CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   RESEARCH PROBLEMS

Giving close attention to the book of Amos, one will easily see that the prophet Amos is presenting a prophecy of justice. The prophecy itself has its background in the ancient Israelite setting, the situation in the eight century BCE, which was quite perplexing. It can be described as an advanced state of decay—socially, morally, and religiously—where society was experiencing great injustice. The lack of conscience and euphoria of the rich, the abuse of power, and the exploitation of the poor by the ruling classes in the land became a common phenomenon (cf Prēvost 1998:26). For example, as Bright (2000:259-260) describes it, "a small farmer found himself often at the mercy of the wealthy landlords who took advantage of the plight of the poor in order to enlarge their holdings." As a result, social injustice became one of the main problems during that time.

In the midst of this situation, God commissioned Amos to go and prophecy social justice to the Israelites. This was not an ordinary or easy task for him because it implied tension and even confrontation. The message Amos delivered came from the idea that God himself opposed and confronted injustices carried out by human beings (cf Freedman 1990:252), especially those who were in political and religious authority. He, through the mouth of the prophet, demanded justice among his people. Mitchell (1990:190) argues that Amos "dwells on the irresistible, inescapable power of God only for the sake of enforcing demand growing out of his character. The attribute of justice or righteousness is especially

prominent. Jehovah is represented as condemning injustice." This demand basically had a religious background. In other words, it had its foundation in the very character of YHWH, the God of the covenant. Accordingly, as far as the prophet is concerned, YHWH himself acts justly and he requires that men act justly in their relation with him and with one another. Hyatt (1949:346) pinpoints that "Injustice violates the fundamental idea that all of the Israelites constitute the people of YHWH. When the rich oppress the poor, or merchants cheat their customers, then the fundamental idea of the covenant is violated."

Such a predicament has been addressed by the foundation of divine laws applied in the land of Israel. The Mosaic Law and the Prophets (cf Mt 22:40) have declared that every Israelite must "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your minds" (Dt 6:5) and "love your neighbour as yourself" (Lv 19:18). Although the laws of YHWH were declared and read on a regular basis, and the religious rituals were performed on a daily basis, oppression and abusive actions to the poor and the marginalized filled the everyday life of the society during Amos' time. It seems that the people of Israel observed only the vertical aspects of divine laws, such as worship, while at the same time, neglected the horizontal aspects of it. In this connection, one may think that the major problem is on the question of why the Israelites kept their religious rituals while at the same time neglected their responsibility to do justice to their fellow citizens.

The main problem of this research, however, is not primarily on the said exposure of historical reality behind the messages Amos delivered, but rather on the development of theological significance of social justice in his messages. It deals with the problem of disharmony, the existence of the gap between the success (religious rigour, economic prosperity, and political stability) and the failure (social injustices) of the people of God. The reality seems to be quite far from the ideals of the covenant, the right relationship between God and his people and the right relationship among his covenanted people. These seemed to be the problem that the prophet Amos encountered during his time.

Moreover, in a more complex way, the problem does not only lie on the theological development of social justice but also on the very nature of the book

of Amos. The book has been subjected to a wide array of disparate opinions by Old Testament scholars. From the bibliographical entries ever published, for example Mays (1959), Kelley (1966), Roberts (1970), Craghan (1972), van der Wal (1986), and Carroll R (2002), one may see that the book of Amos has attracted an extraordinary amount of scholarly study in the last few decades (cf Hasel 1991 [b]:26). It is shown that there is an explosion of publications in the forms of commentaries, dissertations, monographs, books and articles on the book of Amos. In this regard, Petersen (1998:107) comments that "Amos and the scholarships devoted to it offer a microcosm work on prophetic literature. Virtually every method or perspective available has been exercised on these nine chapters. As a result, no prophetic book has a bibliography comparable in size to that on Amos."

Unfortunately, most of references on Amos have common problems, with which my research also shares. Firstly, the problem that deals with the method or approach applied to the texts of Amos. Particularly, it is focused on the issue of synchronic and diachronic orientation to the texts. According to Carroll R (2002:18-30), scholars approach the book of Amos with three foci of concentrations: first, "Behind the text." The terms "behind the text" here refers to the approaches that concentrate on some sort of historical reconstruction (for example, the works of Wolff [1977], Coote [1981], Lang [1981] and Barstad [1984]). Such an approach is considered as a diachronic approach to the readings of Amos; second, "within the text." It deals with an approach of investigating other means of textual study, especially the literary study (for example, De Ward & Smalley [1979], Gese [1987], Gitay [1980], Wendland [1988], and Andersen & Freedman [1989]). The said approach tends to hold on the reception of the final form of the text. Therefore, it is basically a synchronic approach to Amos' texts; and third, "In the front of the text." This term connotes that the main concern of the method is on the impact of the contemporary readers and their appropriation of the given text. Such an approach has its emphasis on the concern for justice and the prophetic denunciation of oppression as seen, for example, in liberation theology within the Two-Thirds World (for instance, the works of Miranda [1974], Tamez [1982], Croatto [1987], Schwantes [1987], and Padilla [1989]).

Thus, the exponents of this approach also tend to heavily emphasize on the synchronic way of interpreting the texts of Amos.

These varying approaches have ended up with diverse results as shown in the works of Old Testament scholars. Those who concentrate on the "behind the text" approach are inclined to put more emphasis on the complexity of historical-critical method. Meanwhile, those who have given more attention to the "within the text" approach deal with the specialized literary theories. Next, those who focus on the "in the front of the text" seem to propose fresh voices around the world, seeking a life free from social, economic, political, or gender oppression as seen in liberation theologies, feminism, womanist view, and concerned evangelicals (see Carroll R 2002:50). As a consequence, the study of the book of Amos can no longer be done through one dominating approach, which is the tendency of most scholars. It seems that scholars naturally tend to gravitate to one or two of these three orientations or emphases according to their interests and training.

Secondly, is the problem related to the task of Old Testament theology. The main question is should OT theology be considered as a descriptive or normative study. This issue has separated scholars into different parties. On the one hand, those who hold on to the descriptive study (Gabler, Wrede, Eichrodt, von Rad, Jacob, Wright, Terrein, Stendahl, and others) maintain that the task of the Old testament theology is only to describe historically the subject to be studied or to answer a question: what it meant? (Hasel 1991[a]:28-34). Other modern scholars believe that Old Testament theology does not have any connection with today's life, for example, as Barr—objecting that there cannot be a normative ethical principle of the Bible—states that "the Bible is not in fact a problem-solver" (1973:142). For him, the authority of the Bible becomes, therefore, not an absolute standard by which behaviour can be judged but a sufficient standard that facilitates contemporary behaviour (Barr 1971:24-40).

On the other hand, those who hold on the normative approach (Eissfeldt, Vriezen, Childs, de Vaux, Porteous, and others) believe that the task is not only to describe but also to interpret the subject theologically (what it means?), and it is conceived as normative for faith and life (Hasel 1991[a]:28-34). This implies that the Bible

with its all recorded events and realities in the past does not only have a significant meaning to the ancient people but also to the contemporary people and context. The past also deals with today's reality of human beings. Westermann (1986:45) argues that "The Bible deals with the whole, the sum total of reality. Therefore, to speak of God is to speak of reality. The Bible begins with creation of the world and of mankind. The whole is thought of as an extension of time and space." This view is a bit uncomfortable especially for those who are not convinced of the authority of the Bible.

Thirdly, the problem situated in the scarcity of thorough study on the theme "social justice" in most Old Testament theology references. Observing recent publications on the Old Testament theology, one can hardly find a literature written on the theme of social justice. It seems that such a theme has been taken for granted by some Old Testament scholars. For the past few years, discussion of this theological theme was rarely done in a comprehensive way. With the exception of Brueggemann's work (1997:421-434, 644-646) that includes a longer discussion on " to listen and to practice justice" and Knierim's work under the sub-title "Food, land and justice" (1995:225-243), recent Old Testament theology textbooks (House [1998], Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim & Petersen [1999], Gerstenberger [2002], Rendtorff [2005], Goldingay [2006], and Waltke [2007]) have not given enough space yet to discuss this theme thoroughly. Only few dozens of pages were dedicated to discuss this central topic of Amos. Thus, most of these resources do not discuss the topic in a well defined way.

Fourthly, as will be seen in the next discussion ("History of Research" section), the theme "social justice" has never been theologically constructed from the book of Amos (in this case, the texts are Amos 2:6-8; 5:1-17; and 5:4-8), especially through a rhetorical analysis. These texts are chosen because they explicitly deal with the issues of social justice. At least, in these passages, the occurrence of the terms "justice" is very obvious. One cannot just ignore the significant occurrence of the idea of "social justice" since it is explicitly written in most parts of the book of Amos. Albeit major commentaries on Amos (Mays [1969], Hammershaimb [1970], Wolff [1977/1984], Soggin [1982], Stuart [1987], Andersen & Freedman

[1989], Finley [1990], Paul [1990], Niehaus [1992], Smith [1995], Birch [1997], Auld [1999], and Sweeney [2000]) are abundant and have studied these texts in a deeper way, still, there are no thorough theological investigations made particularly on such a topic. In my assumption, the discussions in most of Amos' commentaries lack comprehensiveness in dealing with "a theology of social justice."

Based on above observations, the problems of my research can be formulated in the following research questions: since publications are already abundant, why did the researcher write another subject on Amos? In dealing with the issue of the orientation to Amos texts studied, which orientation or perspective this research will follow, synchronic or diachronic? In relation to the issue of the task of Old Testament theology, toward what study this research tends to identify itself, descriptive or normative? In comparison with other Old Testament theology references that include a discussion on the theme "social justice," what is the significance of this research?

Moreover, the central questions are raised around the issue of theology of social justice in the book of Amos as proposed through rhetorical criticism: to begin with, what are the historical issues in the book of Amos? Who did write the book of Amos? What is Amos' main profession?   What are the historico-political backgrounds of Amos' time? What are the socio-religious backgrounds during Amos' time? Next, what are the meanings of the texts (i.e. Am 2:6-8; 5:1-17; and 8:4-8) analyzed? In applying rhetorical analysis to the given texts, this research will question about what the rhetorical unit, situation, invention, disposition and techniques of each particular passage are. Finally, what is the overall theological concept of social justice in the book of Amos? What is the origin of a theology of social justice in the Old Testament? What are the theological aspects of social justice within the book? and finally, how to construct a theology of social justice derived from the book?

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

My research, entitled "Establish justice in the land: rhetoric and theology of social justice in the book of Amos," aims to answer above questions in a more comprehensive way. The main objective is that this research will propose a biblical theology of social justice drawn particularly from the book of Amos using a rhetorical analysis. Subordinate to the core objective, the minor purposes of this research are: firstly, this research seeks to reveal the historical issues "behind the text." It deals with the historical reconstruction of the book of Amos in general, which includes discussions on the authorship, the original professions of the prophet, historical-political background, as well as socio-religious background. Using such a diachronic approach is necessary in order to get insights into the backdrop of the prophet's message on social justice. It is expected that such information may contribute to a better understanding of the texts studied.

Secondly, my research aims to rhetorically analyze selected passages in the book of Amos, especially those related to the issue of social justice (Am. 2:6-8; 5:1-17; 8:4-6). This analysis strives to identify the text's rhetorical unit as argumentative units that will affect the audience's reasoning and imagination, and to examine the specific rhetorical situation that the discourse is designed to present as determined by the choices made by the rhetorician. This also seeks to describe both rhetorical invention and disposition, where the mode(s) of convincing and the organization of material are pointed and to identify the literary devices used creatively and effectively by the rhetorician. Finally, this analysis tries to evaluate the effectiveness of the rhetorical strategies used by the speaker in order to convince his audiences. By using rhetorical criticism, I expect to find the intended meaning of these passages, particularly, concerning the issue of social justice.

Thirdly, and finally, this research attempts to construct a biblical theology of social justice in the book of Amos. It seeks to explain theological implications about social justice behind the use of rhetorical devices employed by the prophet Amos. The focus then is on the finding of theological relational aspects of social justice as found in the book, a triangular relational model of social justice, that is relations between YHWH and the powerful, the powerful and the powerless and

the powerless and YHWH. At the end, these relational aspects are projected to propose a biblical theological construction under a main theme, an establishment of social justice in the land of Israel.

1.3   HISTORY OF RESEARCH

During the last two decades, several distinguished Old Testament scholars have presented outstanding studies around the theme of social justice. Several different approaches to the issue have been proposed. The work of Wolterstorff (1983), *Until justice and peace embrace*, was originally part of the series of Kuyper Lectures at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1981. Inspired by the original Calvinist reform, he "open[s] the discussion by considering what the social vision and practice of the reform was and bring[s] the contributions of thinkers in the reformed/Presbyterian tradition of Christianity into a discussion of more specific issues" (Wolterstorff 1983:viii). The discussion of social justice in this book—as it is related to politics—undeniably is strongly influenced by Reformed theological tradition. Hence, the nature of the dialogue is more on the level of socio-political theology from a Calvinistic perspective rather than a biblical theology (cf Echeverria 1985: 207). Although there is a discussion about justice from the Old Testament perspective, the explanation is by far too short. It seems that this papaer was intended to be an biblical overview written in only a few pages.

The use of socio-historical tools analysis, considered an approach where one seeks to reconstruct social developments within the course of Israelite history, is best represented by the extensive and consistent works of Gottwald, *The tribes of YHWH: a sociology of religion of liberated Israel* (1979), "Sociological method in the study of ancient Israel" (1983), *The Hebrew Bible: A socio-literary introduction* (1985), *Social ccientific: criticism of the Hebrew Bible and its social world* (1986), "From tribal existence to empire: the socio-historical context of the rise of Hebrew prophets" (1990). In these works, he tries to consistently employ social analysis to reconstruct ancient Israel's social setting. He comes up with the

conclusion that a peasant revolt against the opposing rulers of Canaan was the impetus for the emergence of Israel as a people with a distinctive religious orientation. If one does close and critical reading on his work, one will find that the work is too speculative, especially while the author was using heavy presuppositions from neo-Marxist sociological disciplines to interpret the texts. It is still, however, a reconstructive approach which needs to be improved in the future, particularly in its methodological validity.

There was a similar—and yet different—approach recently used by Habel in his work, *This land is mine: six biblical land ideologies* (1995[a]). Here, the use of textual analysis is reliable. Instead of reconstructing the social history behind the texts, the author aimed at demonstrating the social order promoted by the texts. The focus of his publication is to interpret a range of documents from an alien time and culture with the assumption that the texts were the products of social groups and forces at work in ancient society. It is interesting that Habel (1995[a]:279) himself later finds out that these two approaches can increase more argumentations by honestly saying, "the first has a vested interest in uncovering history and has a particular sociological bias, the second is influenced by particular literary theories of textual analysis. Interpreters today therefore tend to identify their particular bias before proceeding with their analysis."

Birch, in his *Let justice roll down: The Old Testament, ethics, and Christian life* (1991), uniquely uses a moral or ethical approach to the issue. He plainly states that he intends to propose a volume on Old Testament and Christian ethics, which "attempts to relate the testimonies and stories of Israel's faith as recorded in the Hebrew canon to the character and conduct of Christians and the Christian community in our time" (Birch 1991:18). This work gives the readers a general explanation on the foundation of "moral ethics" methodologically, historically and theologically as it is written in the Hebrew canon. In addition, his work is based on biblical theological perspectives, as one infers that he is much influenced by Von Rad's "retelling" method of doing theology, although without the latter's fine interest in the historical-critical analysis of the text (cf Knight 1994:74-77), and he uses a methodology that tries to bridge biblical studies and Christian ethics.

Unfortunately, after doing critical reading on the book, one can hardly find a comprehensive discussion on the issue of social justice, since the work itself seems to be heavily loaded with biblical proofs and discussions from the socio-ethical perspective rather than a solid biblical theology of social justice.

A festschrift for Benjamin Uffenheimer, *Justice and righteousness: biblical themes and their influence* (1992), edited by Reventlow and Hoffman, offers a more comprehensive discussion on the theme in comparison to works mentioned above. It is basically a compilation of different articles on the topic of "justice and righteousness" written by several scholars. The readers of the book are expected "to be guided by these keywords to one of the central ideas of the Bible which has had an immense impact on the thinking of the modern world" (Reventlow & Hoffman 1992:7). In spite of the relevance of the theme, the focus of this work is not on proposing a biblical theology of social justice from the book of Amos, rather it presents a long discussion on the theme within a broader historical range, that is, from ancient to modern contexts.

Interestingly, one chapter of this book written by Moshe Weinfield, "Justice and righteousness" also appeared few years later in a book, *Social justice in ancient Israel and in the ancient Near East* (1995). It is undoubtedly a more extensive study on the theme as compared to the former writings. The author indicates that this book aims to clarify the term "justice and righteous," especially the meaning of the expression "doing justice and righteousness." It is a study that demonstrates "the concept of doing justice and righteousness in the literature of Ancient Israel and of the Ancient Near East which implies maintaining justice in society, so that equality and freedom prevail" (Weinfeld 1995:5). To propose this intention, the author exegetically examines biblical materials on the issue of justice and righteousness from the perspective of the Law, the Rulers and the people as individuals and as groups. At the same time, he relates them to the concepts that existed in the context of the Near Eastern nations. A close and critical reading of this book shows that there is a lack of attention to particular prophetic books such as Amos. In general, both books are still considered as the best studies on the issue of social justice from a biblical perspective.

Similar to these works but a more concise one is a work done by Bruce Malchow, *Social justice in the Hebrew Bible* (1996). In this book the discussion of the theme covers almost all the books in the Old Testaments, including the law codes, the prophetic books, the psalms, the later narrative works and wisdom literature. Compared to the above works, although Malchow's also focuses on the same theme, his discussion does not refer to the issue of social justice itself but rather to the *origin* of the concept. He mentions that "Israel did not originate the concept of social justice. It was present in the other countries of the Near East before Israel, and Israel received the legacy of their thought on the subject" (Malchow 1996:xiv). This work is actually a discussion about how other ancient cultural traditions have influenced Old Testament concepts of social justice.

There are similar local resources focused on the same theme. One is written by an Indonesian Catholic scholar, Banawiratna, *Keadilan sosial dalam Kitab Suci* ("*Social justice in the Bible*" [1997]). The author gives a thematic survey on the subject from both Old and New Testaments and proposes some practical implications for implementing justice to the society. Although the focus of the work is clear, it is still too broad and, in relation with this study, is not concentrated on a particular book of the Bible. Another one, edited by Singgih, *Amos dan krisis fundamental Indonesia* ("*Amos and Indonesian Fundamental Crisis*" [2000]), seems to be more focused on discussing the crisis in the Indonesian contemporary situation than the way justice is reflected in the book of Amos. Unfortunately, this is actually not a book about a theology of social justice. Although the author has discussed the issue in a few pages, still, it cannot be categorized as a comprehensive biblical theological work on the theme, because the emphasis of the book is actually not on the issue of justice but on the repentance of the people as it is suggested in Amos 5:6a.

What is more, Carroll R (2002:163-170) lists several selected doctoral dissertations that have been written on the book of Amos (from 1985 to 2000), but only a few of them are specifically dealt with the theme of social justice. To mention some, the work of Mbele, "La justice sociale ou l'ultimate possibilité de salut pour Israel selon le prophète Amos" (1988) analyzes the book from the

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perspective of social justice as set over against final salvation for the nation of Israel. Heyns' work "Amos—advocate for freedom and justice: a socio-historical investigation" (1992) attempts to reconstruct the social context for the message and ministry of the prophet. Pangumbu Shaondo also analyzes the social message of the book of Amos and argues that this constitutes a plea in favor of the oppressed lower class in his work "L'intervention sociale d'Amos—une contribution à l'ètude de la mission prophétique en Afrique aujourd'hui" (1992).

In addition, using a cultural anthropological approach, Ramírez's work "The social location of the prophet Amos in the light of a cultural anthropological model" (1993) attempts to present a more complex and realistic approach to the social setting of the prophet by utilizing the group/grid model in order to supplement form critical studies. Lastly, the work of Mahaffey "An investigation of social justice as it relates to the message of Amos" (1993) proposes a very basic exegesis of relevant texts in Amos with the aim of ascertaining the basis for prophetic condemnation of social injustice by other nations and within Israel. It is important to note that, at the present time, no doctoral research has been done in proposing "a theology" (particularly "an Old Testament theology") of social justice in the book of Amos from a rhetorical analysis.

So far, there are excellent resources produced and are available in discussing the issue of social justice from different perspectives. The approaches they employed to the issue seem to be valid enough and resulted in the production of outstanding and valuable materials. Unfortunately, all the discussions are not specific and complete enough in terms of utilizing a sound biblical theological approach. They are seemingly overloaded with sociological, textual, theological or even ethical approaches and discussions, or lacked focus, especially on the comprehensive work of the issue from particular prophetic books of the Bible (i.e. Amos, Hosea and Micah). It is always necessary to study the subject from a particular prophetic standpoint for, according to Mays (1983:6), "in their sayings, the prophetic stance on justice receives its classic expression." Although some works are able to link together the social justice and a particular book (in this case, Amos), they do not use a rhetorical approach and construct a biblical theology. To conclude, all of

the previous works have had approaches different from this research, they have not used rhetorical analysis. Moreover, they have not proposed to construct a theology of social justice drawn from the book of Amos.

1.4 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Against this backdrop, this research will try to fill the indicated research gap by proposing a biblical theology of social justice which is focused on the Book of Amos and is formulated by using a rhetorical approach on selected texts in the book of Amos, especially related to the issues of social justice. In an attempt to understand the meaning of several texts such as these, one cannot avoid the exegetical process. Exegesis itself might be defined as a thorough, analytical study of a biblical passage done so as to arrive at a useful interpretation of the passage (cf Stuart 2001:1). This definition clearly describes the primary task of the interpreter or hermeneutic, to reveal the meaning of the texts (see Morgan & Barton 1988:6). Hirsch (1967:8) believes that albeit that the significance of the text does change, the meaning is still represented by the text itself, and every communicative action presupposes the possibility of attaining such understanding (cf Vanhoozer 1998:218). In a more specific way, Steck (1998:3) defines Old Testament exegesis as "the endeavor to determine the historical, scientific and documentable meaning of the texts which have been transmitted in the Old Testament."

It implies that any interpretation requires a scientific approach to the Bible in terms of being critical and controlable in every step and treatment in order to find out the meaning of the text according to its specific genre. Barton (1984:19) insists that "biblical criticism has been concerned with enabling the reader to acquire the competence necessary to read the various types of literature that make up the Bible." Thus, this approach is considered scientific because the subject of study can be determined by investigating main passages to the degree that its understanding of the text(s) was grounded exclusively upon knowledge and

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arguments whose appropriateness to the subject can be evaluated by others, and whose rationale can be substantiated (see Steck 1998:3).

1.4.1 Rhetorical Criticism

As an art and a science of interpreting the scripture, the term "exegesis" is indeed too general and wide in scope. It may include all approaches available to the scriptures, such as form, redaction, literary, historical, grammatical and other related analysis. To make it more specific, this study will mainly employ a more recent methodology to intepret the text, namely rhetorical criticism. The main reason why this research utilizes such a method is that this approach is well suited for the genre of texts selected in this study. Barton (1984:19) reminds us that before studying the various texts of the Old Testament one should have "literary competence" and the ability of "genre-recognition."

Besides, according to Gitay (1980:293), "Since prophetic speech is discourse address, the entire range of rhetoric must be utilized in studying prophetic genres." This implies that to have a better understanding of the meaning of the text, an interpreter should use a proper exegetical method fitted to the genre of the text since scriptures utilized many forms of speech. Goldingay (1995:4) suggests that "the interpretation (or exposition) of them [texts] needs to allow for its diverse forms, and to reflect them." In this connection, since I consider the genre of the texts as rhetorical, the proper approach to interpret them is by using rhetorical analysis. This thought is based on the literary study of Dorsey (1999:277) on the book of Amos, "The book is a masterpiece of rhetorical skill; and it is carefully and effectively structured." Studies done by other scholars on these particular passages have shown a similar perspective (De Waard 1977:170-77; Smalley 1979:118-27; Gitay 1980:293-309; Van der Wal 1983:107-13; Dorsey 1992:305-30).

Furthermore, there are other reasons why this research uses the rhetorical approach: first, it generally treats the text as it is. It means that this approach

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accepts the biblical text studied as a final form. Unlike form criticism, a rhetorical analysis is not concerned with fragmenting the text into numerous hypothetical sources, fragments, and interpolations. It goes beyond form critics in its view of the biblical texts albeit form criticism recently recognized the literary forms in the final text. It is more synchronic in nature (cf Mathews 1999:205) because it underscores the unity of the Bible, or a passage, based on consistency of style and argument (cf Muilenburg 1951: 475-77), and only examines the present or final form of biblical texts (see Dozeman, 1992:714).

Secondly, it has its root in historical data. Accordingly, a holistic approach to interpretation should comprise two elements, the literary analysis and grammatical-historical studies (cf Mathews 1999:208). It means that there is a close relationship between the final text and the ancient reader. To understand how the texts affected the ancient audience means to understand the ancient audience to whom it was addressed. The readers of the text are not seen as passive recipients of a speech, but as thinking people who are able to interact with the text and choose whether to respond to the message or not (see Wuellner 1987: 461). In other words, after reading the final text, the reader should respond properly to what is being read.

Thirdly, it focuses on the meaning of the text. The primary task of any biblical interpretation is to find out the message of a given text (Kennedy 1984:159), "what the text does say, and how does it go about saying it?" Therefore, the focus of rhetorical analysis is not on the history of Israelite religious beliefs, or the uses of literary genres, or even on the redaction history of the text, but rather, on the meaning of the text. Such a meaning can be drawn from the study of the function of the text using rhetorical analysis. Therefore, through the rhetorical approach, the interpreter is enabled "to understand better how a text functioned in its historical context and . . . to express the message of a text so that it can be persuasive to its contemporary audience" (Watson 1988:182).

The term rhetorical criticism is closely associated with literary criticism. According to Hauser (1994:3), "rhetorical criticism has much in common with the other literary analyses which have grown rapidly among Old Testament scholars

in recent years." To be more specific, the common ground of the two is found on the point that both of them have shared a similar focus of study, the biblical texts, and they have shared the same literary concerns. Exum and Clines (1993:16) explain that "Rhetorical criticism, sharing the outlook of new [literary] criticism about the primacy of the text itself, and often operating under the banner, 'final form of the text,' concerns itself with the way the language of the texts is deployed to convey the meaning." The biblical texts here become the main focus of all biblical studies and the groundwork for all critical approaches, as it was stated, "It is the text as the Word of God that motivates the religious reader to interpret theologically and ecclesiastically" (Mathews 1999:206). Also, the relationship between these approaches was not only laid in the field of textual or literary matters but also in its historical development, where the rhetorical approach was considered as a part of the development of a literary one.

This association, however, is not always easy to understand. Since literary criticism is closely related to both source and form criticisms (cf Hauser 1994:3), this may create confusion in trying to understand the terms used. It means that the former could not reduce its scope and meaning to become the latter. Longman III (1987:7) reminds us, "Due to the possibility of confusion, some have advocated the use of the term *aesthetic criticism* to describe literary criticism. Others desire to broaden the scope of *rhetorical criticism*, though it usually refers only to matters of style." It is a reaction to terminological confusion and a desire to affirm the superiority of literary criticism over source and form criticisms, and then over the rhetorical or any other terms. This view indeed insists on refusing the literary approach to be reduced to any other literary form of interpretation, or to narrow down the concept of literary criticism.

Moreover, in a recent literary approach, especially among the new literary criticism scholars or those who used the feminist, political, psychoanalytic, reader-response, and deconstructionist criticisms, rhetorical criticism can not only be associated with literary criticism as if it was considered as an "old" literary criticism. Along with structuralism, and "old" new criticism, they claimed that rhetorical criticism was no longer considered as a new literary approach (see

Exum & Clines 1993:15-20).   Therefore, it is difficult to understand rhetorical criticism when it is related to literary criticism, since literary criticism has a broad and uncertain meaning.

In spite of this unresolved issue, I will still utilize rhetorical criticism because it is considerably more specific in treating the texts than literary criticim which is too broad in scope. This approach has a significant place in biblical studies nowadays since its first appearance in Muilenburg writing's, "Form Criticism and Beyond" (1969:1-18) at his inauguration as a president of the *Society of Biblical Literature* in 1968. His proposal basically is a reaction against the older literary studies used by biblical scholars in the past few decades, such as source and form criticisms. Although very helpful in understanding the texts, these approaches had definite limitations in some points. Source criticism is limited because "[its] tendency to use literary criteria derived from modern culture as a basis for finding inconsistencies in the biblical text and separating it into earlier sources, or source criticism's tendency to dice the biblical text into tiny components" (Hauser, 1994:9).

Form criticism, popularized by Gunkel, is no longer adequate to handle the issue of literary style and persuasion of the texts. Muilenburg (1969:1-2) infers that "the circumspect scholar will not fail to supplement his [Gunkel's] form-critical analysis with a careful inspection of the literary unit in its precise and unique formulation. He will not be completely bound by the traditional elements of motifs of the literary genre; his task will not be completed until he has taken full account of the features which lie beyond the spectrum of genre." Significantly, rhetorical criticism is proposed as a proper approach that will be able to deal with the weaknesses of both source and form criticisms. House (1992:6) observes that rhetorical criticism is "a new way" of reading the biblical texts, especially the Old Testament, as an improvement of the old method, namely literary criticism which included source and form criticism.

To understand what rhetorical crticism is, one should refer to an early explanation given by Muilenburg himself. Any valid method of interpretation of the text requires an attention to *stylistics*, as he writes, "What I am interested in, above all,

is understanding the nature of Hebrew literary composition, in exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and in discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole" (Muilenburg 1969:8). In addition, he further explains that the rhetorical approach concerns at least two things, "to define the limits or scope of literary unit, or to recognize precisely where and how it begins and where and how it ends" (Muilenburg 1969:9); and "to recognize the structure of a composition and to discern a configuration of its component parts, to delineate the warp and woof out of which the literary fabric is woven, and to note the various rhetorical devices that are employed for the marking" (Muilenburg 1969:10). Throughout his early works, Muilenburg set the agenda and example about what he meant by rhetorical criticism, such as the concern of literary composition, structural patterns, and literary devices of the text. Therefore, his proposal remained focused on the stylistic dimension of the text, as Howard (1994:87) proposes, "rhetorical criticism has tended to be primarily a literary concern, with emphasis upon stylistics."

However, the stress on stylistics has led some scholars in the rhetorical discipline, such as Gitay (1981), Kennedy (1984), Sternberg (1985), Wuellner (1987:448-63), and Mack (1990), to discontentment. They wanted better approaches developed which would be more comprehensive. Influenced by classical understanding of rhetoric, especially by Aristotle, who postulates that rhetoric is "the faculty of observing any given case the available means of persuasion" (as quoted by Tull, 1999:158), they give an *addendum* to it, the concern of persuasion of the literary devices on the reader. It is believed that this addition will give a more comprehensive understanding on the approach because the concern is not only on the literary artistry of the text but also on its persuasive effect on the original audience or the *ancient* reader. Majercik (1992:710) pinpoints it by saying, "Rhetoric is an art of composition by which language is made descriptive, interpretive, or persuasive."

In the same vein, Hauser (1994:4) adds that a rhetoric will basically do two things in studying a text: analyze the literature to the maximum extent possible, from the perspective of literary composition practiced in the works of ancient Israelite writers; and articulate the impact of the literary unit on its audience. Thus, rhetorical criticism, ideally, must give attention to both stylistics (literary artistry) and persuasion, as Kim (1997:92) writes, "there must be an oscillation of the two axes: 'the art of composition,' which emphasizes the aspect of artful speech in terms of structure (*dispositio*) and style (*elocutio*) and 'the art of persuasion,' which emphasizes the act of communication among the speaker, discourse and audience through the artisitic formulation of speech and writing."

This research is also aware of the limitations or weaknesses that the rhetorical approach has. Since its tendency is to stress more on the stylistics, rhetorical criticism (in Muilenburg's proposal) remains a series of observations about literary style, a description of literary features, verse by verse. This has resulted in at least two consequences: first, the loss of the purpose of interpretation. Black II (1989:253-54) identifies that this proposal is virtually synonymous with "literary artistry." As mentioned above, it is difficult to draw a line between the rhetorical and literary one because both of them have the same concern. Patrick and Scult (1990:12) critically say that this is not rhetorical criticism, in a real sense, but only "stylistic criticism."

Furthermore, stressing more on stylistics can reduce the uniqueness of this approach to merely a literary approach. Clifford (1980:18) accentuates the fact that "Reduced to concern of style, with the artistry of textual disposition and textual structure, rhetorical criticism has become indistinguishable from literary criticism." Such observations imply that the artistry exists for its own sake, and does not actually answer what is the purpose of the rhetorical devices. The rhetorical approach should go beyond the analysis of the genre of the text and also seek to convey a message, not merely to see "how this text uniquely shapes the conventions of genre and adds its own *novum*" (Clifford, 1980:18).

A second problem is the lack of interest in the historical characteristics of the text, such as the author and the original readers. A responsible interpretation of the

biblical text requires attention to these aspects. As Kaiser, Jr. (1981:3) once mentioned, "the understanding of a text, therefore, is always determined by the horizon of both author and reader." If one tries to find the effect of rhetorical devices on the original reader, he or she must not fail to give attention to the historical settings of the text. Because of the lack of interest in historical issues, rhetorical study can become less historical in its approach to the text. It is thought that rhetorical study, which overemphasize the stylistics of the text, tends to overlook the "setting in life" of the text. Kim (1997:93) criticizes this by saying, "rhetorical critics, as a branch of literary ctiticism, lacks interest in historical aspects of biblical text and tends to be a-historical and a-sociological." In a more appropriate way, although rhetorical criticism is thought of as having a different primary emphasis than other criticisms. It should not avoid the generic study of forms and the *Sitz im Leben* in which they are used. Hauser (1994:9) insists that "rhetorical critics normally prefer to leave the task of recovering the history and life of Israel to others," to source critics, and mainly, to form critics.

Realizing the limitations of rhetorical criticism, this research aims to be more critical by using both Muilenburg's model of rhetorical study and also later rhetorical methods. This means that the rhetorical method of interpretation will be used carefully in order for it to be most useful. To begin with, rhetorical study thus should continue to concentrate on the stylistics. This is to deal with the problems that both form and source critics left out. Since rhetorical criticism is a method of analyzing literary stuctures and techniques in the Old Testament text (Muilenburg 1969:1-18), this approach considers the text as having its own unique literary qualities. Watson (1988:182) states that this criticism seeks a knowledge of the forms, genres, structures, stylistic devices, and rhetorical techniques common to the literature of the Ancient Near East to understand better how these can contribute to the interpretation of the text. In a more specific way, these can be observed through some stylistic features of the text, such as chiasms and inclusios, repetition of the key words, strophic structure, repetitions of the particles and the vocatives, and rhetorical questions (see Tull 1999:158).

Next, rhetorical study will pay attention to both the author and the original readers, especially the author's intention and the persuasive effect on the original audience or ancient readers. This is to address the problem that Muilenburg's proposal presents, namely the overemphasis on styles. Rhetorical criticism is not only concerned with the literary styles and settings of the text but also with the function, as Kessler (1982:11) says, "Not only the setting, but also the function or intention (*Ziel*) is emphasized, which is a traditional rhetorical concern." It is recommended that "if this criticism is to be useful it must embrace more than a style, that is, the discovery of the author's intent and how it is transmitted through a text to an audience" (Kennedy 1984:12).

Besides, the close examination of the rhetorical devices and techniques, attention to the intention should bring an interpreter nearer to what the text is saying. Watson (1988:182) outlines the need for studying this aspect, "to achieve a better understanding of the movement of the author's thought, intent, message, and to determine how the rhetoric would be experienced by the audience." Tull (1999:175) interestingly concludes that "a text is more than the sum of its words. As important as stylistic analysis is for attending to particulars, it does not sufficiently account for all that texts do and come to mean . . . . a text is designed to maximize its persuasive powers." Thus, an interpreter, while using any given approach or analysis, should struggle to find out both the intention of the author (cf Knierim, 1973:435-468) and the response of its original readers.

Finally, rhetorical study should gain insight from other approaches as well. All approaches are important and complementary to each other. While proposing the rhetorical approach, Muilenburg argued that it should be considered as a supplementation to other criticisms, especially form criticism (cf Trible 1994:25-26). This means that in doing exegetical work the rhetorical approach is not independent, since it can not stand on its own apart from other approaches. It often includes other analysis needed in doing a complete exegesis, such as:

(1) historical analysis, which aims to reconstruct and then present the historical setting of the text (see Stuart 2001:30-33);

(2) literary analysis, a method of unpacking the meaning of the text, which includes formulating the thematic statement of the passage, tracing the train of thought and plot development from verse to verse (its structure), and identifying the genre and social setting of the passage. The analysis, in short, focuses on the issue of the text's literary integrity and the larger literary context (see Steck 1998:52); and

(3) form analysis, that is, to reconstruct the oral history of the constituent literary forms of the text. It is a "genre-critical" analysis of a passage where the questions must be asked about the matters such as who is speaking to whom, in what situation, and making use of what form. It thus "asks especially what institution or what circle of people took part in the transmission and further development of material handed down, how the individual traditions grew into union with each other, and how finally the longer sources, collections and books were preserved and originated" (Kaiser 1975:41).

In addition, rhetorical criticism—and other appropriate criticisms—should become valid elements in fomulating an Old Testament theology. It is believed that certain biblical texts, above all else, are theological texts because they focus on the relationship between God and the world (cf Knierim, 1995:67). It is clear that any intepretation of the text using any critical method should result in theological prepositions. Brueggemann (1997:54) once infers that rhetorical criticism—along with form criticism that prepared the way for its emergence—was a major force in Old Testament studies, and "one that has become indispensable for the work of Old Testament theology." This view is not widely accepted. Botha and Vorster (1996:17) disagree and consider it as "an impossible marriage between 'the harlot of the art' and 'the queen of sciences.'" They feel that since the rhetorical approach has its root in the art of speech in Greek and Roman tradition, it cannot be used to propose a theology.

However, this research believes that rhetorical criticism can still be used as <u>one</u> of the valid methods in constructing a biblical theology. Kim (1997:94) maintains that "we should better regard the encounter between theology and rhetoric as a promising marriage between 'the queen of the art' and 'the king of sciences.'

Rhetorical analysis will not only embellish but also articulate what theology is going to say and do. Since "all religious systems are rhetorical" (Kennedy 1984:7), therefore, "rhetorical criticism has the potential to contribute to the current endeavour to rejuvenate the discipline of biblical theology . . . [and] it can also help biblical theology to adopt a view of religious language that appreciates the communicative force of the biblical texts" (Möller 2005:689). Therefore, in carrying out a theological task, it is necessary to consider the best methods in interpreting the text. In this case, this study uses as the primary exegetical tool, rhetorical criticism, along with other important biblical criticisms applicable to the text that is being studied. Based on the rhetorical analysis of the text and the other relevant criticisms, the theological message of the text will be formulated.

In a more practical way, there are several essential features of rhetorical criticism (Dozeman 1992:714) need to be considered: First, the affirmation that every text is both typical, in the sense that it has a rhetoric purpose, and unique, in the sense that it contains unique configuration of details that an interpreter would impose on the text, rhetorical criticism is concerned with unique features within a given text (cf Trible 1978:9; see also Melugin 1979:91). Second, form and content must be interrelated in the interpretation of any text (Greenwood 1970:419). Third, rhetorical criticism has two foci, namely, to determine the boundaries of the larger literary units and to describe those rhetorical devices which unify particular texts (cf Kessler 1974:25-26; see also Kuntz 1982:141). The purpose of this approach is, in the end, on revealing the intrinsic meaning of the texts that will be analyzed.

In applying a rhetorical-critical approach to the texts, I intend to primarily adopt dan modified the five steps that Kennedy (1984:33-38) proposed: investigating the rhetorical unit, situation, categories (genres), problem (text's style and strategy), and effectiveness. The reason in choosing this procedure is that it presents a lucid and systematic model for rhetorical-critical exegesis that is under-girded by classical erudition (cf Möller 2005:690). However, in this research, the third (identifying "rhetorical genre[s]") and fourth ("rhetorical strategy') steps in Kennedy's model will be modified together under a different name, the "rhetorical techniques" step. His fifth step ("rhetorical effectiveness") will also be used as

the last step but rename as the "review of analysis." This arrangement is not done on the basis of my own creativity but in consideration of both effectiveness and systematization.

This research will include Kennedy's model integrated with Black's (1965), Kessler's (1974:22-36), and Wuellner's (1987:448-63) concepts of *inventio* (invention) and *dispotitio* (disposition) as two further and independent steps (Roth 1999: 296-8). Therefore, the rhetorical procedure used in this chapter will be explained and implemented as follows: first, the critic identifies the text's *rhetorical unit(s)*, understood as argumentative units that affect the audience's reasoning and imagination. Second, the focus is on the specific *rhetorical situation* and the imperative stimulus or exigency that the discourse is designed to present as determined by the choices made by the rhetorician. Third, the identification of *rhetorical invention* that includes pointing out invention, as a mode of convincing and the way it is used in an attempt to convince, as well as disposition, which concerns the organization of the material. Fourth, *rhetorical techniques* (similar to Kennedy's "text's style and rhetorical strategy"), which consists of different approaches to the audience and the different kinds of persuasive techniques, particularly the literary devices, used creatively and effectively by the rhetorician. Fifth, *review of analysis* that focuses on the discourse's rhetorical effectiveness, seeking to establish whether, or to what extent, it is a fitting response to the original exigency (see Möller 2005:690).

The above rhetorical approach will be applied to selected texts of the book of Amos including Amos 2:6-8, 5:7-15 and 24, and 8:4-7. There are at least two considerations why these specific passages are chosen as materials to be rhetorically analyzed. First, they are clearly related to the issue of social justice. A close reading of the texts will explicitly lead one to the description of the practices of injustice in Israel's society. Bird (1993:39-40) insists that these texts contain plain vocabularies of "justice," "the poor" and "the crimes against them" as it is expressed through the abuses of the power directed against weak members of society. Secondly and most importantly, these texts are considered as complete and independent units. As mentioned earlier, an independent unit is

required as one of the basic elements in doing rhetorical analysis. In analyzing division of units carefully, Hubbard (1989:163, 220) argues that such passages are independent units under the topic of "oppression" and "injustice" (see also the division chart of Andersen & Freedman 1989:14-15).

1.4.2 Brueggemann's Biblical-theological Method

Since so many methods—with their different strengths and weaknesses—have already been proposed in the field of Old Testament theological study, this research purposively uses an approach modeled by one of the contemporary Old Testament scholars, Walter Brueggemann. In his work, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, dispute, advocacy* (1997), Brueggemann proposes a different approach to Old Testament theology, namely a pluralistic approach. This approach tried to free itself from the dominant models available to us from the works *inter alia* Eichrodt and Von Rad, that became the governing models for doing Old Testament theology in the twentieth century.

The reason for stating this is that the context for interpretation changes from time to time. One can no longer use a method that maintains hegemony, such as a singular faith articulation in the text, an agreement on the use of critical method and a dominant interpretive community. Instead, in doing Old Testament theology, one must consider three things (Brueggemann 1997:xiv-xvi):

 (1) *a pluralism of faith affirmation* and articulation of YHWH in the text itself;
 (2) *a pluralism of methods*, that has displaced the long-standing hegemony of historical critical approaches; and
 (3) *a pluralism of interpretive community.*

When proposing this model, Brueggemann is not concerned with focusing any effort on substantive and thematic matters, as it has been done generally in this discipline, but rather on the *processes, procedures* and *interactionist potential*. This is expressed in his metaphor and the imagery he uses of a courtroom trial which focuses on the processive, interactionist modes of assertion and counter

assertion to find the truth. This focus leads to the concept of presenting the utterance of the theological claim—as a *testimony*—which is embodied in the biblical text itself, of allowing competing and conflicting testimonies from the witnesses. Out of this form comes a verdict, an affirmed rendering of reality and an accepted version of truth (as a *dispute*), and promoting a rendering of truth and a version of reality against other renderings and versions (as an *advocacy*). Thus, in summary, the main concept that the author wants to propose is that the reality of pluralism in the text, in the methods of interpretation and in the interpretive community gives new direction and, at the same time, changes the approach for doing contemporary Old Testament theology (see Brueggemann 1997: iv-vii; cf 1995:455-469).

Although Brueggemann's model for doing Old Testament theology may be considered more relevant to modern issues, it invites several criticisms. One of them is focused on his method, considering it as reductionism. Criticizing Childs for being reductionist—since Childs' canonical approach allows limitations in the reading of the Old Testament text to what is useful for Christian theology, and, thus, disapproving of Levenson's Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament (1997:92-93)—Brueggemann ironically falls into the same pit of reductionism by imposing his approach. The main problem is that he was not open to dialogue with other views, especially the rich of traditions of the past generations of both Christians and Jews. To put it in Olson's (1998:176-178) words, "he could not recognize that no reader or interpreter can avoid bringing some interpretive framework to impose on a text such as the Bible." As a scholar who proposes a scholarly work, he is expected to be more fair, open and complementary to different perspectives in order to find a better consensus in understanding the biblical truth.

Other criticisms are more focused on Brueggemann's view on "the utteredness" of the text at the expense of ontology. The emphasis on the importance of the speech about God or the *rethoric* (the testimony) in his work, although it is creative enough, might be dangerous. Barr (1999:545) criticizes him because this emphasis will lead to a conclusion that the God of Israel is "generated" or

constituted by the texts of Israel.   The insistence on the concept of "the God of the Old Testament theology or YHWH lives in, with, and under this speech, and in the end, depends on Israel's testimony for an access point in the world" (Brueggemann 1997:66, 714) may be somewhat misleading.   The texts or the speeches are the means to reveal God, and not vice versa.   They are supposed to signify what or who is the signifier.   Accordingly, at such a point, Brueggemann's approach seems to have missed one of the most fundamental truths related to the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible; that the text itself points to a God whose power is not dependent on any human utterance or other human form of power (cf Bellis 2001:233).

The last criticism is on his view of the history behind the text.   Brueggemann (1997:57) insists that "The world behind the text is not available . . . . [M]oreover, were the world behind the text available; it would not be in any direct way generative for theological interpretation."   It seems, at least to him, that historical inquiries of the text are impossible and yet unnecessary.   As a consequence, he is more focused on the text in its final form and what it means for the present time.   Barr (1999:545) indicates that Brueggemann's position which emphasized the non-historical approach would actually end up with abandoning the history and the historical criticism method in the study of the text, as he says, "It is not only that historical criticism is neglected or rejected: *history altogether* is very largely ignored."   Therefore, as the importance of history is overlooked, it ends up with the rejection both of the possibility of knowing anything about this world and the usefulness of such knowledge for theological interpretation (cf Bellis 2001:233).   It is also important to consider Anderson's (1999:26) comment on Brueggemann's view, when he says that "there is a problem by 'bracketing out' all questions of historicity, what really happened with the historical circumstances that prompted the testimony, because the dimension of facticity and historicity cannot be ignored theologically."

In spite of several deficiencies in Brueggemann's proposal, what he has offered is worthy of being considered as a proper approach to doing Old Testament theology for the Asian (or the Pacific) context (see Bennett 2002:89).   The main reason

behind this statement is that he tried to be faithful both to the texts and to the context. He highly viewed both in doing his theology. On the one hand, the texts are very important because the God of the Old Testament, as the subject of theology, is spoken of through them. In other words, he wants to say that "those are of the Israel's speech—Israel's testimony—about God" (Brueggemann 1997:177). It seems that for him dealing with the text is a serious matter. The necessity of the texts is also shown in his statement, "that the God of Old Testament theology as such lives in, with, and under the rhetorical enterprise of this text, and nowhere else and in no other way,'' and he adds that "for Old Testament faith, *the utterance is everything*" (Brueggemann 1997:66, 122).

Brueggemann defends the importance of the scripture (the Bible) for both the person and the culture. In his work, *The Bible makes sense* (1987) he argued that the Scripture has to do with the fidelity and vitality of the church for it is a present resource for faith, an "answer" to the deepest questions of life, a statement of presuppositions, where the testimony about God is in the posture of confession, not proof, a partner in whom one may dialogue, a central direction and a rich diversity, in which one must be always open to move in both directions with any given text, and a lens through which all of life is to be discerned (cf Brueggemann 1987:147-154). In this regard, exegesis as a means to study the biblical texts became very important to his approach. On this, Brueggemann (2002:359) affirms that "The biblical text is itself a sufficient cause for wonder. By using an exegetical method that focuses resolutely upon the text, teachers can help people find themselves addressed and reimagined by this 'strange new world' of the Bible." This research will take up the same attitude and the steps which he proposed, that is, giving consideration both to the text and the exegetical method.

On the other hand, Brueggemann considers the context seriously. The context here refers both to the original context of the texts and the contemporary context of the modern readers. In doing his theology, he deals with "these contexts" creatively as well as constructively. As already mentioned above, his approach is a kind of escapism from the hegemony of dominating methods in the history of Old Testament theology. He indicates that two things that are sure about Old

Testament theology now are: (1) the ways of Eichrodt and von Rad are no longer adequate and (2) there is no consensus among us (scholars) about what comes next (Brueggemann 1992:111). Not wanting to follow the old ways and be determined by it, he calls for a new fresh approach in proposing theology.

The assumption behind his proposal is that the context in which we are doing theology has been changing. One must seriously consider the contemporary context before engaging with it. The situation surrounding the theological task can be seen in at least three main areas:

(1) the postmodern interpretive situation where new socio-political situations, new hermeneutical approaches, new issues and studies in the Old Testament discipline lay behind the scene;

(2) the centrist enterprises represented by some Old Testament scholars, such as Childs, Levenson, Barr and Rendtorff;

(3) the interpretations from those who operate from the margin of discipline like those who consider themselves as feminist, liberation, and black theologians (see all of chapter two, 1997:61-102).

It is his intention to suggest that a contextual approach, or a consideration of the contemporary situation is a must in proposing a relevant Old Testament theology.

This can be seen in his dealing with the contextual issues from other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, literary theory and the wider postmodern debate. It is done in order to relate biblical interpretation with interdisciplinary aspects of life, where, in his terms, it is "a conversation" between text and the context, "This interpretation knows the One to whom we must give answer. This One is the subject of the text and the interpretation; we dare to say this One is the voice that haunts the text, our interpretation, and our faithful living" (Brueggemann 1991:134). Thus, there is a significant thing in his biblical theological approach for he was able to bridge the two poles, as Moberly (1999:472, 475) comments, "(his) consistent concern has been to relate the biblical text to Christian life today . . . (he) has undoubtedly put his finger on something both central to the biblical material and regularly absent from modern biblical scholarship: valid language

about God cannot be separated from human engagement in particular demanding forms of living." This research is intended to follow Brueggemann's theological method in providing a biblical theology that can be used as materials for constructing the contemporary social theology. As he once strongly affirmed, "Old Testament theology is not simply a religious exercise, but also a moral shape to the public process that *curbs* the raw exercise of power" (Brueggemann 1997:113).

In this connection, this research uses *an Old Testament theological method* in developing the theological significance of social justice implied by the selected passages in the book of Amos. According to Schultz, "determining the theology of a 'given text' is an essential part of the exegetical process" (1997:182; cf also Childs, 1993:323-47; Talstra 1999:102; Deurloo & Venema, 1999:10) and in reconstructing a more comprehensive concept of this theological subject from a wider perspective of the book, the whole concept of the testament, or even the whole Bible. Further, the theology of each passage must be viewed in the light of its larger theological context, including both the theology of the biblical book in which it is found as well as the larger concentric circles of theological context, for example the theology of major divisions or genres of the Old Testament, the theology of the Old Testament as a whole, and of the entire Bible (see Schultz 1997:182).

Seeking the unity and correlation between these three elements (text, book and testament) is very important in reconstructing a sound Old Testament theology. On this matter, Hasel (1991[a]:204) contends, "an Old Testament theology not only seeks to know the theology of various books, or groups of writings; it also attempts to draw together and present the major themes of this testament. To live up to its name, Old Testament theology must allow its themes, motifs, and concepts to be formed for it by the Old Testament itself." Therefore, the main purpose of drawing theological implications from the results of exegetical work is to find *what it means*, the general theological principles derived from the passage (cf Broyles 2001:59-60).

Since the theological theme "social justice' does not exclusively belong to the book of Amos, it is imperative to interrelate it to other similar concepts found particularly in other parts or books of the Old Testament. It considers what Knierim (1984:25-58) has suggested namely that involvement in any exegetical work might result in proposing a plurality of theologies. It is proper to consider the issue of the plurality of the Old Testament theology. The effort of drawing theological implications from the particular or selected biblical passages will thus contribute to the whole theological concept of social justice in the Old Testament. Based on this, theology of social justice as proposed in this research may be considered as one of the theologies on the same theme that can be drawn from a particular book.

Theology of social justice as proposed through this research will consider two aspects: first, it is a part of God's activity in the historical context. this means that the struggle for social justice is a part of YHWH's work manifested in "the redemptive acts of God" (Wright, 1952:11), or, it is a common biblical theological term, in "the covenant or salvation history" (Eichrodt 1961:17, 27, 81-87; Von Rad 1962:105-21); and second, it is a part of Israel's religious experience in daily life. Consequently, it is important to study the origin of the idea of social justice from all of the books of the Old Testament. This effort would provide both the historical and theological backgrounds in order that I would gain a better understanding of the theological concept of social justice in the book of Amos.

1.5 RESEARCH ORGANIZATION

To conduct the intended study, this research will be organized into several steps or chapters: Chapter One will give a short introduction to the problem. This includes an explanation on why I chose the research problem and topic, that is, basically to complement the theological studies of the theme social justice in the book of Amos done by other scholars. It is assumed that there ia a lack of study using rhetorical analysis to particular texts related to the issue of social justice in the book of Amos. As a result, there is no in depth study reconstructing a

theology of social justice based on a rhetorical analysis of the texts. This chapter also critically discusses the methodologies used in this research, namely, the rhetorical analysis and theological method based on Walter Brueggemann's approach.

In Chapter Two, discussion will be focused on the critical historical issues in the book of Amos. This part will consider both introductory critical argumentation and historical information on the background of the book of Amos. The issue about the authorship of the book and the authentication of Amos' profession as a prophet of YHWH will be discussed. This is important because in recent studies, especially after the period of pre-critical studies in biblical scholarship, the book of Amos has been under unending scrutiny from modern critical perspectives. This chapter will also give attention to the historico-political and socio-religious settings of the life and ministry of Amos.

From Chapter Three to Chapter Five, the research will deal with the interpretation of particular texts in the book of Amos related to the issue of social justice, such as Amos 2:6-8; 5:1-17; and 8:4-8. In this section, these biblical materials will be analyzed by using, primarily, rhetorical criticism. This is an analysis that follows several steps: finding rhetorical unit, explaining rhetorical situation(s), exposing rhetorical invention and disposition, identifyng rhetorical techniques, and, finally, reviewing the effectiveness of the rhetoric used. To complement it, other approaches will be used as well, such as grammatical, semantical, literary, genre, structural and compositional analysis. Attention will be given to the structure in which a pericope is found, the overall structure of the book of Amos, and the social context of the words being used (this includes not only references to historical data, but also to probable socio-contextual factors that can help us to understand what Amos intends in his prophecy).

In Chapter Six, attention will be paid to the issue of proposing a biblical (Old Testament) theology drawn from the book of Amos. This theology will be formulated in terms of issues like the theological concept of social justice in Amos, describing theological aspects of social justice, such as YHWH, the

powerful and the powerless in Israel, how these aspects are related to each other in a triangular relation, and reconstructing the theology of social justice derived from the book. These will explain the theological significances of social justice in the book of Amos. However, focusing merely on the theological standpoint of one prophet will not be enough. It is also necessary to compare it to the writings of other prophets and even to the rest of the Old Testament. This is done in order to get a more comprehensive theological perspective on the issue of social justice.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, a summary of the research will be given. This chapter also discusses the practical implications of the study, particularly the importance of theological message of social justice in this present age. Majority of world's population are suffering and prone to the problem of social injustice. In my own context of life in Indonesia, the issue of social justice is relevant to be addressed. Thus, this research may contribute something positive to the issue.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL ISSUES IN THE BOOK OF AMOS

Before rhetorically analyzing the texts related to the issue of social justice in the book of Amos, it is necessary to discuss major historical issues of the book in a more critical way, such as, the authorship of the book, the person of Amos and the situation when he wrote his message. It is relevant to the main purpose of biblical-exegetical interpretation which, according to Kaiser (1981:2), is "to ask the historical question of the meaning the biblical text has within its original horizon of meaning." Culler (1981:48) similarly insists that historical approach could be meant as "what its author meant by it, or what it would have meant to an ideal audience of its day, or what accounts for its every detail without violating the historical norms of the genre." Since the main purpose of an interpretation of the text is to understand "what the author meant" in its original context or historical setting, one cannot thus ignore the usefulness of the historical critical methods which "have proven quite successful in illuminating the history, religion, and culture of Ancient Israel" (Dobbs-Allsopp 1999:235).

As early as this chapter, it is important to acknowledge that this research is aware of the difficulty in dealing with historical issues of the book of Amos, especially in reconstructing the history of Israel in eighth century BCE. If a historical reconstruction implies observations of what is "behind the text," including efforts such as "to trace the compositional growth and redaction history of the book of Amos, to uncover archaeological data, to elucidate textual particulars, or to explain the complexities of the actual world of the eighth-century [BCE] prophet on the basis of social theory" (Carroll R 2002:18). Therefore, one should be suspicious of the values proposed for reconstructing with confidence actual

ipsissima verba, the "very words" of the real Amos, settings and events. The reason for saying this is because of the existence of the historical gap between the ancient texts and modern interpreters of the book. Modern studies of the book of Amos can only do "a reading back" and, accordingly, it is harder to get back to what the prophet(s) actually might have said and thought (cf Auld 1983:3-23).

As a consequence, scholars have come up with different approaches and conclusions on this issue. Those who held an historical-critical approach concerned with the search of historical Amos and, on the issue of the authorship of the book, they (Wolff and others) proposed that the book has undergone several stages of development or multilayered redactions. Moving beyond this approach, other recent approaches engage in a discussion of various literary, structuralist, "close reading," or semiotic methods (cf Hasel 1991[b]:24). Up to the present, conclusively, there are at least two major approaches in studying Amos and his book: diachronic (using all forms of modern historical-critical research) and synchronic. This leads to the fact that there is always a plurality of methods used in the study of the book of Amos (see Schöckel 1988:285-92; Levenson 1988:19-59) which resulted in a diversity of understandings and interpretations of the book.

Since this research tends to be more synchronic, its main concern is, therefore, on the study of its literary expressions, specifically of its rhetorical devices. In this context, being synchronic implies that one has to be heuristic in approaching the texts studied. Since rhetorical analysis synchronically treats the text as it stands as the basis of exegesis (cf Roth 1999:398), the focus of the research is on the final form of the texts and, thus, it lies on a heuristic model, an assumption that the nearer something is to the source, the nearer it is to the truth. Differing from the usual rhetorical approach which is considered "lacking of historical attention," my study will deliberately embrace the historical issues of the book. It is in accordance with Möller's view (2005:689) that rhetorical analysis "promises to combine the three foci of the author ("the world behind the text"), the discourse ("the world within the text") and the reader ("the world in the front of the text")."

This chapter tries to present the historical information about them in order to complement what is lacking in a typical rhetorical approach.

With an assumption that discussion on historical issues is complementary as well as preliminary in studying the texts rhetorically, this research also holds the importance of historical studies in the process of analysis. As Jakobson and Tynjanov (1985:29, as cited by Doobs-Allsopp 2006:15) point out, every synchronic system has its past and its future as inseparable structural elements of the system, such as the linguistic and literary background and the tendency toward innovation in language and literature. This means that the synchronic approach is always part and parcel of a diachronic one, and should not ignore the force of the latter. In this regard, Kessler (1982:5, 12) assumes that there must be continuity (or connection) between diachronic and synchronic approaches. Therefore, albeit whatever heuristic benefits may be gained from synchronically oriented studies, at the end, "pure synchronic approach" is inadequate and even impossible.

2.1   THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK OF AMOS

In reading Amos 1:1 which says, "The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa," one may be lead to an assumption that the author of the book of Amos is the prophet himself. There are scholars "who agree that the prophecy of Amos, at least in essence, was an authentic production of the man whose name it bears" (McComiskey 1985:270). Gordis (1971:225), for example, argues, "Barring minor additions, the book is the authentic works of Amos." The main reason for saying that Amos was the author of the book is usually based on the analysis of the message and the style of writing. McComiskey (1985:270, 275) again suggests, "the consonant of Amos's message with eight-century milieu and his vividly forthright style of writing make it difficult to think otherwise; and, in a more simple way, the superscription of the book (1:1) attributes the work to Amos." Further, another reason proposed to support this view holds that the unity of the messages and forms of writing are able to support that this book is written by a single author, namely the prophet himself, by saying that "The traditional and

pre-critical views agreed that the book of Amos was written by the prophet himself" (Dillard & Longman III 1994:377). In other words, the more traditional or pre-critical view maintains that Amos is the author of the book.

However, since the beginning of the modern critical biblical scholarship, the study of the book of Amos—particularly on the authorship of the book—has drastically been changing, and as a consequence, the above view is no longer maintained. Stuart (1987:298) observes that, due to a tendency towards atomism in the analysis of the collections of prophetic oracles, the book is judged to be the product of centuries of development from an original core of genuine material. This may lead to an assumption that in order to reach its final form, "the prophecies of Amos must have circulated orally, probably in fragmenting form," as Soggin suggests (1982:244).

Other views similarly believe that the book has undergone stages of development or "a gradual process of growth" (Schmidt 1984:196). Rendtorff (1986:220) also insists that "the present collection has undergone a lengthy history in which a number of stages can be distinguished, though (in contrast, to say, the book of Hosea) the original units have largely been preserved." Those who do not agree that the writings are the product of the prophet himself therefore believe that the book is not the authentic work of Amos. A good example of it is the theory of Coote (1981:5-6) that divides the composition of the book into three stages. The author himself composed a short work (for example, the oracles), represented by the present chapters 2, 4 and 6. Next, an editor B, to some extent making use of the existing prophetic tradition (perhaps even some of the A materials), composed the present chapters 3, 5, and 7, and finally, another editor C, rewrote the composition of A and B with the addition of an opening and closing section—the present chapters, 1 and 8. In addition, Wolff (1977:107-113) identifies six layers of development of the composition of the book: from the words of Amos himself, the literary fixation in cycles, the old school of Amos, the exposition of the Josianic age, the Deuteronomistic redaction, and then, the stage of postexilic eschatology of salvation.

To support this view, the issue about different styles of writing in different sections of the book, particularly in the third-person account of 7:10-17, is raised. This section seems to interrupt the natural sequences of the book. Wolff (1977:106-107) argues that this is an interruption of the vision reports, and adds another element such as "the insertion of various strophes of a hymn at widely separated points in the book (4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6)." According to Soggin (1982:243), although the book of Amos has relatively a well-ordered form, "the only problem is that 7:10-17 interrupts the context of visions, which we would in fact expect at the beginning of the book, if his ministry began with them." This view is being held by modern critical views which question the singularity of the author of the book.

In a more moderate way, Schmidt (1984:196) believes that rather than saying that this is an interruption, it is better to take it as an insertion or as a supplement to the whole body of the work. Meanwhile, Achtemeier (1999:171) suggests, "[this] has been inserted to the series of the visions." All of these refer to a conclusion that there must have been another person(s) who laboured on the composition of the book throughout a period of time albeit it remains uncertain "who this person was." Scholars end up with different identification of who it was. For example, it might be just "another hand" (Eisfeldt 1965:399), or the old school of Amos (Wolff 1977:108), or a circle of friends or disciples (Schmidt 1984:196). It then ended up in a multi-interpretation on the origin of the texts of Amos.

This research, however, takes a slightly different view in contrast with the views mentioned above. There are at least two reasons for this: first, it is proper to acknowledge that different styles occur in the composition. A careful reading of the book certainly shows that there is indeed a third-person language used in it. The assumption here is that there was a third person who wrote Amos 7:10-17, and that he might have been an eye witness (Achtemeier 1999:171) or someone in the audience (Hayes 1988:39). It is important here to note that this only applies to this particular section, with one or two minor exceptions, and the more important thing is that it cannot be applied to all parts of the book.

To believe that this book is the product of certain redactive intrusions, especially within a long period of time, is quite unconvincing and, of course, is not based on solid reasoning. Paul (1991:6) argues against it by saying that "all of the arguments for later interpolations and redactions, including a Deuteronomistic one, shown to be based on fragile foundations and inconclusive evidence." It should be kept in mind that, although they were collected by someone else, in the process, some parts of the sayings must have been recorded immediately to form the basis of the final book. As a result, there is no evidence that the book is the end product of a structural development. Rosenbaum (1990:6) supports this by saying that these inserted materials are, "perhaps written down, shortly after they were spoken, thus making most suggestions for 'redaction' superfluous."

The second reason is that it is proper to assume that the writing of the book in its totality has its origin in the prophet Amos himself. Hammershaimb (1970:14) maintains that although the theory of composition can be applied to a few passages, this does not affect the genuineness of the rest of the sayings. In a more convincing way, Rosenbaum (1990:6) believes that "one man named Amos wrote the Book. This is not a tautology since it is conceivable that a Southerner speaking in the North might employ a northern scribe to record his words." Paul (1991:6) once infers that "When each case is examined and analyzed on its own, without preconceived conjectures and unsupported hypotheses, the book in its entirety (with one or two exceptions) can be reclaimed for its rightful author, the prophet Amos." In the same vein, Smith (1995:29) believes that "there is, therefore, no reason to ascribe any part of this book to any other than the prophet Amos." It thus implies that to believe in the existence of a group of disciples or others who contributed to the final shape of the book is very hazardous and speculative.

To sum up, one cannot ignore the fact that there was a "collector" of some materials inserted in the book, but it should not lead to a conclusion that all of the book was the product of a structural development over a long period. This research follows what Andersen and Freedman (1989:4) suggest on this issue: "instead of a low estimate of the text, we have a high estimate of the author. We

also have confidence that the text has been preserved with a high degree of the fidelity to its original, or at least, early state."

By holding this position, I am aware of the fact that whatever view is held, one cannot avoid his or her own subjectivity. Hasel (1991[b]:24) wisely reminds us that "there is no such thing as a purely objective or scientific study of the book." Therefore, every historical (re)construction done is always a construction and never the final truth. Coggins (2000:80) asserts that there can be no "right" answer to questions around the problem of "the historical Amos." Admittedly, my position, approach and proposal in this section ("the authorship of the book") may also contain some weaknesses and, most importantly, subject to be scrutinized and improved in the future.

2.2 THE PROFESSIONS OF AMOS

The name "Amos" is not recorded elsewhere in the Old Testament. The only way to find any information about him comes from the book itself. One can only have direct access to the person from the book itself, as Hammershaimb (1970:11) indicates: "We know nothing about the prophet other than what can be gathered from the book itself." In a similar word, Stuart (1987:284) also informs us that "We know nothing of his [Amos] personal history aside from the book. . . . What little we know of Amos, then, we know mainly through his message." It is therefore quite difficult to be certain who the prophet is. It is consequently necessary then to be always reminded that an interpreter should not go far from what is written in the text to avoid subjective speculations.

The first verse of the book informs that he was a shepherd by profession. From what is written, אשר־היה בנקדים מתקוע ("who was among the sheep-breeders of Tekoa"), one may clearly infer that he is a sheepbreeder rather than an ordinary shepherd. Although the word נקד generally means "shepherd," there are other possible meanings of the word like "sheep-raiser," "sheep-dealer," "sheep-tender," or simply "sheep-breeder" (cf Holladay 1988:245). It can then be

suggested that "Amos was by profession a shepherd, which probably means that he was an independent sheep owner rather than a shepherd looking after sheep belonging to others" (Eisfeldt 1965:396). Thus, Amos may be a big sheep-owner or someone who possesses a large number of sheep or goats. Economically, he was independent because an ancient language study which was an investigation of *nqd* in Ugaritic, Akkadian, and Moabites languages reveals that the persons refered to as *noqed* were managers of sheep and had a high status in society rather than just being ordinary shepherds (see Craigie 1982: 29-33).

The word itself appears again in the Old Testament and refers to a description of "Mesha, King of Moab" (2 Ki 3:4). King Mesha was required to pay Ahab, the King of Israel, 100,000 lambs and wool from 100,000 rams. Based on this, there is one assumption which tries to relate the profession of Amos to cultic activity . Watts (1958:6; cf Kapelrud 1961:69, 78) observes that the appearance of the term in Ugaritic texts, which referred to "Chief of the priest and chief of *nôqdîm*," has led a number of scholars to see some cultic meaning in the word, such as "*noqed* is the shepherd of the temple's flocks." It suggests that he is a person who tends to herds destined for sacrificial use. However, several criticisms state that this view lacks valid support. Vawter (1981:30) argues that "although there is evidence from the usage of other contemporary languages that it had to do with some kind of official standing, (it is) not necessarily connected with the temple or sanctuary, as had sometimes been thought." Looking from the other side of Amos' occupation, Blenkinsopp (1983:41) insists that "since it is difficult to imagine how dressing sycamore figs could be a cultic activity the observation is probably beside the point."

Another view, still focusing on the connection between the occupations of a prophet and the temple, proposes a different perspective: Amos often appears at the temple not as a temple official but as a religious person who does business. He did not only travel to the northern kingdom in order to do business, in which he sold his products there (cf Hammershaimb 1970:12), but also served as "one of those who would present a portion of the Judean agricultural and animal produce as tribute to the suzerain Israel at the royal sanctuary at Beth El" (Sweeney

2000:197). It is understandable because at that time, Judah was allied as a vassal to Israel during the reigns of Kings Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam, son of Joash of Israel.

Although the text mentions that he is a sheep-breeder, Amos himself also acknowledges his profession by another term בוקר (see Am 7:14). The word *bôqer* has a different meaning from *noqed* as the previous may be generally considered as denominative form of *bqr* (cow, ox), which is usually used as a collective name for a herd of cattle, and so literally the word means "herdsman" or "cattleman" (cf BDB:133). This difference creates a problem, indicating a contradiction between this title and the use of *noqed* in Amos 1:1. Different answers have been proposed to answer the problem. Kapelrud (1961:7) indicates that this might be a so called "scribal error" for writing the word *noqed*, because it is quite possible for the scribes to interchange Hebrew characters from נ (n) to ב (b) (also, ד [d] to ר [r]) in the process of copying the manuscripts. It implies that there must be an emendation of the text.

Unfortunately, this view seems to be too speculative since there is no valid textual evidence in this regard. Wolff (1984:306-307) tries to find another way to solve the problem, especially when he suggested that the reading of *bôqer* as *noqed* might be influenced by the Septuagint reading in Am 1:1, αιοπολος ("sheep"), but such reading of Am 1:1 is possibly influenced by the use of this Greek word in Am 7:14. As the effort to find a better answer is still ongoing, it is necessary to think that although it is difficult to understand the contradiction between the application of these words to denote the profession of Amos, one may consider a comprehensive translation such as "livestock breeder" (Stuart 1987:376) as a good rendering and a way out. This translation seems to be more appropriate in covering all nuances of significance of the terms and, therefore, Amos is probably the owner of both large and small sheep, thus justifying the application of both the titles *bôqer* and *noqed* to the prophet.

Amos was not only a livestock breeder but also a sycamore-fig tree cultivator. In Am 7:14, he claims that he is not only a livestock breeder but also a בולס שקמים.

The word *bôles* that describes his activity with regard to *šiqmîm* is *hapax legomenon*, the significance of which is unclear. The verb בולס generally refers to "an activity of gathering figs" (BDB:118). Since the word indicates that a person may gather sycamore leaves and/or fruits to use as fodder for his sheep and cattle, it is therefore possible that this activity closely relates to Amos' other occupation, a herdsman, and thus, this suggestion can be considered as the most feasible interpretation on the issue (see Wright 1976:363).

Another possible meaning of the term is an activity of "piercing the fig-like fruit of the Palestinian sycamore to hasten its ripening" (Flanagan 1966:3; cf McKeating 1971:58). According to an ancient writer, Theophrastus (372-287 BCE), this was a very common practice in ancient times, as quoted by Wright (1976:363), "It cannot ripen unless it is scraped; but they scrape it with iron claws; the fruit thus scraped ripen in four days." This activity basically refers to a process by which the unripe sycamore fruits are slashed, pierced or cut at the tip to let the juice run out and promote the process of ripening, as Moore (1995:29) briefly states, "perhaps Amos bruised the fruit with the stick to provoke them to ripen and to make them edible."

In spite of these differences, whatever the activity indicated by this term, there must be a relationship between Amos and the sycamore tree. No one can explain for sure what it was; as Watts (1958:8) suggests, "it is not clear whether Amos is described as a simple worker or as an owner of sycamores." Although what the prophet did with the sycamore tree is unknown, one can be sure that his main occupation is a herdsman with a second occupation which had something to do with trees, presumably as "a side-line" (Hammershaimb 1970:11) or "a seasonal occupation" (Winward 1989:37). However, a quite recent study indicates that Amos worked with both sycamores and livestock. According to Steiner (2003:120-122), he perhaps leased fields containing sycamore trees, possibly in Jericho Valley, to feed his animals in the winter, and since the sycamore is the only tree in the region that bears fruit in the winter and since much of its fruit is unfit for humans but good for sheep.

A more critical study of the book shows that the problem is not restricted to who Amos was and what his original occupation was, but also includes the problem of the location of Tekoa, where he came from (cf Heicksen 1970:81-89). The first verse of the book records that he is from Tekoa (1:1). The use of a preposition such as מן before the noun תקוע indicates the place where the prophet came from. Scholars have different opinions about this location, which could be a place currently known as Khirbet Tequ'a. On the one hand, some traditional views believe that it is a town located in Judah, or more specifically, the location of the town would be a few miles south of Jerusalem (scholars vary in measuring the distance: 5 miles [Paul 1991:1]; 6 miles [Macpherson 1971:5], 10 miles [Stuart 1987:284], or even 12.5 miles [Eisfeldt 1965:396]). If one relates this place to the job of Amos as a cattle–breeder, there will be no problem at all, because this place is thought as a proper site to cultivate cattle.

Contrary to this view, it become a problem when one relates it to his other occupation as a sycamore cultivator. Since sycamore trees cannot grow in the highland, about 2,800 feet above the sea level, Tekoa cannot be the proper place to cultivate them. Eisfeldt (1965:396) insists that "Amos may have owned land either in the hill country which runs down to the Mediterranean, or in the valley of the Dead Sea, which may both well have stood in close economic relationship to Tekoa." It assumes that Amos had cultivated sycamore trees, at least, in the lowland area that belonged to him. Thus, based on the efforts to match Amos' occupations with this place, the most common view is likely to identify the place as a Judean Tekoa.

On the other hand, some believe that this place was located in the northern kingdom of Israel. The earliest proposal for this came from the study of Schmidt, who showed that Tekoa was a town somewhere in Israelite territory (1920:158-71; cf. Calvin 1950:147ff, and Speier 1955:305-310). To support this view, scholars held different opinions on identifying the exact location of this place. Koch (1985:70) assumes that the place was somewhere in Galilee of the northern kingdom, as he argued that "it would be therefore more obvious to think of a Galilean Tekoa, which is attested in postbiblical times." Unfortunately he

proposed it without giving any more explanation or even solid argument for it. Accordingly, as this study developed, it was discovered that the idea of a Galilean Tekoa most probably comes from the tradition of Israel, such as that of the Talmud (cf Hayes 1988:43).

Although not giving the exact location, other opinions see the issue in connection with Amos' contemporary, the prophet Isaiah. Davies' (1981:200) assessment on this asked the question why a Southerner was called to correct the North when Isaiah's career did not indicate such problems. A more recent elaborated argument on this view focuses on the analysis of the internal evidence of the book itself. This is a proposal that tries to prove that Amos is a northerner in origin. To begin with, sycamore trees do not grow in the South. Next, Amaziah's use of the words 'flee' (instead of 'return') and 'treason' (7:10) indicates that Amos must be a northern-born citizen and an Israelite official who came from a mid-level position in the government of Israel; and finally, the language and dialect used by Amos is peculiar for a Southerner (Rosenbaum 1990:49-55, 85-95).

The argument of a Northern Amos above fails to convince other scholars. Criticizing Schmidt's proposal, Eisfeldt (1965:396) opposes the view of the northern Tekoa by insisting that this place is now the modern Khirbet Tequ'a, and not "a place of the same name, otherwise unknown, in the northern kingdom." The problem with this opinion is that Eisfeldt does not support his argumentation with abundant and accurate information. His proposal seems to be considered as obsolete, for it does not keep up with the progress of biblical research especially in the area of biblical archaeology or sociology. Although his argument seems to be "stereotype" and has not been based on extensive research, still, Eisfeldt's opinion seems to be more determinative than Schmidt's.

To counter the argumentations of Rosenbaum on the issue of "Amos of Israel," Hasel in addition uses the view of Weippert (1985:1-5)—who studied the pictures, images, and metaphors Amos employed in his messages. In his study, he stated that Amos did not belong to the well-to-do strata of Judaic society, but functioned as a "peasant" and "farmer" (Hasel 1991[b]:38). It is difficult to consider Rosenbaum's northern Tekoa as a definite claim because it seems to be very

speculative. In fact, he does not mention where the exact site of this place is in Israel. In contrast to Paul's commentary on the book (1991), Hasel (1991[b]:39) infers that this conclusion seems to be inflexible because in Paul's careful research, it is simply stated that Amos did "own cattle" and "tend sheep and goats," nothing more. Although the efforts in finding a new and different alternative in interpreting the place should be appreciated, these are not able to convince most scholars that the place "must" be somewhere in the northern kingdom. Gowan's observation (1996:352) on it is that "efforts to make Amos a citizen of the northern kingdom, from a Tekoa in Galilee, have not been persuasive to many scholars."

Furthermore, scholars do not only pay attention to the historical issues such as Amos' occupations or where he came from but also his profession as God's prophet. They questioned the response of Amos to Amaziah's order to flee to Judah and continue his prophetic activities there: לֹא־נָבִיא אָנֹכִי וְלֹא־בֶן־נָבִיא אָנֹכִי ("I *was* no prophet, Nor *was* I a son of a prophet) (7:14). The dispute is specifically about the translation of Amos' reply. Grammatical analysis shows that the arrangement of this statement is without a copula that connects the subject and the predicate, as Ward (1982:54) observes, "Properly speaking, there are no tenses in Hebrew, so one must decide on the basis of the context whether the temporal reference intended is present or past."

The problem here lies on how one should translate this sentence, in the present tense or past (cf Huffmon 1977:209-212). In other words, the problem may be stated in a simple question, "does verse 14 describe Amos's present situation (RSV and NEB: 'I am not a prophet and not a son of a prophet') or his previous state (JB and NEB: 'I was not a prophet and was not a son of a prophet')?" However, Auld (2000:26) points out that "the problem [is] rather easier to state than to settle." This problem of trying to determine a certain translation may also employ a certain interpretation. Thus, since there is no indication of the tense or a verb, it is difficult to translate this verbless sentence meaningfully and to understand the complexity of the issues involved.

Disagreements on the translation, however, create different perspectives on Amos' profession as a prophet. Those who hold the "present tense" view of interpretation prefer to translate the sentence "I (am) not a prophet and I (am) not the son of a prophet" (Wolff 1984:312-313; Hayes 1988:230; Smith 1989:230, 239-40). This view believes that Amos never claimed to be a prophet in the sense that he was not a חזה as Amaziah called him (7:12), at least in his present condition. It is hence quite natural that his reply refers to the present, not to his past. To support this view, Wolff (1984:312) asserts that "the nominal clauses are of necessity heard as statements concerning the present status of the prophet." Auld (1999:26) also puts it in the same way, "In Hebrew such nominal sentences (sentence without a verb) are reckoned to imply present time unless the context demands otherwise."

Besides, Amos also does not claim himself to be a נביא in the sense that he is a cultic prophet. Kapelrud (1961:11) maintains that such a prophet was one who had a recognized position or function in the faith community's worship or practice. Such an opinion is supported by Bič (1969:20) who proposed that Amos was an *Opferneschauer*, an "inspector of sacrifices" (Hasel 1991[b]:43), or he was holding the "office" of a prophet (Reventlow 1962:14-24). After all, Smith (1989:239) insists that "The purpose of 7:14 is not to give a biographical account of Amos; its purpose is to explain the basis for the authoritative message that YHWH commanded Amos to deliver to 'my people Israel' (cf. 7:8). . . Amos is counterdicting Amaziah's demand that he not prophesy at Bethel (7:12-13) by showing that this is a denial of the command of God." Thus, Amos's reply can be considered as a dissociation of himself from the type of prophets, either as a חזה or as a professional נביא. In other words, he is actually not intending to deny the office of the prophet but to emphasize the function or the act he is taking from YHWH in the present situation, and most importantly, to deny that Amaziah had any authority over him and any right to send him away.

On the other hand, others prefer the "past tense" view of interpretation. If that is the case, the translation will be "I (was) not a prophet and I (was) not the son of a prophet" (Kapelrud 1961:7; Mays 1969:134; Soggin 1985:165; Andersen &

Freedmann 1989:762; Paul 1991:238; Niehaus, 1992:462-63). The advocates of the preterite interpretation are convinced that there is a contrast between the text of 7:14 and texts like 2:11 and 3:7-8, and especially in the second part of Amos' reply in 7:15b itself. Rowley (1947:194), for example, argues that "It is strange that in Am. vii 15 the prophet should use the verb that is cognate with the title which he is said to repudiate in v. 14. If he denies the title of *nabi*, he yet claims the function."

As the second part of the reply begins in the past tense, it is therefore proper to consider that the first part also refers to a past condition. Watts insists that "Amos was not a prophet at the time when YHWH gave him the commission to prophesy to Israel" (1958:33). In the same vein, Niehaus (1992:462-63) proposes that "this verbless clause is best translated as a past tense (with the LXX: ημην, "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 comports well with the context, which recalls what Amos *was* before he became a prophet." Such an argument implies that, in the first place, Amos did not begin his career as a prophet but then became one. It thus can be assumed that "Amos was not a prophet to begin with, but on the basis of his call to prophetic activity he *became* prophet" (Hasel 1991[b]:43).

Since a certain translation will determine the contents of Amos' profession, the writer is of the opinion that it is proper and fair enough to keep the literal translation as it is stated, "No prophet I, nor prophet's son" as it stands (McKeating 1978:58). This translation is preferable because it is far from speculation. Both present and past translations, and even other variants of translation such as "Am I a prophet? . . ." (Ackroyd 1956:94; Driver 1973:108), "No! I am a prophet, but not a son of a prophet" (Cohen 1961:176; Zevit 1975:783-790 and 1979:505-509; Hoffmann 1977:209-212; Stuart 1987:369-370), or "I am indeed (reading *lû'* for *lō'*) a prophet, but not a son of a prophet" (Richardson 1966:89), all have resulted in a more complicated explanation than the literal one.

In order to avoid such speculative conclusions, it is suggested that the interpreter should focus his 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. Gowan (1996:410) says, "The issue at the heart of the confrontation is much the same no matter how vv. 14-15 is read, Amaziah claimed authority over where Amos may speak. Amos refuses to acknowledge any such authority, for he is acting neither as a member of any prophetic group nor his own." It is therefore possible to translate the nominal clauses in 7:14 in several different ways as long as one keeps giving attention to the meaning of Amos' reply, that is, to establish a sharp contrast, for one, between a prophet by virtue of office (נביא) and one called by YHWH. Second, between a "prophet's disciple" (בן־נביא) trained by a prophet and one sent by YHWH, and finally, between a salaried cult official and his own independent activity sanctioned by YHWH alone (Wolff 1984:313). The coming of Amos to Bethel is not as "a representative of one of the prophetical guilds but as a layman under divine order to perform the function of the prophet" (Smith 1989:28; Noble 1998:430-431).

There is still more to be discussed about the person of Amos as scholars have studied Amos in a broader perspective over the decades. Carroll R (2002:4-18) quite extensively observes that most of the studies done tried to relate Amos to early religious traditions in Israel, such as ethical monotheism (Wellhausen), ecstatic prophetism (Hölscher and Lindblom), cultic associations (Haldar, Johnson, Mowinckel, and Würthwein), covenant theology (Crenshaw, Fensham, Mays, Clements, and Bright), and wisdom tradition (Wolff). Because of the growing expansion of studies on this subject, it is necessary to scrutinize these proposals. However, this research is not intended to go farther in discussing them in detail, since this study focuses merely on Amos' utterances on social justice.

It is true that one should be aware of drawing too fast any conclusion about what kind of prophet Amos was. Hayes (1988:39) once reminds us that "too little is known about Amos's background to speculate on how this influenced his preaching. His language and thought are probably more reflective of the culture at large than of a particular segment such as the cult and wisdom circles." It has to be realized that there is a difficulty to reveal historically the person of Amos if

it is based solely on studying the book. Since the book has its own limitations, it is thus advisable not to go beyond what has been literarily informed or written by the book or by Amos' words.

To conclude, although it sounds doubtful, Auld (1983:3-23) reminds us that we can only look at the prophets, particularly Amos, "through the looking glass" or in a blurred way because they often did not well describe themselves and their tasks. In reconstructing historically what lies "behind the texts" one has to consider that "the goal was not necessarily to 'get behind it' by various kinds of reconstructions (whether by form or tradition criticism, archaeology, anthropology, or sociology), but rather 'to move within the text' in order to grasp better its structure and inner workings" (Carroll R 2002:24).

2.3   THE HISTORICO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Prior to Amos's time, the kingdom of Israel was situated in between the superpowers of the Middle East from the ninth to the eighth century BCE. The Assyrian empire was in the process of building up a great and strong empire in the ancient Near East, and became a serious threat to the smaller nations surrounding it. Under the rules of Ashur-nasir-pal II (998-859) and then Shalmaneser III (858-824), strong Assyrian campaigns were directed towards the west in order to gain control of the trade routes and commerce (cf Grayson 1982: 253-69).

As a result, the western kingdoms as far north as Asia Minor and as far south as Egypt formed an anti-Assyrian coalition, which was promoted by three figures: Irhuleni of Hamath, Hadadezer of Damascus and Ahab of Israel from the Omride dynasty (see Hayes 1988:16-17). However, after several years, the anti-Assyrian allied forces could not maintain their unity. The main problem emerged from within one of the strongest members of the allied forces, Syria (Aram-Damascus). Hayes (1988:17) indicates that after the death of Hadadezer, Hazael of Syria replaced him through a *coup de etat*, and for some unknown reasons, the coalition dissolved because he turned his back upon Assyria and started attacking his own neighbouring allies.

The situation then got worse for Israel because, while fighting against their long-time adversary (the Assyrians), the Syrians simultaneously became a new enemy and threat for their former allies. Interestingly, albeit the coalition crumpled and Damascus became the single major contender of Assyria, Hazael was able to defend his territory from the attacks of the mighty army of Shalmaneser III. Also, he was able to take control of the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Ki 10:32-33) making her a vassal kingdom.

In Israel, the situation was deteriorating because the Omride dynasty was becoming weaker at this time. The successor of Ahab, Jehoram, was wounded in the battle at Ramoth-Gilead (2 Ki 8:25-28) while he was protecting Israelite holdings against Hazael's attack, and then left the army under the command of Jehu, the Israelite army commander (2 Ki 8:29; 9:14-15). After holding a leadership position in Israel for quite a while, Jehu unpredictably started fighting against the legal throne by killing the Israelite kings, Jehoram and Ahaziah as well as many leaders both in Israel and Judah (2 Ki 9:21-10:4). The main reason behind his murderous actions was that he was an anti-Omride (see Rosenbaum 1990:17).

Moreover, he welcomed Shalmaneser III as a new ally and paid tribute to him, as recorded in the Black Obelisk. Before departing from Syria-Palestine, Shalmanezer received homage from Jehu, and bestowed his blessing upon him as the new king of Israel (cf Hayes 1988:17). By making a vassal treaty with the Assyrians he was trying to secure his new kingdom. Unfortunately, the Israelites could not escape the strong dominion of Damascus. The Syrians gained power and attacked Israel. This situation got worse because the Syrian kings, Hazael and Benhadad, treated Israel mercilessly (2 Ki 10:32; 12:17-18; 13:7). Jehu (839-822 BCE) was not able to keep his control over the Trans-Jordan territory, and even his successor, Jehoahaz (821-805 BCE) failed to gain back the lost territories and finally surrendered to the Syrians as their vassal state (2 Ki 13:3, 7, 21).

Damascus' dominion over the southern vassal kingdoms came to an end when the great Assyrian forces, under a fairly aggressive and successful king, Adad Nirari III, attacked Damascus (cf Grayson 1982:271-76). The pressure from the north

caused the Arameans to become weaker in some places in the south. Around 805 BCE, the Assyrians successfully defeated Syria. However, after this victory and the death of Adad Nirari III, Assyria was attacked from the north by the kingdom of Urartu (present-day Armenia) and its army was largely immobilized on the northern frontier (see Soggin 1987:2). They could not cope with such a critical situation because the next three kings of Assyria were weak leaders.

From the south, there was also no serious threat because Egypt was fragmented by Libyan and Sudanese kings, and was no longer a strong influence in Palestine (cf Smith 1989:1). Fortunately, this created a situation where Israel and Judah too became strong independent nations in that region. The result of the absence of Assyrian pressure towards the west was that Johoahaz and later Jehoash, as his successor, were able to regain some Israelite independence and occasionally take offensive against Damascus. In 798 BCE, Joash or Jehoash (798-782 BCE) became the king of Israel and, taking advantage of Aram's preoccupation with Assyria, defeated Damascus three times with encouragement from Elisha (cf Rosenbaum 1990:20). He then defeated Judah that was under the rule of Amaziah (796-767 BCE). This Judean king made a fatal error by challenging Joash who responded by demolishing a portion of Jerusalem's wall, looting the Temple and the palace treasury, taking hostages to Samaria, and in the end reducing Judah to vassalage. As a result, despite the outstanding leadership of Amaziah's son and successor Uzziah, Judah continued to be overshadowed by the Norhtern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II, Joash's son and successor (see King 1988:30).

With the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BCE) in Israel and with the reign of Uzziah (791-740 BCE) in Judah, both kingdoms entered a golden age in terms of political expansion and socio-economic prosperity. Taking advantage of the foreign political situation and the absence of an Israelite-Judean war—there was cooperation between the two—the Northern Kingdom enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity during the reign of Jeroboam II, who had pursued a vigorous policy of expansion east of Jordan with great success (cf Mays 1969:2). Smith (1989:1) indicates that during this period the Israelites were able to recapture the territories

previously taken from them (2 Ki 13:25) and extend the border of Israel as far north as Hamath (2 Ki 14:25; Am 6:14).

After the former boundaries were restored, Israel became the largest and most influential country along the eastern Mediterranean coast, and the name of Jerobam II certainly was widely known (see Wood 1979:276). Along with this, as long as Uzziah ruled the Southern Kingdom, the Judeans also enjoyed the same prosperity. This Judean king, who was an excellent administrator, brought his country to the zenith of its power through expansion and military might, though it remained a vassal to Northern Kingdom of Israel, Judah developed agriculture by establishing military-agricultural settlements in the Negev, which in turn protected the trade routes (cf King 1988:31).

In addition, the alliance of the kingdoms of Israel and resulted in the emergence of a new power. Whether this was a formal alliance or these kingdoms plotted their strategy together, is still uncertain, but, as Andersen and Freedman (1989:21) inferred, "it seems clear that they intended together to restore the classic boundaries of the united kingdom of David and Solomon." Accordingly, the expansion of their territories is believed to be much larger than at any time before these kingdoms were separated. As Coote and Coote (1990:47) state, "The allied of the kingdoms of Jeroboam II of Israel and Uzziah of Judah rivaled Solomon's empire in extent."

2.4   THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

The change of social structures in Israel's history contributed to the issue of social gap. Before the monarchic period, the Israelites were still living in tribal societies and they shared the egalitarian value of living. However, times were changing. The settlement of the Israelite tribes in Canaan changed in their social and economic structures. But some elements of tribal structures continued long after the settlement gradually were replaced by the appearance of the monarchy. This happened because the concept of "royalty" created a class consciousness that had

not previously existed, and, as a result, there was an emergence of a new class of royal officials in their society (cf Jensen 2006:68).

Consequently, the political centre existed in the society, wherein "all powers" in every aspect of life were accumulated in a certain group of people. Gottwald (2001:227) indicates that such a centre would, "in any event, have included the monarch, the members of the royal family, the chief officers of the main government responsible for the chains of command that carried out state decisions, and advisors to the court who might have official assignment or might be consulted on an ad hoc basis." This situation became bad because of the absence of a "power" controller in the society.

This condition continued on throughout the monarchic period in the northern kingdom of Israel, and until the middle of the eighth century BCE. In the final half of Jeroboam's tenure, Israel had reached probably its height in terms of economic prosperity (cf Stuart 1987:283). The success of Israel's political expansion and stability brought prosperity to the nation in general. Amos reported that agriculture in Israel flourished in spite of occasional crop failures (4:6-9). It is also important to mention here that in the context of a vassalage and an agrarian economy, the people of Judah would have to pay a share of their agricultural harvest and animal stock to both the Judean and Israelite monarchies (see Sweeney 2003:193).

While they controlled the strategic trade routes, they also gained profits through international trade. The control over the trade routes and the lively commerce nourished a growing wealthy class who lived in an elaborate way and brought, as Smith (1989:2) noted, "the new wealth and access to expensive ivories and furniture (3:15; 6:4)." Unfortunately, not all people of Israel enjoyed such luxurious living. It was only, in fact, experienced by a very few people. Mostly the ruling elite of Israel who were also the governing class, as Coote (1981:25) indicates, "Comprising from 1 to 3 percent of the population, they typically own 50 to 70 percent or more of the land. . . . [and] control by far the greater amount of power and wealth in the society, and their positions of power exercise domain over the peasantry."

In some studies of the social history of Israel, this development has been called "early capitalism." Mays (1987:148), proposing this view, gives several reasons for saying it, namely: the shift of primary social goods and land from the functional support to that of capital; the reorientation of social goals from personal values to economic profit; and the subordination of judicial processes to the interest of the entrepreneur. It can be elaborated as follows, as Mays (1987:149) adds that kings had appropriated land for the partial support of this administrative class, but they were left to some degree to manage their own support. They needed a basic capital to allow them to serve the crown. As officials, they also had the opportunity to gain from international trade. Their emergence created a group who had a vested interest in the accumulation of land and goods as capital. They were not originally an economic class, but they soon became one. Therefore, as the capitalists became the so-called ruling class, "the officials" and "the leaders," they became socio-economically powerful and tended to be corrupt.

It seems that during Amos' time, materialism had become prevalent, hedonism and selfishness increased, and social disparity intensified. The prophet also observed the luxury and extravagance of the wealthy, their summer and winter palaces adorned with costly ivory (3:15) and their gorgeous coachs with damask pillows (3:12) on which they reclined at their sumptuous feasts (6:4-6). Even the women were likened by Amos to fat cows of Bashan (4:1) who were addicted to wine and without compassion for the poor and needy (cf Kleven 1996:215-227). The market was cornered by profiteering usurious commerce, false weights and fraudulent merchandise (refuse given for wheat) (8:5-6). There was no justice in the land (3:10) for every judge was corrupt (v. 12) and they turned "justice into poison" and "the fruit of righteousness into wormwood" (5:7). According to Kuhl (1960:61), Amos could objectively see such things because, "The man from Tekoa was sufficiently detached from affairs and people to realise the full extent of the abuses and wrongs in society in Samarian society."

The consequence was that this situation created the stark contrast between the luxury of the rich and the misery of the poor; where the rich enjoy indolent, indulgent existence (4:1ff; 6:1-6) in winter and summer houses (3;13; 6:11) and

the poor become a tempting target for legal and economic exploitation (2:6-8; 4;1; 5:10-12; 8:4-6) (cf Mays 1969:2-3). In reality, it seems that the rich prospered at the expense of the poor (4:1) by crushing the needy, taking possession of the land of those who had fallen into debt or subjecting them to slavery (2:6; 8:4, 6), denying them justice in the lay courts at the city gates (2:7; 5:10, 12), and cheating them in the marketplace (8:5). Smith (1989:2) thus concludes that social conditions in Israel during Amos' time was soured by sin and greed.

As Israel experienced economic boom, there was also an increase in religious activity. The shrines at Bethel, Dan, Gilgal, and Beersheba were constructed and had constant streams of worshippers bringing sacrificial animals (cf Miller & Hayes 1986:312). The first two Israelite shrines, at Bethel and Gilgal, considered as the state temples, and the last two, at the high places of Gilgal and Beersheba provided spiritual identity to the nation (5:5; 8:1-14). The main architect behind these physical projects was Jeroboam II, who was closely related to Jeroboam I, the first king of Israel and the founder of the cult at Bethel according to Deuteronomistic tradition (see Coote 1981:22). In order to observe religious activities at the temple, he appointed Amaziah to take the role of a high priest at Bethel.

From the perspective of the Israelites, this religious "awakening" was closely related to economic success. There was a belief that economic success was a sign of God's favour towards them. From the perspective of Deuteronomistic theology, it was a common concept to believe that the success of Israel is a sign of divine favour (cf Wright 1965:202). It seems that such eagerness in building religious physical objects was the expression of the people's gratitude for God's blessing and favour. Unfortunately, this motivation was ironically turned into self-satisfaction. While these activities happened, the ruling elite still oppressed the peasants who were really downtrodden and poor as mentioned earlier.

It is understandable that behind the religious awakening, there also rose a religious hypocrisy. Stuart (1987:284) argues that "Israel was a people often orthodox in style of worship but disobedient in personal and social behavior," or, as Achtemeier (1999:170) directly points out, "the conscience of the rich placated by

participation in an elaborate cultus." The Israelites thus were in a paradoxical situation. The economic and formal religious ascent were in co-existence with the moral and social decline. The more the Israelites built their shrines and offered sacrifices, the more they treated the poor and the powerless unfairly, as Smith (1995:26) observes, "Israel's frequent attendance at the shrines to make sacrifices did not result in moral, spiritual and social uprightness."

On the one hand, the Israelites did not only commit sins in the social sense but also religious ones. Amos's critics were not only directed toward social matters (2:6-8; 3:9-11, 13-15; 4:1-3; 5:7, 10-13; 6;1-8, 11-12; 8:4-7) but also towards cultic issues (4:4-5; 5:4-6, 14-15, 21-27; 8:9-10). Although religious issues were not emphasized by Amos as much as the social ones, such a problem was quite serious. Accordingly, the Israelite religious institutions and theology were being perverted, misunderstood and rejected, and although they performed elaborate rituals as proud demonstrations of piety (4:4-5), they were unrelated to justice and righteousness (5:21-24) or to real seeking after God (5:4-6) (see Smith 1989:2; Mays 1969:2-3).

Besides, in a more specific way, Barstad (1987:127-38) argues that the root of the religious sin of the Israelites was their worshipping other deities and because of this Amos insisted that YHWH is the sole legitimate God and the true source of fertility. It seems that the situation at that time was very contradictive. On the one hand, the religious life of the Israelites in terms of its performances and elaborations was very sophisticated; on the other hand, they neglected the very important substance of their religious faith, trusting and patronizing God with humility and having compassion to other fellow humans.

As a result, this acute hypocritical attitude was strongly opposed by God and so Amos showed God's disapproval of such religious activities by announcing God's judgment upon the religious sites, by giving counsel to stay away from the sites, and by declaring God's rejection of their religious activities (Am 3:14; 4:4-5; 5:4-5; 5:22-24). This would culminate in the coming of the day of the Lord, which "instead of being a panacea for all the nations' ills, would bring disaster, as

perverted religion and empty ritual must lead to political and economic crashes" (Kaiser, Jr. 1998:354). It is predictable that the fate of the people is at hand.

The coming of Amos represented the judgment of God against Israel's disobedience and sins (see Williamson 2000:291-306). Carrying God's commission, he challenged the Israelites because they had sinned against him by treating the divine and other fellow humans improperly. God's speech of judgment directly pointed to Israel but the action of judgment itself was indirectly being done by using the hand of the old powerful nation, the Assyrians. With the rise of Tiglath-Pileser III to the Assyrian throne in approximately 745 BCE, that mighty empire again embarked on an imperialistic policy, which included Palestine (cf Chisholm Jr. 1990:10) and started again to regain influence in the west. Such a renewed westward campaign was supported by the mighty Assyrian army, which at that time had reached a high degree of competence and superiority to all opponents in equipment, technique and tactics (see Hermann 1975:243).

The Assyrian expansion was inescapable and became a serious external threat to the Israelites. It seemed that, on the one hand, the major political factor in the downfall of the northern Kingdom was the restoration of Assyrian power under Tiglath-Pileser (cf Flanders, Crapps & Smith 1988:289). On the other hand, internal factor also contributed to the downfall of Israel, and the death of Jeroboam II (753 BCE). After his death, Israel had no longer any strong leadership and suffered under political unrest for years. Jeroboam's son, Zachariah (746-745 BCE) was in power only six months before being assassinated by Shallum (745). With the death of Zachariah, the four generations of Jehu came to an end (cf Kaiser, Jr. 1998:352), and in a period of three decades (754-722 BCE) the powerful Northern Kingdom ceased to exist as an independent nation (cf Schultz 2000:196).

The destruction of Samaria may be considered the end of the Israelite Kingdom. Historically then this is the background of the preaching of the eighth century BCE prophets (cf King 1984:14-), including Amos. According to their interpretation, the fall of Samaria was the result of Jeroboam's sin because it had allowed Israelites to engage in idolatrous practices and ignore their covenantal

obligations (see Matthews 2005:125). What was sown in sinful behaviours, such as violating God's law (and covenant) and mistreating other fellow humans was reaped in fates and miseries, destruction of the nation and, worst of all, the exile. Amos' message of judgment and doom was thus fulfilled and became a reality although the people who heard him did not believe him.

2.5   CONCLUDING REMARKS

The issue of the authorship of the book of Amos has been debated for many decades. There is no absolute answer to the real original author of the book. Based on the unity of the book, "the pre-critical view" believed that the author of the book is Amos himself. In contrast, based on differences in style and the appearances of the writing, "the critical view" argues that the book was composed gradually in several different stages coming from different sources, and therefore, there is no single author to whom the composition can be attributed to.

However, with the recognition of different styles in the composition of the book and the possibility that the original author was the prophet himself, I take a different opinion. I believe that Amos is the single author of the book who used different styles of writing and compositions for his rhetorical purpose. The purpose of using these different styles can, in my opinion, be considered as a rhetorical strategy, especially in order to persuade the audience both to hear and to believe the message he delivered.

Although one proposal holds that Amos is from the northern kingdom (Israel), a more convincing view believes that he is from Tekoa in the Southern region (Judean Tekoa). The reason for saying this is because the previous view can not exactly show where the place or location is in the Northern region. In addition, regarding his occupation, the prophet Amos had several occupations, being a sheep-breeder as well as a sycamore-fig tree cultivator. As a livestock-breeder, he probably was the owner of both cattle and sheep as the terms בקר and נקד indicate. It means that he was economically self-reliant and had a high status in society rather than being an ordinary shepherd.

As a sycamore-fig tree cultivator, although there is no assurance of whether he was a simple worker or an owner of sycamores, it is possible that he owned or perhaps leased the fields containing sycamore trees or leased it to others. Since he perhaps owned cattle, he may also have been the owner of the sycamores. Both occupations are linked because the fruit of this kind of tree is unfit for human consumption but good for cattle.

Scholars are also still in debate on the profession of Amos as a prophet, particularly in translating his words: לֹא־נָבִיא אָנֹכִי וְלֹא־בֶן־נָבִיא אָנֹכִי (Am 7:14), where he himself confesses that he is not a prophet and not the son of the prophet. The problem here lies on the issue of whether this information is referring to the past or present. The interpretation that it refers to the present argues that Amos never claimed himself to be a prophet in the sense of חֹזֶה or נָבִיא, thus, he denies that he is not a prophet by profession but "a prophet" by function. On the other hand, the interpretation of this information as reference to the past holds that the prophet was not a prophet at the time when God gave him the commission to prophesy to Israel, but, on the basis of his call, he later became one.

I prefer to take a literal interpretation on these words and argues that both are correct since both interpretations gave attention to the meaning of Amos' reply, to establish a sharp contrast between a prophet by virtue of office (נָבִיא), a prophet's disciple (בֶן־נָבִיא), and a salaried cult official (a commercial prophet) and Amos' own independent activity as sanctioned by YHWH. It is more likely to consider him as a layman under divine order to perform the function of a prophet.

The context of the life and ministry of Amos was unique in the sense that both Israel and Judah existed in a peaceful and prosperous situation. In Israel, Jeroboam II, fourth king of the Jehu dynasty, brought Israel into unusual political stability and expanded Israel's territory. He restored the borders of his kingdom to Lebo-Hamath in the north and to the sea of Arabah in the south, as indicated in 2 Kings 14:25. The expansion was set against a background of long conflict between Israel and her northern neighbour, the Syrian kingdom of Damascus. The threat from Syria was put on hold for the moment, as the vigorous Adad-

nirari III ascended the throne of Assyria and turned attention to the Aramean states that had been in the forefront of resistance. As the Syrian army became weaker, Israel, under Jeroboam II, became stronger and had military successes against Syria. Israel was able to gain control of Damascus and Hamath (2 Ki 14:28). Thus, with Syria subdued, Assyria was no longer presenting any threat, and Judah could become an ally, the Israelite territory was quite stable.

The successes of political expansion and stability in Israel brought prosperity to many in the nation. In the final half of Jeroboam's tenure, Israel probably reached its zenith in terms of economic prosperity (cf King 1983:3-15). This was a situation that could have brought good times for all. However, that was not the case. The settlement of the Israelite tribes in Canaan had changed their social and economic structures. Some elements of tribal structures continued long after the settlement but gradually they were replaced by the appearance of the monarchy. This was because the concept of "royalty" created a class consciousness that had not previously existed, and, as a result, there was an emergence of a new class of royal officials in their society. There arouse social gap between the powerful rich and the peasant, and it continued to grow.

In addition, as the ruling classes controlled the strategic trade routes they consequently gained profits through international trade. The control over trade routes and lively commerce nourished the rising of this wealthy class who lived comfortable lives. In other words, these commercial activities created the sort of income that allowed its holders to accumulate prosperity and other forms of wealth. As a consequence, this situation created a distinct contrast between the luxury of the rich and the misery of the poor. The rich then used their wealth to exploit the weakness of the poor, even to the extent of appropriating their property and enslaving them for debts they could not pay. The worst aspect was that they used their resources to bribe judges and other officials so as to obtain unjust judgments against the poor and strip them of their property and other rights. Thus, the social condition in Israel during Amos' time was spoiled by both sinfulness and greediness.

As Israel experienced this economic boom, there was an increase of religious activities. Several religious shrines were constructed and had constant streams of worshippers bringing numbers of sacrificial animals. There was a belief that the prosperity gained was a sign of YHWH's favour. Although these religious movements seemed to be a positive expression of the people's gratitude toward God's blessing and favour, but in reality, they point out self-satisfaction. Moreover, in this so-called religious awakening the ruling elites actually developed a hypocritical lifestyle because, while doing such religious activities, they were also practicing social injustices by means of oppressing and abusing the poor and the unfortunate. Thus, the core problem in Israel during Amos' time was in fact really religious. Some people in Israel neglected the very substance of their faith, to trust and serve God in humility and be compassionate to their fellow Israelite citizens.

Into these historico-political and socio-religious scenes the prophet Amos stepped in. Amos was sent by God to channel the roar of the lion (Am 3:8). God had spoken out against his people and Amos was the herald God chose to convey his words of challenge and rebuke. He was indeed not sent to pagans who had never heard God's word, but to his fellow citizens (the Israelites), God's own people who failed to recognize sin in their lives. His main mission was clear, to warn people about their failure to live the way God expected and show them the consequences that could follow. At the end, he delivered a harsh message to them in order to represent the judgment of YHWH against their disobedience and sin. In YHWH's sight, the sin of his people was very serious, especially in violating his covenant by practicing social injustice. Through the fall of Samaria, Amos' message of judgment and doom was fulfilled and brought into reality.