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Moral and Philosophical-Social Values in the Book of the Prophet Amos - Highlights for Contemporary Social Work

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Abstract: *A very special place among the personalities of the Old Testament is occupied by the preachers known as prophets, a title that was attributed to them due to the role and mission they had to fulfill in the activity which, from a spiritual point of view, represents the preparation of the work of salvation that would be realized through the incarnation and sacrifice of the Savior Jesus Christ. From a religious perspective, in the activity they carried out, the prophets were constantly guided by the commandments of the Covenant concluded on Mount Sinai, and their activity is focused on preaching the fulfillment and perfect observance of this Covenant. From another perspective, however, the ideas transmitted by the prophets are equally a moral code and a set of social norms, which are based on a broad reasoning on the social characteristics of the communities in reference to which they were decreed. Some of the commandments of the Covenant have remained relevant in today's society, many in their original form, others were modified and adapted during the historical evolution of society. The purpose of this article is to theoretically analyze the topicality of the moral and philosophical-social values presented in the book of the prophet Amos, as highlights for contemporary social work.*

Keywords: *the prophet Amos; morality; socio-religious norms.*

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Introduction

According to the Old Testament, God chose the Jewish people, with whom He made a Covenant to lead them to the promised land, as long as the chosen people would respect the precepts drawn by Divinity. In other words, a pact was formulated between the divine and the human factors, according to which the Jewish promised to respect the moral and social precepts of behavior required by the divinity, in exchange for obtaining, amongst other things, material benefits, consisting of a geographical area of land which they were to master. Spiritually, the covenant between God and the Jewish people has far more subtle connotations than the mere understanding of a convention or a contract, in the secular sense. The Jewish people was the "chosen one" because the divinity considered that it had the moral attributes that would allow it to understand the spiritual usefulness of the behavioral precepts drawn by God, and an existence according to those dispositions would have led that society to a special spiritual evolution, which would have made it worthy not only of a spiritual reward, but also a material one, of living in a secure geographical space, where the moral-social-spiritual values traced by the divine in people's lives would have been promoted.

However, several times these laws were violated, and some members of the Jewish community chose to worship other gods, a phenomenon known as idolatry. After the liberation of the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery, when the Jews definitively settled in the promised land and their basic occupation became agriculture, their religious and moral life declined and, implicitly, their social life deteriorated. Spiritually, this return to sin represents a rejection of the values that enabled Jewish society to free itself from Egyptian rule. Initially, when the survival of the nation was uncertain, the society had adhered to divine values, which had become a binder of social cohesion, a set of trademark norms, which differentiated the Jewish people from other societies and gave them individuality. The members of society formed their self-identity by referring to that set of values (Huidu & Sandu, 2020) and used them as social, moral and psychological coping mechanisms to overcome the obstacles that the road to the promised land entailed. Later, however, after the national desideratum was achieved and the difficulties overcome, the psychological motivation to follow the divine moral precepts decreased.

Once this state of spiritual instability is reached socially, the guiding attitude of the divinity is felt, because God does not abandon the spiritual

potential of the chosen people and sends the heralds of His will, the prophets, the keepers of the laws and commandments, to be the rebukers of deviations from religious precepts, but also the comforters of people's spiritual sufferings, also being the harbingers of future events (Ayali-Darshan, 2024). The social role of the prophets exceeded their spiritual attributions, they also had the role of keeping awake the consciences of the peoples, the kings and each individual, preaching to them the belief in one God, in other words, acting as social influencers who aimed to increase the level of social awareness regarding the norms applicable in society, promoting the idea that the moral norms of a society reflect the level of evolution of that society (Solomona, 2024). This conclusion emerges from the fact that the prophets not only campaign for faith in God, but also for a moral life, lived in love (a source of interpersonal empathy and social balance), as a fruit of faith in God.

The activity carried out by all the prophets of the Old Testament had a religious-moral aim, but also a social desideratum. The religious aspect stands out in the attempt to distance society from idolatry and to guide it in keeping faith in one God. Opposition to idolatry seems natural today, when technological advancement has confirmed that the inanimate objects idolized by archaic societies did not possess magical characteristics (Bastian & Dirgaprimawan, 2024). The social aspect of the prophets' work can be seen in their attempt to promote social behaviors that ensure a higher standard of living and broad social cohesion, on the foundations of social and moral justice (Barton, 2012).

At the time when the Christian tradition places the appearance of the prophets on the historical timeline and the unfolding of their spiritual mission, the moral-religious context within the Jewish people implied a social split between the groups that maintained the Christian prophetic tradition and the groups that had moved away from the teachings of the prophets, leading to a decadent lifestyle, both inside families and in society (Eidevall, 2017). Idolatry had begun again and manifested itself on a large scale, and the prophets had recommitted themselves to the fight against these practices, considering it was a catalist for social decline, both from a religious and social point of view. In this context, the activity of the prophets focused on the promotion of social and individual values opposed to the decadence of morals, they invoked the moral ascendant given by the call and mission entrusted to them by God (Hamborg, 2023), preaching to the people the practice of love for others, of charity towards those in need, of justice and honor. The degradation of religious, moral and social life in

the Jewish communities was also due to the influence exerted by the neighboring peoples (Burcuş, 1966, 175).

The purpose of this article is to theoretically analyze the topicality of the moral and philosophical-social values present in the book of the prophet Amos, as highlights for contemporary social work. In order to achieve the purpose of the research, we formulated the following research objectives:

- analysis of the main behavioral deviations that are presented as morally reprehensible in the Book of Amos and their topicality in contemporary social work;
- identifying the link between individual moral decadence and the deterioration of social life as presented in the Book of Amos and identifying the elements of contemporaneity found in the prophet's sermons, that are of interest in the field of social work;
- analyzing the purpose of divine sanction by comparison to secular sanctions in today's society, also considering the social reintegration of vulnerable social groups;
- studying ways to avoid divine punishment in the Old Testament tradition, from the perspective of the purpose of punishment;
- examining the interdependence between secular justice and divine justice.

In order to achieve the research objectives, we considered the following research questions:

- is there any connection between the antisocial acts condemned in the Book of Amos and the current criminal law systems (currently criminalized offences)?
- is individual moral decay a sign of social moral decay and how do the two trends mutually influence each other?
- what is the role of divine punishment and how does it differ from secular punishment?
- what is the difference between the causes for exclusion of liability specific to secular justice and the ways to obtain divine forgiveness?
- is there any connection between the consequences of not observing divine justice and not observing secular justice in the Old Testament tradition?

The activity of the prophet Amos – socio-religious implications

Among the prophets of the Old Testament who campaigned for the change of the decadent lifestyle and stood firmly against the religiously

sanctioned trends of the Jewish society of that time is also the prophet Amos: "And they lay themselves down upon clothes laid in pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god" (Amos, 1991, 2: 8). According to indications from biblical historiography, Amos is the first preacher from the Old Testament who is considered a prophet, since written texts belonging to him have been transmitted to the present day (Introduction to the Book, 2001, 1131).

The Hebrew name Amos means "to carry". Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa, a town located near Bethlehem (Amos, 1991, 1:1). He was born in the Southern Kingdom, but he carries out his prophetic mission in the Northern Kingdom, in the cities of Samaria and Bethel (Semen & Melniciuc Puică, 1995, 265). From the mentions made in his book, it is known that the prophet Amos was not only a shepherd, but also a sycamore gatherer. Therefore, the prophet is formed as a biblical character through two transformative experiences. He is at the same time a "lonely shepherd, with his simple, harsh, contemplative life, of a man faced with eternity" (Introduction to the Book, 2001, 1131), but also a nomad who, in his travels, takes contact with the customs and culture of numerous communities and cities of the time, an experience "through which, probably, he becomes an autodidact" (Introduction to the Book, 2001, 1131).

From a biographical point of view, the life of the shepherd Amos until the moment when he was chosen by God to be a prophet is one specific to the society in which he lived and to the respective historical period (Hadjiev, 2009). The call to prophecy comes as a result of a command received suddenly from the divinity, when he is asked to leave his homeland, called the Kingdom of Judah, and move to the Northern Kingdom, to the city of Bethel, where idolatry had become a common practice and the influence of the Bethel community was also felt in the neighboring communities (Introduction to the Book, 2001, 1131). Amos prophesied in the Northern Kingdom, which during the reign of Jeroboam (787-747 BC) experienced a period of armed stability: Transjordan was reconquered, conflicts with neighboring states were settled, and peace was restored, trade was developed and the society was prosperous. The economic situation favorable to the people of Israel would drive society away from those moral precepts that had helped individuals to endure in unfavorable times, and this laxity will soon lead to the degradation of the moral and religious environment in the kingdom.

Among the sins listed in the Book of Amos are: fornication, lust for luxury, normatively tolerated injustice (what is now called structural violence). The social and religios-moral situation of the Israelite society and

the neighboring peoples is compromised as a consequence, poverty becomes endemic, and the social-economic mechanisms to mitigate the phenomenon are no longer applied, sacrifices are made to the gods imported culturally from the neighboring peoples (King, 2021), and God, the Israelite deity, is gradually removed from religious practices. As the phenomenon was characterized in the specialized literature (Comte, 1995, 31), the obvious symptoms of a morally ill society appeared in Samaria.

During the historical period when the prophet Amos was active, the exploitation of the financially disadvantaged class by the class that had control over the financial resources of the society had become common behavior, as well as the indifference to the idea of financial assistance to vulnerable groups, while justice was marked by corruption. These social conditions in Samaria affected religious customs, therefore religious moral precepts were not only neglected, but even perverted to justify the climate of intolerance and lack of social empathy. This was the situation in the Northern Kingdom when Amos begins to carry out his prophetic mission, preaching against the digressions in society (Biblical Dictionary, 1995, 34).

The involvement of the prophet in the social issues of the Northern Kingdom and the criticism of the dysfunctionality of the social institutions in this kingdom does not derive only from his own personality, nor only from his revolt against social injustices that manifest themselves under the shelter of a social formalism that obviously eliminates Christian love from social relations, as Amos travels to Israel as God's messenger. His vocation among the prophets was prooved by the visions transmitted by God, which diverted him from his daily life to serve another higher purpose, of social utility, as God had done with Moses. The call to prophetic mission produces an inner struggle, and Amos attempted to resist that call, but in the end the prophet abandoned his old concerns, when he faithfully accepted the will of God and the collaboration with the divine.

The word of God, addressed to the prophet, is decisive in assuming his mission, so that he is overwhelmed by the greatness of the divine act and the role that was being prepared for him within this higher plan, so that he ends up showing his adherence by means of two questions that suggests the understanding of the importance of the mission entrusted to him (Basarab, 1979, 404): "The lion has roared - who will not fear? The Lord has spoken - who can but prophesy?" (Amos, 3:8). Amos is called to preach faith in God and to criticize the morals of the Israelite society, and this was to happen precisely in the center of Israelite idolatry, the city of Bethel. Amos' mission was to encourage the Israeli people to show remorse for deviant behaviors and return to faith in God, rejecting immorality and doing good (Semen &

Melniciuc Puica, 1995, 266): "Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph" (Amos, 1991, 5: 15).

The prophetic activity cannot be separated from the social-political and cultural-historical context in which the mission of a prophet was carried out, and also influenced the way the prophet Amos fulfilled his duty (Biblical Dictionary, 1995, 33). Looking at his activity as a whole, we notice that in the course of his mission, the prophet always called for the fulfillment of justice and the return to a moral life corresponding to the will of God.

Combating human trafficking, corruption and crimes against life – fundamental landmarks of divine justice

In general, the content of the Book of Amos is imperative. The prophet morally condemns the lifestyle of the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom and predicts the effects of these behaviors, that would attract divine punishments. Only towards the end of the book is a prophecy made regarding the messianic salvation (Chirilă, 2003, 233). Chapter I of the book describes the punishments that will be administered by divine justice on the peoples neighboring Israel, insisting on the acts committed by the Philistines, which were to be severely punished. The prophet campaigns for the restoration of secular justice, considering it to be an absolute necessity, but predicts that God, who is justice par excellence, will also act based on His plan of divine justice.

In verses 6-8, Amos' sermons are directed against human trafficking, specifically the slave trade. The prophesied punishment is the total extermination of those who commit such abuses, exploiting the labor capacity of other people, the prophet excluding any possibility of pardoning the guilty. The slave trade is vehemently condemned, being considered an act directed against human dignity, as well as a deprivation of freedom (Basarab, 1979, 444).

Slavery represented the most humiliating social condition within society, a practice that deprives the individual of all human attributes and objectifies people, transforming them into assets, because the a person who is sold no longer has any freedom and is forced to work for the owner, becoming a source of profit. Amos vehemently protests against this social-legal institution, accepted at the time, being scandalized by the commodification of humans as objects of a sale-purchase contract: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals." (Amos, 1991, 2: 6).

The corruption of justice, as an effect of the corruption that marked social relations as a whole, characterizes the historical era in which the prophet Amos was active, corruption constituting one of the accusations by which the prophet motivates divine intervention and judgment (Basarab, 1979, 426). People who belonged to socially disadvantaged classes, but who respected the divine moral precepts, were sold in the slave trade, and this the prophet attributes to the fact that the judges no longer watched over the observance of the law, but became the defenders of the privileges of their own social categories, and their role was reduced to that of a class lawyer (Basarab, 1979, 425).

In verses 13-15, attention is drawn to the fact that any attempt on the life of another person would be punished by divine justice. These sermons specifically targeted the Ammonites, whose armed incursions were often accompanied by atrocities that, nowadays, would be categorized as war crimes. Killing pregnant women was a custom practiced by the invaders to reduce the number of fighting male population, and the Israelites were no exception to this custom. In Amos' sermons, these women became the symbol of vulnerable persons, who had no possibility of defense, and at the same time, they are the bearers of a new potential life, which makes the deed worse (the contemporary legislation in many states provides that the killing of a woman pregnant is an aggravated form of murder). Those who committed these crimes were aware that in this way they became the destroyers of two generations, so Amos insists on the need to mitigate the contempt of the oppressors, shown for the life of the conquered, and shows that, according to religious view, life is the most important value of the human being, and the only one who has the right to offer life and decide death is God (Basarab, 1979, 449).

More than a sin - moral decadence, a sign of social decadence

Chapter II of the Book of Amos includes another series of behaviors that the prophet catalogs as contrary to the precepts of the Covenant and which, although not as obviously destructive as those combated in chapter I, are likely to have a subversive effect equally destructive to any human community. In the prophecy addressed to Moab, one can observe the prophet's position against the sin of contempt, more precisely against acts against human dignity, while any contrary act is, in Amos' view, a mortal sin.

Verses 4-5 focus on the fact that the divine law was despised, as well as the ten commandments, behaviors doubled by the worship of idols or idolatrous representations of Israel. Beyond the religious-moral aspect of

the prophet's preachings, the respective practices had serious social implications, not only disturbing the relationship between God and the people, but, at the same time, dehumanizing the relationships between people.

In verses 6-8, one of the prophecies addressed to the people of Israel is presented: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines" (Amos, 1991, 6:8). The sins referred to in the text are human trafficking, in the form of slave trade, the refusal to provide support to people from financially vulnerable social classes, the exploitation of vulnerable people (in this case, women who practice prostitution) and the desecration of places or objects of worship (we mention the fact that all these facts are currently a crime in most countries worldwide). By the fact that it was God's chosen people, the Israeli society is not exempted from observing the divine laws, but, on the contrary, its responsibility is increased, because those who are given plenty according to the Covenant with the divinity, are required to behave in such a way as to be worthy of the gifts received, therefore, when faced with divine judgment, they will answer for their deeds in accordance with the commandments that were issued to them and that they were obliged to respect (Basarab, 1979, 452).

The corruption of justice, social injustice, religious formalism, financial avarice of the favored classes, immorality and sexual libertinism are exposed, and the prophet's speeches turn into a real indictment against the Israelites. Amos' analysis of the situation in the Northern Kingdom will include both the religious, moral and legal aspects, as well as the social issues observed by the prophet. His purpose was to raise awareness of the shortcomings of a society, where injustice, corruption and exploitation of the human being had become endemic problems. Through the general wording of the text, the idea of condemning the Israelites in a manner similar to that of the other prophecies, addressed to other peoples, is induced, and it is observed that the Northern Kingdom is lowered to the level of the other neighboring peoples, no longer being treated as a chosen people.

The special relationship with God of the people of Israel was not only a privilege, as it had been erroneously interpreted, and it does not absolve the decadent from divine punishment, because by analyzing

infidelity to the law (in the sense of the covenant with God), with its implications in all domains of public activity, the prophet demonstrates to his audience that Israel deserves punishment (Basarab, 1979, 453). Along with the human and social aspects, other accusations concern the moral-religious side. The Covenant was not respected in any of its aspects, and the evil consequences of the breach of the Covenant infused all aspects of life. Immorality within the family was considered by Amos as a desecration of God's name: "Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name" (Amos, 1991, 2: 7). Amos's contemporaries, rejecting the prophets, rose against the Covenant concluded by their ancestors with the divinity, and the disastrous consequences of estranging from God is social injustice, immorality and defamation of sacred places (Basarab, 1979, 457).

Divine motivation – sanction as a way of moral purification

Chapters 3-6 of the Book of Amos are centered on the description, in numerous passages, of the certainty, necessity and severity of the divine punishment on the people of Israel, because of the behaviors described in the first two books: "Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria; see the great unrest within her and the oppression among her people. They do not know how to do right, says the Lord, who store up in their fortresses what they have plundered and looted" (Amos, 1991, 3: 9-10). Amos laments the complete ruin of the society of the Israelite people and explains its causes as disobedience to God and lack of repentance. "The prophet is hungry and thirsty for justice. Social differences, abuses, hypocrisy, miserliness and debauchery ignite his indignation and he makes a full swing analysis and criticism of the evolution of society, revealing its most intimate parts" (Chirilă, 2003, 234).

By the fact that the prophet criticizes the different social groups, the capital city of the kingdom, the idolatrous worship practiced at Bethel and the religious holidays, he actually attacks the foundations of the institutions of society at that time, which were characterized by a lack of morality. From the descriptions contained in these verses, the conclusion can be drawn that Israel in the time of Amos did not differ in anything from other peoples, but because it was the chosen people, and by that it should have been distinguished by a special morality, God determined that, through the sermons of Amos, the moral decadence and social disorder in Samaria should be proclaimed everywhere, as a negative example. The accusation brought by the prophet in verse 10 suggests the high degree of perversion of the inhabitants of the city of Bethel: "they do not know how to do right, says

the Lord" (Amos, 1991, 3:10). The accumulation of defiant wealth and luxury was done at the expense of justice, through dishonest capital accumulation and the violent exploitation of the disadvantaged people.

In chapter IV (1-3), the luxury and greed of the women of Samaria are condemned, who contributed to the worsening of the economic situation of the poor through their attitude towards wealth and the desire for material accumulation, by supporting their men in committing acts of social injustice and oppression of small owners, that were at the origin of their luxurious life, because the women were motivated by the desire to have the demands of a worldly life satisfied (Bocian, 1996, 37): "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands: Bring us some drinks!" (Amos, 1991, 4:1).

Amos vehemently exposes the tendency of a certain social category that lives with the aim of satisfying its hedonistic desires, manifesting traits that are obviously foreign to the purpose of human existence. The way of life led by men, marked by the self-sufficiency they demonstrated, is also criticized. Amos opposes luxury and wealth not on principle, but because they were based on injustice, exploitation of other people and alienation from God's precepts (Basarab, 1979, 427). The following verses of chapter IV mention the events that are warnings of impending divine punishment, signs that the people of Israel ignored and therefore did not display an attitude of sincere repentance that could have been saving (Basarab, 1979, 472).

The prophesied punishments had a pronounced pedagogical character. God does not punish out of anger, but in order to correct human behavior. The punishments represent occasions for repentance, for returning to God, which He offers to His people precisely as evidence of love. The people of Israel rejected sincere repentance and the desire to return to God and preferred cultic formalism, the zeal of demonstrative pilgrimages, devoid of spiritual finality, and pagan ritual sacrifices, which had no other effect than that of alienating the people from their God. Therefore, verse 12 contains a warning, when God conveys through His prophet the fact that the moment of meeting God is approaching, but not as a spiritual communion, but for judgment (Basarab, 1979, 473): "Israel, prepare to meet your God. He who forms the mountains, who creates the wind, and who reveals his thoughts to mankind, who turns dawn to darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth - the Lord God Almighty is his name " (Amos, 1991, 4: 12-13).

Regret (repentance) – the path to forgiveness

Chapters V and VI contain elegiac speeches, and their main theme is not only the threat of punishment, but also the possibility of avoiding it, which is signaled by the words: "Seek me and live; 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. Seek the Lord and live, or he will sweep through the tribes of Joseph like a fire; it will devour them, and Bethel will have no one to quench it" (Amos, 1991, 5: 5-6). Because of the moral-religious decadence, social injustice was the most widespread problem in that historical period in the Northern Kingdom, that is why the prophet Amos insistently returns to the free will of Christians, i.e. the choice between good and evil, mentioning that good must be loved, and evil must be hated, because a personal relationship must be established between man and doing good: "Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph" (Amos, 1991, 5: 14-15).

In a society where civilization and progress have penetrated unequally into the social classes, Amos becomes a disturbing presence, as he criticizes the luxury of the capital's buildings, the polished stone houses, the ivory and ebony ornamentations, the comfortable divans, which had been made by unjust means, by exploiting the financially disadvantaged classes. The prophet expresses this by using the following words: "There are those who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground. There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth. You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts" (Amos, 1991, 5: 7, 10-12).

The values on which social relations were based and which the Covenant sanctioned as desirable values, therefore the will of Yahweh, had been diverted from their purpose, therefore the prophet, filled with revolt, brings accusations to his contemporaries, to whom he speaks about divine judgment, since they neglected not a life against formal laws, but a moral life. In Amos' view, the disregard of human justice is also a rebellion against God, manifested in the transgression of the Covenant. The degree of corruption and degradation of society is marked in the speech of the

prophet, who considers Yahweh as his protector and condemnes those who declares that particular historical era as an unfortunate period, a historical accident, without assuming their own fault for the situation, considering that God will step in to end injustice without any human effort. Amos shows that the revolt against the divine order will attract God's punishment, because the level of injustice, violence and cultic formalism that had been reached could no longer be tolerated.

However, the prophet does not fail to show the way to avoid punishment: a sincere repentance could change a divine decision that seemed final. The decision to serve good and identify with God could bring about a change in the divine will in favor of the humans. Even if the divine punishment is just, Amos shows empathy towards the fate of Israel, feels connected to his contemporaries in the Northern Kingdom and lets the hope of divine mercy shine through in his speeches for those who decide to return to God. In his speeches, an anticipation of the revelation of the New Testament can be observed, in the sense that God is not only a revengeful God, but also a merciful God.

Amos understands the weaknesses of humans, therefore, he expresses the hope that a sincere repentance can influence the divine decision. In Amos' theology, the grace of divine mercy and goodness lies in the organic connection with justice. Together with empathy towards the Other, this makes up what his contemporaries should have recognized as specific to God's love (Basarab, 1979, 418). In verses 21-27 of the 5th chapter we observe the repudiation of the formalist cult, through a criticism against the sanctuaries and the personnel who ensure the functioning of those religious establishments, places where, under the influence of foreign peoples, a deviant evolution of the religious cult was accepted and encouraged. These acts of worship, which did not honor God, but worshiped the king and the idols, as happened in Bethel, are harshly criticized by the prophet, and these criticisms led to contradictions between Amos and the priest Amasia, who claimed that the pilgrimages and numerous sacrifices would be sufficient to glorify God (Semen & Melniciuc Puica, 1995, 274). Although the practice of Christian rituals had been maintained in the national places of worship, idolatry was practiced outside thos holy places and immorality was tolerated. This is not a condemnation of sacrifices as such, but of using sacrifices as a substitute to a truly moral behavior (Biblical Dictionary, 1995, 34).

Secular justice and divine justice - interdependencies

Chapter VI addresses a warning to the leaders of society, to whom death and slavery are predicted, because of pride and indulgence in a hedonistic life style. Verse 8 shows the divine contempt because of social injustices: "I abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses; I will deliver up the city and everything in it" (Amos, 1991, 6: 8). Verse 12 criticizes the violation of secular justice, because the activity of the judges in Israel, diverted from its purpose, corrupted and demoralized life within the community: "But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness" (Amos, 1991, 6: 12).

Chapters 7-9 present the visions and prophecies of Amos concerning the end of the people of Israel. There is a noticeable difference in tone between the prophecies and the visions of Amos. While the prophecies are harsh, insensitive to human weaknesses, distant and relentless in announcing the punishment, the visions highlight the human side of the prophet, his sensitivity to the suffering of the people, his understanding and solidarity with his contemporaries. Amos presents himself as the mysterious witness of some events that place him in the proximity of God, an advantage he uses to try to save his contemporaries, exclaiming: "Sovereign Lord, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!" (Amos, 1991, 7: 5). This verse expresses the prophet's complex state of mind, in which fear, complete trust in the righteousness of divine intervention and the desire to mediate between the human and the divine concretize the prophet's uproar. However, the perseverence in error of the people of Israel makes the prophet avoid invoking forgiveness, causing him to ask only for a postponement of the punishment. Amos' intervention is crowned with success, and this is how God's patience is emphasized (Basarab, 1979, 508). Chapter VII "vehemently signals the moral disorder, which is like an invasion of locusts that eat the buds of a virtuous life" (Basarab, 1979, 508).

Chapter VIII continues with a series of prophetic sentences, which maintain and motivate the decision to punish the people of Israel, previously communicated by God to the prophet in visions, due to immoral acts, like the desire to get rich by unfair means, as the merchants did in their activity, when they resorted to forgeries. The prophet reproaches that this social category, the merchants, is marked by dehumanization. The desire to get rich did not stop with forgeries, but continued with the exploitation of vulnerable people by any means, especially through the slave trade (Neaga, 1993, 3): "Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying: When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain,

and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat? - skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat" (Amos, 1991, 8: 4-6).

Amos believes that the rich, who have accumulated their wealth through violence and robbery, show no remorse, or any tendency to respect God's law. Their ultimate goal was to get rich, therefore they were going to maintain the state of social injustice, but the situation could not be tolerated indefinitely, which is why they were going to be subject to the imminent divine judgment, without the possibility of forgiveness, because God had decided: "I will never forget their deeds" (Amos, 1991, 8: 7). The dominant social classes consolidate their position by brutalizing the poor, disadvantaged classes, a behavior that is exposed by the prophet, which is why, as a result of all their unjust deeds, their holidays were to become occasions of lamentation and not of joy: "I will turn your religious festivals into mourning and all your singing into weeping" (Amos, 8: 10).

Attention is drawn to the fact that a broken law cannot be restored only through rituals, sacrifices or participation in celebrations. Formalistic rituals have no moral value, as long as those who practice them do not show any genuine intention to rise to the moral standards that the holy Covenant assumed. A ceremonial and ritualistic religion has nothing in common with the true morality required by divinity (Biblical Dictionary, 1995, 35). The isolation of the people from the divine message transmitted through the prophet Amos draws the young generation of Israel into a moral decay from which no prospect of liberation can be seen. All the unjust acts, followed by cultic pharisaism, are nothing but the consequences of the estrangement from God, which are the reasons why God abandons his chosen people.

In the last part of the ninth chapter, however, is glimpsed the idea of saving those worthy members of a people who was about to be punished. The precepts of the Old Testament advocate for a social life that is more humanitarian, so that even at the time of applying the sanctions, attempts are made to soften the sufferings of those punished according to their level of guilt, an element that constitutes a common point and a first-order concern of all the prophets. Beyond the harshness of some prophecies, most of the prophets show optimism for humanity's ability to morally recover and were convinced that a superior moral order will emerge in the world, based on justice, peace and equality, through which good will defeat evil, peace will be restored, and individuals subject to passions and hedonistic desires will turn into militants of peace, understanding and fraternity.

The prophets carried out a continuous activity for the improvement of social life, the book of the prophet Amos being just an example in this sense (Negoiță, 1950, 588). Throughout the Book of Amos, the society of the time, the legal, political and religious institutions, and the abandonment of the desire to promote a moral life, are criticized. Various forms of oppression and exploitation are highlighted, and the realism and topicality of Amos' criticisms are evident in the accusations brought against the ruling class and in the disagreement expressed towards idolatrous forms of spirituality.

Conclusions

Reading the Book of Amos leads us to conclude that the prophet was the protagonist of special spiritual experiences, and aspects were revealed to him that exceeded the human understanding of common individuals, which transformed the prophet into an interlocutor of God. The concept that relationships between people must be based on virtue, love, justice, mercy is constantly present in the Book of Amos, because it forms the basis for the relationship between people and God, which is fundamentally based on love.

Amos' main concern was to demonstrate the advantages of a life led according to divine precepts, since any violation of the moral law was at the same time a violation of divine law and therefore a challenge to divine justice (Biblical Dictionary, 1995, 35). From the prophet's sermons, it appears that, from a religious-moral point of view, a life lived in moral decadence, with the defiance of secular laws, leads not only to contempt for fellow human beings, but the same indifference and the same contempt will be adopted towards God, or towards religion in general. For the vanguardism of the ideas that he preached, the prophet Amos was considered by many (Introduction to the Book, 2001, 1131) a social reformer.

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