divine origin. To a large extent, prevailing circumstance determines prophetic oracles. In ancient Israel, prophecy served as a medium of social control and change. Prophecy was employed by the marginalized elements to influence and control the socio-political space in order to engineer social change (Bach, 2018: 173). Prophets were men who carried authority and power. They were great leaders whose influence were felt in every facet of the lives of their audience. It is believed in many quarters that prophets had direct links to God and as such always caught something which they shared with the people of God (Gangli, 1984: 4).

Prophets were important figures in the Old Testament. They were seen as God's ministers (NanGwenen, 1990: 1). Many scholars have agreed that prophets played crucial roles in shaping the history and the religion of the Israelites. In fact, prophets have been very active in the religious, political, economic, and the social lives of the nation of Israel, from merely to exile (Aba, 2005: 1). Anthropologically speaking, prophets were seen as intermediaries between humans and the divine world. It is widely believed that prophets came in direct contact with the divine when possessed by the spirit or when they supernaturally traversed the human world or the divine realm. Old Testament prophets were surrounded by an aura of mystery (Wilson, 1985: 8).

On the other hand, Thomas Aquinas defined justice as "the strong and firm will to give to each his due" (Quoted by Ayo Ladigbolu, 2018). Social, economic, and political institutions in any society are organized around justice. Justice implies that persons have obligations to be active and productive participants in the life of the society in which they live, and that the society has the duty to enable them participate. Justice demands that the right of every person be always and everywhere respected.

The word leadership is defined as "the position of function of a leader" (Trethly, 1985: 123). To Webster, leadership is "an act or instance of leading, guidance or direction" (Webster, 2000: 850). Awolobi, turned the line of Webster when he said "Leadership is a process of guiding, directing and guiding others to achieve a desired goal" (Awolobi, 2015: 4). In other words, a leader is someone who guides, directs, and commands others to achieve a desired goal or objective. Leadership is the action of leading a group of people or an organization, or the ability to give guidance, direction, authority, control, management, supervision, superintendence. Also, leadership emerges with time, identified with a particular circumstance because the leaders are able to give

answers to problems conditioned by the space and the time at hand (Wanibunda, 1991:26). Leadership is considered a process of getting the members of the team to put their weight effectively, to give their loyalty to the group, and to task or carry out properly the activities allocated, and generally to play an effective part in the operation, service or task the organization has to undertake (Breach, 1975:19). Breach opened further that in leadership there must be regular supervision to ensure that the working teams are keeping to plans and attaining an adequate level of effectiveness and economy of work. In this concept of leadership much of the labour is committed in the hands of the subject while the leaders focus on how the goal would be achieved. Prophets in ancient Israel were considered as leaders.

3.0 The Book of Prophet Amos and the Oracles

Jewish tradition ascribed the authorship of this book to Amos, the prophet. However, some scholars like Robert Wilson disagreed with this position based on editorial and transmission grounds. According to him, a basic collection of Amos had been supplemented by several editors whose identities are not clear (Wilson, 1981: 267). Some of these editors are believed to be Amos' disciples or the Deuteronomistic editors by reason of the resemblance of Amos' Oracles with that of the Deuteronomistic editors on the Torah of Yahweh. In the same vein, B. Coote asserted that the book of Amos is the end result of many series of components of the original words of the prophet himself. According to him, the compositions of the book are in three stages - (i) record of Amos himself (ii) the work of an editor called Helel who worked in Amos' record, and (iii) the work of the closing editor who is Jerusalemite (Coote, 1981: 2-3).

Amos was called from following a herd of sheep to prophetic office. Amos was to deliver messages into the ears of people who would have little respect for a man from the hills (Isaiah, 1975: 20). He was blunt, direct, courageous and dynamic. Amos possessed a world vision and a keen insight into the secrets of international politics. Thus he appeared to be a visionary among people whose heads were too thick to discern profound matter (Bullock, 1986: 59). He was not a son of prophet or a prophet from his birth. He was rather a herdsman, a sheep tender and a cultivator of yamamot trees. The sheep he pastured on the slopes of the limestone hills around Tekoa were probably his own (Bullock, 1986: 57). Amos was also engaged in manual seasonal work as a ripper of yamamot trees. The practice of patching or puncturing the figs was to hasten the ripening and increase the size and sweetness of the fruits (Harrison, 1977: 844). Amos was a contemporary of Hosea. While Hosea emphasizes the love of God in the midst of judgments, Amos set forth the majesty and uncompromising righteousness of God against sinners (Bullock, 1986: 56). He was a man who had been molded by the stern discipline of the desert to look objectively upon persons, nations, and events (Watts, 1958: 7).

In dating the book of Amos, two important events should be noted. They are (i) Amos prophesied in the days of Uzziah King of Judah and in the reign of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel (ii) Amos prophesied two years before the earthquake (iii). According to scholars like Henry (Anderson, 1974:48), for Bullock, quoting Edwin R. Thiele's record that Jeroboam reigned between 782-753 B.C. while Uzziah reigned between 767-740 claimed that Amos's ministry occurred around 767 and 753 B.C. Amos' ministry lasted for over sixteen years (Harrison, 88-886).

It should be noted that Amos was a farmer with no training for religious office. He was a dresser of yamamot trees. Amos hailed from Tekoa, some five miles south of Bethlehem and ten miles south of Jerusalem. However, some scholars opined that Amos was not from Tekoa on the

grounds that the topography of Tekoa was not suitable for the cultivation of yamamot figs. Harrison and some scholars have suggested that Amos was not a native of Tekoa, but rather of a northern tribe who had gone into exile in Judah (Harrison, 1977: 863-866). But the view is at variance with the internal witness in Amos 7:1, where Amosiah, the priest declared that Amos should go back to Judah his country to prophesy. In Kephner's view, Amos was believed to be a temple staff or official by virtue of his link to cows and sheep that are used for sacrifices in the temple (Adams, 1994:9-28). The word roged (shepherd) used to describe Amos suggests that he was rearing sheep and producing wool. Bullock observed that Amos Kephner associated roged with the Mesopotamian temple herds and that those sheep breeders were sometimes temple officials and were responsible for the temple cows and sheep. D. Watts strongly maintained that Amos was a shepherd of a large flock (Hammershamb, 1990: 46). However, the view that he was a temple official in charge of sheep and cows may not be correct due to the statement of Amos that he should go back to Judah to prophesy. Amos responded that he was not a prophet, neither a prophet's son (7:14). This suggests that he had no connection with temple activities before he received his call to prophetic ministry.

The oracles of Amos

Amos prophesied in the reign of Jeroboam II. It was a time of prosperity and renewed national confidence. Anderson noted that "the official religion was growing, the festivals were popular, and the sanctuaries were thronged. But the old social order had disintegrated and the contrast between the arrogant luxury of the rich and the misery of the poor made the old Israelite ideal of brotherhood seem an anachronism" (VanCleave, 1977:129). The reason for the prosperity was the suspension of the rivalry between Israel and Damascus by reason of the resurgence of military power in Assyria. It was this situation that compelled Damascus to seek the protection of Israel. This made trade and commerce to thrive and there was mass movement of labour from their erstwhile land to the city. People's attention was on accumulation of material things and this resulted in a demand for luxury items which earlier on was the prerogative of the rich in Judah. Justice, as such, these came for material possessions brought about moral decadence in the land. Justice, as instructed in the Torah, was set aside. People who wanted to amass wealth broke their way through judges became corrupt and thus perverted justice. Poor people lost their property to the rich in the society because of high level of corruption in the judiciary. This situation created inequalities in the society. The margin between the rich and the poor became continuously wide to the extent that within few years, the poor had been reduced to the level of servants and slaves. Bad worship became popular. The sanctuaries in the North were filled with worshippers who were rebelling in the prosperity of the times. Temple prophets and priests that were associated with the sanctuaries made a good deal of profit from the gifts of the worshippers, thereby doing this backwards against speaking the truth (Ockene, 2001: 47; Ayaniso, 2009: 80-82). It was against this backdrop that Amos surfaced with his message of judgment and reformation.

Amos started his oracles with Israel's neighbouring countries. He informed them that Yahweh's judgment was coming because they have violated one social justice or the other. In the book of Amos, God is seen as judge. It should, however, be noted that God's judgment as Amos declared was designed to produce fruits of repentance. God at one time or the other disciplined His people with the hope to bring them to repentance but the nation failed to change (Amos 3: 6-5; 4: 19-25). This was alluded to by Isaiah and Jeremiah, when the duo asserted that God is merciful in judgment (Isaiah 25:9-26). Some scholars have queried why Yahweh had to give Amos oracles for

individual and the role of social system. Justice is one of the attributes of God. God expects humans that he created in his image to do the same to their fellows. In other words, in line with his action of benevolence and fairness, God's expectation is that humans would replicate his fairness and magnanimity among their fellows and nations (Amos 5: 3-15). Sweeney (2000: 200-203) and Samuelsen (1983: 1428-153) concur with above submission on the justice of God when they declared that Israel, Judah and all the nations of the earth will be judged because of their selfishness. God's pronouncement of judgment is anchored on his sovereign right over the earth as the creator and as the standard of justice for humans.

5.2 The Socio-economic implications of Amos 2:16 in the Context of Social Justice in Nigeria

Scholars have described the term justice as "lawful or just actions which are for the common good or good of others" (Mumuni, 2012). In other words, it is "the virtue which dictates that a man should treat his neighbor fairly" (Mumuni, 2012). This is to say that man must give another person his due. A critical look at Nigeria in this twenty-first century reveals nothing dissimilar to the situation of the northern kingdom of Israel of Amos' day: the social, economic, political and religious sphere of the country have been bedeviled by numerous social ills such as corruption in both public and private spaces, poverty, which has propelled widened class difference in the society, manipulation, distortion and perversion of justice in favour of the wealthy and to the detriment of the less privileged. Worse still, the religious circles that is supposed to serve as an example of morality and champion the cause of social justice are enmeshed in all kinds of corruption, ritual practice and all forms of social injustice.

As in the days of prophet Amos, rulers and judges in Nigeria prevent the course of justice for pecuniary benefits. Some of the judges in Nigeria are greedy and as such they collect bribes from the wealthy to change the course of justice. Joseph Oduka describes the level of injustice in the Nigerian judiciary system when he concluded that "we are all guilty" (Abdullahi, 1986: 8-9). According to him, injustice in the Nigerian judiciary is now a hyper-headed monster. This is because those to whom we should look up to in the sanitation of a decaying society are themselves caught up in what is becoming a ground norm. In other words, attempts are made to prevent the course of justice by those who should dispense justice.

Print and electronic media have revealed various atrocities being committed by Nigerian judges. It is a known fact that the rich, influential families, politicians, and people in places of authority enjoy preferential treatment from some Nigerian judges. Questionable judgments have been delivered at difference instances. For instance, commenting on the state of Nigerian judiciary system, a former Chief Judge, Justice Mustapha said, "As it stands today, it appears that the society we serve is not entirely satisfied with our performance. Hard as it may be to accept, we feel it is less important to focus on whether this assessment is fair or not. The important thing is for us to transparently come to terms with the prevailing reaction, accept the gap in expectations and do our utmost to bridge it" (Mumuni, 2012).

This is not different from the time of prophet Amos when the poor who could not offer any money for bribe were denied justice. In Nigeria today, a lot of poor people are awaiting trial. It is like the day of Amos when hopes for justice for the common people were dashed. Nigeria today is labeled by the international community as a people without any ethical or moral values (Adeyemi, 2004b). The implication of this social vice is the scarring away of foreign investors who could have entered into serious investments with the country and through which the economic sector of the country would have witnessed tremendous development. According to Abdullahi Ango, injustice has

incorporated the chance for national development. He opined that the problems of development that the country is experiencing are not necessarily due to scarcity of the natural factors of production, rather, it can be seen in the unending struggle among Nigerians to retain or gain advantages over fellow Nigerians (Abdullahi, 1986: 9).

Also, Hussein Alataw believes that corruption can hinder the development of a nation. For him any government plagued by injustice and corruption will neglect various duties essential to an efficient administration. This may result in loss of lives and property or outbreak of epidemics. The money that should have been spent for developmental projects would now be directed to the care of epidemic. Corruption has to be tackled because upon it hangs all other forms of social injustice and anomalies (Alataw, 1990: 125-153).

In Nigeria today, there is economic recession. This has bred poverty. Like the northern kingdom of Israel, the rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. There is social oppression, perversion of justice and social disorder. Ours is a society with a notable feature of affluence, exploitation and profit motive with moral standard sinking into disrepair. Nigeria nation is a society plagued with the social malaise of inequity, economic oppression, culminating in economic disparity between the rich and the poor masses.

These social malaises cut across the political, socio-economic and religious sectors of our society with the highly placed and those in authority falling as perpetrators. Nigeria being the largest producer of oil in Africa has the potential to be an economic giant, but much of this wealth has been wasted by series of corruption and incompetent leadership (Abogunrin, 2001: 5). Our nation is ranked among the poorest nations of the world. The United Nations Development Programme ranks Nigeria as the 13th poorest nation in the world (Mwegbogu, 2001: 99). Poverty is a major issue in Nigeria socio-economy. This is an indication that the poor has the tendency to be cut off from the economic societies. Mass poverty is today a stark reality in Nigeria. The poor in Nigeria suffer materially, socially, culturally, and politically (Abogunrin, 2001: 7).

Like in the days of Amos, Nigerians are very religious. They perform all religious rituals but they are still far away from God. Amos emphasized that what God requires is not worship of the sanctuary but obedience in life. According to Winer, obedience is the fruit of a right relationship with God and this is sustained by worship (Winer, 1998: 40). In Nigeria today, some of our religious leaders have substituted a right living for cultic acts. God detects all acts of worship which are substitutes for right personal and social relationship.

Besides, leaders in Nigeria must practice justice. To John Arthur, justice is the sum total of virtue with regard to our relations with others and which has the ring of righteousness in acting fairly to one another (Arthur, 1982: 14). Unfortunately, this virtue is becoming scarce noticeable especially as it relates to our dealings and distribution of wealth in the country. Justice is gradually disappearing from our national life. Bribery and kickbacks are frequently employed by unscrupulous individuals who seek to amass wealth in a comparatively short-time. Some Nigerians believe that the government is using the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to which hunt political opponents.

6.4 Conclusion

In this piece, attempt has been made to expose the social injustice in the days of Amos, the prophet, and the situation in contemporary Nigeria. It is clear that there is a parallel between Amos' day and the contemporary Nigerian society. The leaders, judges, pastors, seers and the likes that

are in the corridor of power practice injustice. They exploit and oppress the poor that they are to defend and protect. There is high level of corruption in the judicial system.

Also, the gap between the rich minority and poor majority continues to increase. While the poor in the society fight for basic needs such as food, healthcare, shelter etc. on daily basis, the rich laurate in an extravagant life of ease above the shore of want. These inequalities abound as poverty strikes in the land.

The Nigerian Government must put in place measures to reduce poverty. There is the need for government to address the problem of injustice in our society. The judicial system should, therefore, be overhauled to give credibility to the decision and judgment of the judiciary. Corrupt judges must be flushed out by the Government if good progress must be attained.

Furthermore, our religious leaders must be exemplary in conduct. The religious life in Nigeria is characterized by hypocrisy and moral depravity. The church must champion crusade against injustice, oppression and poverty.

Finally, it should be noted that there is the reflection of Amos' situation in the contemporary Nigerian society. Care should, therefore, be taken so as to avert the coming judgment on the nation. As Amos called Israel to return to God, Nigerians too must return to her Creator. Justice must be sought at all levels irrespective of the wealth and status of the individuals involved. Church leaders, who are watchmen and custodians of moral and ethical values, should join the struggle and find lasting solution to the factors impeding the desirable national development in Nigeria.

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