

A RHETORICAL CRITIQUE OF ISRAELITE WORSHIP IN THE BOOK OF AMOS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GHANAIAN PENTECOSTAL/CHARISMATIC CHURCHES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Amos' critique of Israel's worship at Bethel and Gilgal (Amos 4:4-5; 5:21-27), condemning religious hypocrisy. Using George Kenedy's five-stage model of rhetorical criticism as the methodological framework, the study analyzes Amos' use of irony, satire, hyperbole, and judicial rhetoric to emphasize justice and righteousness over empty sacrifices. Through this lens, two key authorial intentions emerge: minimizing Israel's excessive rituals that overlook righteousness and depicting the corrupt cult from Yahweh's perspective. Although some scholars argue that Amos did not explicitly identify the sinfulness of Bethel and Gilgal, this study finds that he condemned the offering of both leavened and unleavened food-acts that further intensified Israel's rebellion. The study also explores the contemporary relevance of Amos' message for Ghanaian Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches where the emphasis on miracles and prosperity often overshadows ethical leadership and social justice. It reveals patterns of financial and moral exploitation and underscores the biblical call for justice, integrity, and accountability. The findings suggest that pastors should prioritize justice in their ministries. Churches, especially Pentecostal/Charismatic persuasions, must support the needy, invest in youth training and care for the vulnerable. Furthermore, applying Amos' prophetic critique to Ghanaian society at large can foster biblical formation, reduce corruption, and inspire national reform.

Keywords: *Cult, Yahweh, Rhetorical Criticism, Prophets, Prophecy, Justice Righteousness*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Williams (1972) defines the Israelite cult as organized worship, aligning with Mowinckel's (1967) view of it as a visible and audible expression of divine relations. Perdue (1977) defines it as the act of purposely sustaining an ongoing relationship with the deity in order to seek a divine blessing for the community through obedience to divine commands, fulfilling the deity's needs, appeasing his wrath, and upholding the purity of his sanctity. Wickham (2009) links sacrifice to tithes, offerings, and festivals, while Soggin (2001) sees it as religious experience expressed through external actions. Wickham (2009) defines a sacrifice as a means of approaching Yahweh and maintaining his presence by preserving the sanctuary's holiness, with emphasis on the worshipper's attitude rather than the offering itself. Whiles JoAnn Scurlock (2006) also sees it as a contractual offering to a deity, where the worshipper provides gifts to express gratitude in exchange for divine help or protection. Oesterley and Robinson (1961) classify cultic rites into sacrifices and festivals, further categorizing sacrifices into burnt, communal, and expiatory types (de Vaux, 1965; Soggin, 2001). Festivals, such as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Booths celebrated by Ancient Israel, strengthened communal bonds and supported the poor (Garrett, 1996; Hui, 1990), though Amos (5:21) condemned them for prioritizing ritual over righteousness.

In Israel, the cult expressed loyalty to Yahweh through ceremonial laws, which had to be integrated with moral laws shaping personal and national life (Mowinckel, 1967). Priests were responsible for administering worship, including sacrifices, offerings, and rituals, while prophets reminded the people of Yahweh's commandments delivered through Moses (Exod. 20; 34; Deut. 9). Prophecy, therefore, complemented priestly functions by calling Israel back to covenantal faithfulness whenever ritual observance was divorced from ethical obedience (Von Rad, 1972; Blenkinsopp, 1996). Together, priests and prophets ensured that worship and prophecy reinforced Israel's covenant relationship with God.

Prophecy, as defined by Collins (2010), is proclaiming on behalf of a deity, with prophets serving as mediators between God and people (Sanders, 1970). They addressed social, political, and religious issues (Sharp, 2009), primarily "forth-telling" Yahweh's will but also engaging in future predictions (Koch, 1982). Divination, defined as discerning hidden events (Marshall et al., 2001), was either instrumental or intuitive (Koch, 1982). While priests typically used instrumental divination, prophets occasionally practiced it, as seen in Samuel casting lots (1 Sam 10:17-27) (Miller, 1987).

Grant Osborne (1991) identifies three prophetic roles: receiving and communicating Yahweh's revelations, enforcing strict obedience to the *tōrāh*, and preserving ancestral worship traditions. They also acted as revivalists and emphasizing temple reforms (Malachi 1:8). Bruce Vawter (1992) highlights three additional roles: preaching eschatology (the end of the present world; Hasel 1991), serving as communal conscience, and promoting ethical monotheism. Prophets warned the people of Yahweh's judgment, upheld social virtues, and emphasized moral purity in worship. Scholars differ in emphasis: Osborne (1991) focuses on obedience, Buss (1984) on societal morality, and Vawter on eschatology and ethical monotheism.

Buss (1984) contrasts prophecy with priestly tradition, noting that prophets rebuked societal evil and advocated a new ethos. While both conveyed Yahweh's revelation, prophets did so through direct speech, while priests preserved sacred traditions. Prophets condemned social injustice and corruption among leaders (Amos 6:1-6; Hos 5:10; Isa 1:23; Amos 8:4-6).

Amos' critique of the cult suggests that Bethel and Gilgal's worship practices were corrupt (Oesterley & Robinson, 1961). John Bright (1972) attributes this to social evils and covenant violations. Lafferty (2010) argues that Amos did not reject the cult entirely but condemned prioritizing ritual over justice. Mowvley (1979) suggests Amos' opposition to non-Jerusalem shrines, asserting that true worship requires obedience alongside sacrifices. Sanders (1970) links Amos' critique to societal oppression, while Ward (1969) sees it as a response to moral corruption and social injustice.

Several scholars whose ideas have been discussed already, are of the opinion that Amos does not explicitly state why the Israelite shrines became sinful in his critique of the cult in Amos 4:4-5.

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However, scholars have provided various interpretations. Mowvley (1979) makes three key observations: First, Israel maintained its relationship with Yahweh in the wilderness without sacrifices, proving that sacrifices are not essential. Second, sacrifices must be accompanied by righteousness and justice, as performing them without these virtues is hypocritical and sinful. Third, worship and sacrifice are acceptable only when paired with an inward disposition of obedience to Yahweh.

Sanders (1970) links Amos' condemnation of the cult to societal injustice, stating that religion should not contribute to the oppression of the people. Ward (1969) notes that there is little information on what constituted "sinful" worship but argues that Amos' rejection of the cult was due to moral corruption, including sexual immorality and social injustice. Ward (1969) highlights that Amos condemned public worship because it coexisted with unethical practices, emphasizing that Yahweh desired righteousness and justice over mere rituals.

2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Rhetorical criticism, defined by Aristotle as the study of methods of persuasion, is the method used in this study to analyze the messages of Prophet Amos. The goal is to understand how the Prophet's words were designed to persuade the audience to turn away from evil (Morrison, 2004). Rhetorical criticism's origins in Old Testament studies stem from James Muilenburg's 1968 SBL address, where he defined it as the study of Hebrew literary composition, focusing on structural patterns and persuasive devices (Muilenburg, 1969). Howard (1994) identifies two aspects of communication in rhetorical criticism: persuasion and suasive (advising), and outlines three categories of persuasive discourse: political, epideictic, and forensic (Kennedy, 1984). The book of Amos primarily uses judicial rhetoric, where Yahweh, as prosecutor, brings legal accusations against Israel (Mamahit, 2009).

This study applies rhetorical criticism, focusing on the authorial intent to understand how the message is structured and its impact on the audience (Trible, 1994; Kennedy, 1984). Kennedy's five stages of rhetorical criticism—rhetorical unit, situation, invention, disposition, and effectiveness—guide the analysis, aiming to uncover the Prophet's persuasive goals and how modern religious groups, like Ghanaian Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, can draw implications from the text (Kennedy, 1984). This approach emphasizes understanding the message's delivery and its effect on the audience.

3.0 YAHWEH AS THE ISRAELITE DEITY

The Yahwist (J) and Elohist (E) traditions identify Moses as the first Israelite to encounter Yahweh, a deity understood to have originated outside the later Israelite territory, particularly in the southern deserts near Midian (Collins, 2010; Modriaan, 2010; Mason, 2015). Although early patriarchs worshiped El, the Canaanite creator god, Yahweh revealed himself uniquely to Moses, declaring in Exodus 3:14, "I am that I am," a name derived as a causative form of "to be." This revelation, central to Mosaic theology, marked the beginning of Israel's monotheistic covenant faith (Bright, 1972; Modriaan, 2010; Mason, 2015).

Scholars generally hold that Yahweh's cult arose in Canaan but was shaped by desert origins and later merged with the local cults of El, Ba'al, and Asherah. Over time, Yahweh was identified with El, ultimately becoming Israel's supreme deity (Mason, 2015; Modriaan, 2010). This development is echoed in biblical traditions: Deborah's song depicts Yahweh coming from mountain Seir (Judg. 5:4–5), Amos speaks of him roaring from Zion, and Elijah encounters him at Horeb, the mountain of God (Oesterley & Robinson, 1961).

Some are of the view that King Saul introduced Yahweh, who was thereafter assimilated into the ancient character of El (Modriaan, 2010). El and Yahweh were recognized early on, and Yahweh eventually emerged as the most important deity. Extra-biblical evidence likewise associates Yahweh with the *Shasu* nomads of Sinai, where he was revealed in manifestations of thunder, smoke, fire, and earthquake (Modriaan, 2010). As Israelite religion developed, the canonical prophets further defined Yahweh's nature by emphasizing his absolute moral demands. They portrayed him as the lord of nature and history, the arbiter of eschatological destiny, and the guarantor of universal morality, whose justice extended to Israel and the nations alike (Oesterley & Robinson, 1961).

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4.0 RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF AMOS' CRITIQUE OF THE CULT OF ISRAEL

4.1 Pericope

Below are two texts (4:4-5 and 5:21-27) which are dealt with as one unit with reasons to be given:

4:4. Come to Bethel — and transgress; to Gilgal — and multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days; ⁵bring a thank offering of leavened bread, and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them; for so you love to do, O people of Israel! says the Lord GOD (NRSV).

5:21. I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. ²³Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. ²⁴But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. ²⁵Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? ²⁶You shall take up Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images, which you made for yourselves; ²⁷therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.

4.2 Rhetorical Unit

The first step in rhetorical analysis is defining the literary unit, which in this study consists of Amos 4:4-5 and 5:21-27. These passages contain Amos' critique of Israel's cultic practices but are not continuous, as other themes interrupt them. Despite this, they are grouped together to focus on the religious indictment. The book of Amos is divided into three sections through *inclusios*, where words or ideas start and end a text, and chiasmic structures, which reverse the order of corresponding phrases (Motyer, 1994; Kennedy, 1984). The first division (1:2-3:8) follows an ABB'A' chiasmic structure, with the roaring lion as its theme (Motyer, 1994)

- A (1:2) The Lord Roars from Zion
- B (1:3-2:5) Oracles against foreign nations
- B' (2:6-3:2) Oracles against Israel and Judah
- A' (3:3-8) Roaring lion and prophetic conclusion

The second (3:9-6:14) has an ABCC'B'A' structure, titled the surrounding enemy (Motyer, 1994).

- A (3:9-15)- The Summons to Witness Israel's Ruin
- B (4:1-13)- False Security and Corruption in Samaria
- C (5:1-17)- The Call to Return to God
- C' (5:18-27)- The Day of the Lord: Darkness, Not Light
- B' (6:1-7)- Complacency and Luxury in Zion
- A' (6:8-14)- The Certainty of National Collapse

The third (7:1-9:15) follows an ABCDC'B'A' structure, focusing on the Lord's judgment and hope. *Inclusios* subdivide themes using *kōh 'āmar y'hōwāh*, *'āmar y'hōwāh*, and *n'um y'hōwāh*, marking introductions and conclusions (Motyer, 1994).

- A (7:1-3)- Vision 1: Locusts
- B (7:4-6)- Vision 2: Fire
- C (7:7-9)- Vision 3: Plumb Line
- D (7:10-17)- Interlude: Amos and Amaziah
- C' 8:1-14)- Vision 4: Basket of Summer Fruit
- B' (9:1-10)- Vision 5: The Lord beside the Altar
- A' (9:11-15)- Promise of Restoration and Hope

The selected passages fall within the second division (3:9-6:14), which forms part of the second chiasmic structure that alternates between social and religious indictments, each culminating in a pronouncement of judgment. Amos 4:4-5 introduces religious critique, emphasizing Israel's misguided focus on sacrifices rather than justice. Chapter 5 revisits this theme, climaxing in 5:24, where Yahweh

demands justice over ritual. The critique culminates in 5:26-27, where idol worship invites divine judgment. Though 5:26 is debated as a later interpolation, Paul (1991) argues that it aligns with the Masoretic Text and fits the Prophet's indictment. Despite originating from two different sections, Amos 4:4-5 and 5:21-27 form a coherent critique of Israel's cultic practices, underscoring Yahweh's desire for justice and righteousness rather than empty rituals.

4.3 Rhetorical Situation

Rhetorical discourse arises in response to a situation (Bitzer, 1968), meaning Amos' critique of the cult likely reacted to moral decline. The rhetorical situation, according to Kennedy (1984), also corresponds to *Sitz im Leben* (a German term meaning "context" or "situations in life"; Pearson, 2019), which corresponds to the concept used in form criticism. The *Sitz im Leben* in the pericope corresponds to the 8th century during Amos' time, when the worship of Yahweh in Bethel and Gilgal had deteriorated to such an extent that both centers had become sources of rebellion against Yahweh (Niehaus, 1992). Understanding his message requires examining his background, historical context, and the circumstances prompting his prophecy or the birth of the text in the eighth century in ancient Israel.

With regards to the background of Amos, he is noted to be a shepherd and sycamore dresser from Tekoa, a village in Judah, prophesied around 755 BCE during Jeroboam II's reign (Reed, 1966; Smith, 2012). Though not a professional prophet, he was called by Yahweh, granting him boldness (Reed, 1966). His message fiercely condemned injustice, described as "a whip to the oppressor and honey to the oppressed" (Reed, 1966:108). The historical background includes historical, religious, social, political contexts of ancient Israel in the eighth century.

In the political context, at the start of the eighth century BCE, Assyria's military dominance weakened due to poor oversight of vassal states and army management (Batmaz, 2012). The defeat of Syria by Adad-nirari III around 794 BCE further freed Israel from oppression, allowing for territorial expansion and increased political stability (King, 1989). In economic terms, Israel's strong ties with Phoenicia and control of trade routes led to a "golden age" of prosperity under Jeroboam II (King, 1989). Territorial expansion, fertile land, and revived Red Sea trade boosted wealth (Bright, 1972). However, economic and military success led to moral decline as the people violated Yahweh's covenant (McComiskey, 1985).

In the religious context, Israel's economic boom in the eighth century led to increased temple sacrifices, yet also, moral decline (Oesterley & Robinson, 1961). Worship mixed Yahweh and Ba'al, with priests prioritizing wealth over ethics (Bright, 1972). Corruption and hypocrisy flourished, prompting Amos to condemn the religious decay and moral collapse (Amos 8:5; Wolff, 1977; Bright, 1972). In the social dimension during Jeroboam II's reign, economic prosperity led to severe social inequality, corruption, and moral decay (McComiskey, 1985; Bright, 1972). The wealthy exploited the poor, judges took bribes, and dishonesty thrived (Amos 5:10-12). Amos condemned these injustices, warning that Yahweh's favour depended on justice, not ritual worship (Bright, 1972; Wolff, 1977).

Considering the birth of the text during Amos' time, worship at Bethel and Gilgal had deteriorated into empty ritualism, with excessive sacrifices masking rampant social injustice (Niehaus, 1992). The people zealously observed cultic practices but neglected morality, oppressing the poor while increasing offerings (Amos 2:6). Amos condemned this hypocrisy, arguing that rituals alone could not appease Yahweh (Niehaus, 1992; Miller, 1987). His critique exposed the disconnect between religious zeal and ethical living. It can be inferred from the discussion so far that the conditions in which people could be devoted to the cult but fail to live according to moral teachings led to the rhetorical problem arising from the situation, which the Prophet presented ironically in 4:4-5.

4.4 Rhetorical Invention

Rhetorical invention focuses on how a text persuades its audience (Okyere, 2013). Amos' critique (4:4-5; 5:21-27) is structured as ridicule (parody) in 4:4-5 and rejection (condemnation) in 5:21-27 (Mamahit, 2009). The parody mocks excessive sacrifices, progressing from general to specific terms, while the rejection follows a similar pattern, culminating in Yahweh's rejection of Israel's worship. The Prophet sarcastically invites the people to bring sacrifices more frequently, exposing their hypocrisy. Their rituals—burnt, grain, and peace offerings—meant to produce a pleasing aroma, are now condemned (Niehaus, 1992). The people publicly proclaim their sacrifices (4:5), intensifying the showy nature of their worship while neglecting justice and

righteousness (5:24). Their religious zeal becomes rebellion, making their cultic rites offensive to Yahweh. The rhetorical technique in Amos' message employs irony and satire, where the people's excessive sacrifices, meant for devotion, only increase their sin. The Prophet uses Hebrew expressions (*w^eqir'û*, and call out, and *hašmî'û*, proclaim) to highlight their public display of offerings. Their focus on rituals, rather than moral obligations, leads to Yahweh's rejection of their worship. Amos' rejection passage (5:21-27) escalates in intensity. Yahweh first declares that "he takes no delight", *w^elō' 'ārîha*, in their assemblies (5:21), "will not accept", *lō 'eršeh*, their burnt and grain offerings (5:22), "and will not even look upon", *lō 'abbîṭ*, their peace offerings (5:22). Finally, he commands their songs to be silenced, *hāsēr ma'ālâ*, and refuses to hear their melodies, *lō 'ešmā'* (5:23). This climaxes in complete rejection, as seen in the use of *šānē'* (hate) and *mā'as* (despise) (5:21).

The external proof (5:25) provides historical evidence that Yahweh sustained Israel in the wilderness without sacrifices, proving that true worship must be preceded by justice and righteousness. Without these virtues, their meticulous observance of cultic rituals is meaningless. Thus, Yahweh, not only rejects their worship but also decrees their exile (5:27). Amos' critique underscores the fundamental message that religious devotion without ethical living is worthless. Justice and righteousness are paramount, and without them, worship is futile. The Prophet's use of irony, progression, and satire effectively condemns the people's superficial religiosity and warns of impending exile due to their moral failures.

4.5 Rhetorical Disposition

Rhetorical disposition focuses on how arguments are structured to persuade (Mamahit & Venter, 2010). In Amos 4:4-5 and 5:21-27, Yahweh's judgment follows a structured pattern using messenger speech, covenant lawsuit, and judgment oracles (Wallace, 2007). The text, marked by the messenger formula, follows a covenant lawsuit format. A covenant lawsuit occurs when there is a breach of a covenant (Wallace, 2007) or when people are accused of being disloyal to a covenant, and their guilt is declared (Davidson, 2010). The pericope is organized as follows: introduction (4:4-5), rejection (5:21-23), reason for condemnation (5:24), historical guilt reminder (5:25-26), and judgment pronouncement (5:27). This structured arrangement enhances persuasion, aligning with Kennedy's (1984) rhetorical disposition strategy.

4.6 Organization of the Text or Material

This study analyzes the rhetorical disposition of Amos 4:4-5 and 5:21-27, focusing on its organization and persuasive style. The text follows a covenant lawsuit format, using messenger speech, judgment oracles, and rhetorical strategies to emphasize Israel's disobedience. The passage begins with a satirical invitation in 4:4-5, using *Qal* and *Hiphil* imperatives to ridicule Israel's excessive religious rituals at Bethel and Gilgal. *Qal* conjugation is the basic and simplest form of verbs (*bō'û*, come, and *ûpiš'û*, and transgress). It can be inferred that *Qal* conjugation reflects a calmer mood of the speaker. *Qal* conjugation shifts to a *Hiphil* imperative second-person plural (*harbû*, multiply) in reference to Gilgal (Owens, 1992). *Hiphil*, marked by *ha* in *harbû*, expresses causation. This form shows the people deliberately transgressing through actions and attitudes, progressively increasing (*harbû*) in sin or rebellion (*ûpiš'û*) (Owens, 1992).

The invitation for the people to go to the shrines to transgress is a parody ridiculing the cult. Parody exaggerates a style for comic effect (Soanes & Stevenson, 2006) and exposes vices through ridicule (Ryken, 1999). It critiques a cult excelling in rituals but failing in justice and righteousness (Ryken, 1999). The exaggerated call to bring sacrifices "every morning" (*labōqer zibhêkem*) and tithes "every three days" (*lišlōšet yāmîm ma'š'ērôtêkem*) mocks worship. The law required tithes every three years (*šālōš šānîm*, Deut 14:28; *hāšlīšît š'neṭ*, Deut 26:12), but Amos states they were brought in three days (*lišlōšet yāmîm*).

The hyperbolic language exaggerates their zeal for sacrifices while highlighting their failure in justice and righteousness. The phrase, "three days" instead of the stipulated "three years," for tithes, serves as a literary device to mock their superficial piety. The text employs inseparable prepositions such as *le*, indicating purpose and emphasizing the people's deliberate transgression. The shift from second-person plural to third-person plural suggests a transition from direct accusation by Yahweh to a courtroom setting where the prophet assumes the role of the prosecutor. The *Piel* conjugation in 4:5 intensifies the accusation, reinforcing the certainty of the people's guilt in offering leavened sacrifices, which violate Levitical law (Lev 2:11). The use of satire exposes their religious hypocrisy, where public displays of worship mask their moral failings. The people were so zealous in performing rituals that they offered excessive sacrifices, even burning leavened food as thanksgiving offerings, which

Levitical law forbids (Lev 23:18). They proudly and publicly announced these abominations (4:5). The more they visited shrines with such offerings, the more they multiplied their transgressions.

The strongest condemnation of Israelite worship appears in 5:21-23, where Yahweh explicitly rejects their festivals and sacrifices. The verbs *śānēti* (“I hate”) and *mā’astī* (“I despise”) create a forceful hendiadys, emphasizing Yahweh’s total repudiation of their cultic practices. Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines hendiadys as an expression of a single idea by two words connected with a conjunction and (Soanes & Steveson, 2004). Observing from the text, the rejection extends to seven ritual elements, including solemn assemblies (*’āšārāh*), burnt offerings (*’ōlāh*), grain offerings (*minhāh*), peace offerings (*šelem*), songs (*šir*), and harp melodies (*zimrāh*), forming a list of seven referred to by Paul (1991) as the Heptad of Negation. This complete dismissal, signals a divine refusal to accept their worship without ethical integrity.

In 5:24, Yahweh shifts focus from ritual to ethical obligations, using dialectic negation to promote justice (*mišpāt*) and righteousness (*šedāqāh*) over empty ceremonial acts. The command for justice to “roll down like waters,” employs a jussive form in the *Niphal* conjugation, indicating a continuous, unstoppable flow. The use of simile compares justice to an ever-flowing stream, stressing its necessity for true worship. This metaphor evokes an arid landscape transformed by water, paralleling Israel’s spiritual drought due to its failure in social justice.

The argument strengthens with a rhetorical question in 5:25, highlighting Israel’s lack of sacrifices during the wilderness period. The interrogative *hā*, preceding *hazzbahīm*, confirms that worship in the desert did not rely on rituals but on obedience to God. The passage continues in 5:26 with a procession carrying idols, demonstrating the people’s deviation into idolatry. Finally, in 5:27, the *Hiphil* conjugation signals Yahweh’s decisive action in exiling Israel, underscoring the consequences of their misplaced religious priorities.

Through its rhetorical disposition, the passage effectively persuades by exposing Israel’s hypocrisy, negating empty ritualism, and calling for a return to justice and righteousness. The strategic use of imperative, satire, hyperbole, simile, rhetorical questioning, and judicial rhetoric, strengthens the prophetic indictment. The text ultimately emphasizes that true worship is not about extravagant sacrifices but about upholding divine justice in society.

4.7 Persuasive style of the text

Kennedy (1984) reiterates Aristotle’s three modes of artistic proof—*logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*—in discussing the persuasive style of Amos’ critique. *Ethos* refers to the speaker’s credibility, which attracts the audience to accept the message (Kennedy, 1984). *Pathos* describes the emotional reactions of the audience, resulting from the speaker “playing on the feelings” of the audience, often by recalling past sorrowful occurrences (Kennedy, 1984:15). *Logos* is defined as the logical aspect within the discourse (Kennedy, 1984). These modes are used in the study because they are universal means of persuasion (Kennedy, 1984).

4.7.1 Logos

Prophet Amos promoted universal morality by pronouncing judgment on nations, including Judah, for crimes against humanity (1:3-2:5; Paul, 1991). Deducing from Paul’s (1991) assertion, if Yahweh subjects all nations to judgment, then it is consistent for the prophet to do the same for his own people, Judah. Hence, by presenting a logical and impartial framework of judgment applicable to all, including his own nation, Amos reinforces the credibility of his prophetic message. In his indictment (4:4-5), he sarcastically invited people to Bethel and Gilgal to increase transgression, using hyperbole to attack the cult and shift focus to justice and righteousness (Henkemans, 2013). The people, in their zeal, exceeded required offerings by burning *w^qattēr mēhāmēs tōdāh*, “leavened food thanksgiving offering” (4:5), which was forbidden (Ex 23:18; Lev 12-14; Keil, 1980). They proudly announced *tōdāh w^qir’ū nēdādōt hašmī’ū* (4:5), further multiplying their transgressions. Amos’ satire exposed cultic deficiencies to both the elite and common people (LeBoeuf, 2007). His strategy made their worship appear foolish without immediately provoking anger.

Yahweh’s anger led to the people being ostracized for three reasons. First, he used *śānē’tī*, “I hate,” and *mā’astī*, “I despise,” showing complete rejection of their festivals (5:21-23). Amos detailed specific sacrifices Yahweh rejected, emphasizing the severity of divine disapproval. Second, Yahweh’s refusal to delight in *’ārīḥa*, “solemn assemblies,” and festivals showed hostility, cutting the people off completely. Third, his rejection extended to offerings: *lō ’eršeh*, “I will not accept,” *lō ’abbīṭ*, “I will not look upon,” and *hāsēr ma’ālā*, “take away from me” (5:21-23).

This hostility arose because the people prioritized cultic activities (4:4-5) while neglecting justice and righteousness, which became the new paradigm for the cult (5:24). Their zeal for offerings became meaningless

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(5:25). Since the wilderness cult required no sacrifices, bringing offerings without justice and righteousness was unacceptable. Yahweh, therefore, would remove them beyond Damascus, where his presence would be absent, leading them into captivity (5:27).

4.7.2 Pathos

In Amos 4:4-5, the Prophet critiques Israel's cultic practices through satire and parody, using humor to engage the people, but ultimately leading them to conviction (LeBoeuf, 2007). The Prophet's sarcastic invitation to Bethel and Gilgal, to transgress (*pāša*'), is meant to provoke strong emotions in the people, as it challenges their belief in their relationship with Yahweh. The term *pāša*, meaning "to revolt" or "cast off allegiance to authority," arouses fear and surprise, as the people view themselves as under Yahweh's authority (Paul, 1991). The use of hendiadys in 4:5 (*wēqir'û...hašmî'û*) intensifies their public display of sacrifices, making their actions more absurd and emphasizing the contrast between cultic activity and the need for justice and righteousness (Henkemans, 2013).

The critique reaches a climax in 5:21, where the Prophet uses two strong words—*šānē*' (I hate) and *mā'as* (I despise)—to describe Yahweh's rejection of Israel's cultic practices. *Šānē*' conveys intense hatred and disdain, while *mā'as* implies a complete avoidance of the people with disgust (Harris, Archer, Waltke, 1981; Okyere, 2015). The use of these words together without conjunction conveys Yahweh's emotional rejection of the people, reflecting his sorrow and anger. This emotional rejection extends to all aspects of their worship: their solemn assemblies, burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, and music. Yahweh no longer takes delight in their sacrifices or songs, which were once expressions of faith (Swanson, 2001; Parrott, 2009). The removal of music, a key emotional outlet for the people, symbolizes the deepest form of rejection (Miller & Strongman, 2002). Amos heightens the emotional appeal by reminding the people of their bitter experiences during the forty years in the wilderness (5:25), further stirring up painful memories. The ultimate anticlimax of the message is the pronouncement that Yahweh will take them into captivity in Damascus (5:27), where they will be exposed, vulnerable, and stripped of their dignity, an emotional and physical blow that completes the Prophet's message of impending judgment.

4.7.3 Ethos

The credibility of Amos' message is established through several factors. First, the consistent use of Yahweh's declarations ("thus says the Lord") throughout the pericope (4:4-5, 5:21-27) confirms the divine origin of the message. Second, Amos' encounter with Amaziah (7:12-14) highlights that, unlike other prophets who earned a living from their ministry, Amos supported himself through his own business, showing that his prophetic work was not for personal gain, but was divinely commissioned. Finally, the historical record in 2 Kings 18:9-10 fulfills Amos' prophecy of Israel's exile, further validating his credibility and confirming the truth of his message for future readers.

4.8 Structure of pericope

Come to Bethel — and transgress; -1st line
To Gilgal — and multiply transgression; -2nd line
Bring your sacrifices every morning, -3rd line
Your tithes every three days; -4th line
...And proclaim freewill offerings, -5th line
Publish them-6th line

In Amos 4:4-5, the second line mirrors the first but intensifies the invitation to transgress by using the word *harbû* ("multiply"), signaling an escalation of wrongdoing. The people are urged to bring sacrifices every morning and tithes every three days. Synonymous parallelism, such as *wēqir'û* ("proclaim") and *hašmî'û* ("publish"), adds rhythmic depth, heightening the message's impact (Ryken, 1999). The parallelism creates a growing intensity, culminating in the proclamation to "proclaim" and "publish."

In 5:21-27, the poetic section (5:21-24) starts with synthetic parallelism in 5:21, contrasting Yahweh's rejection of their festivals with his lack of delight in solemn assemblies. In 5:22, antithetic parallelism contrasts the people's offerings with Yahweh's rejection: "I will not accept" versus "I will not look upon." The structure shifts in 5:23 to synthetic parallelism, explaining Yahweh's refusal to listen to their songs by stating, "I will not listen to the melody of your harps." Finally, 5:24 returns to synonymous parallelism, using the imagery of moving water to emphasize justice and righteousness, virtues that Yahweh desires above empty rituals.

5.0 RHETORICAL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PERSUASION

Rhetorical effectiveness in Amos, highlights the people's hypocritical worship, neglecting justice and righteousness, which Yahweh hates. The Prophet's judicial rhetoric declares that Israel is guilty and destined for exile. The goal is to persuade the audience to accept this judgment and convey Yahweh's universal morality. The message's implications extend to present-day communities, like Ghanaian Christians, emphasizing justice and righteousness (Trible, 1994). The purpose of using rhetorical criticism in reading this text is to present the *ipsissima verba*—the exact words of the Prophet—to uncover his true intention. This has significant implications for the Ghanaian Christian community, highlighting the need to prioritize justice and righteousness in their faith and worship (Trible, 1994).

From the research, two authorial intentions can be suggested based on rhetorical criticism. The first intention arises from the people's zealous engagement in cultic rites, to the point of offering an abomination, neglecting justice and righteousness, and boasting about it. This intention is conveyed through a sarcastic downplaying of the cultic practices. The second intention is to provide a clear depiction of the state of the cult from Yahweh's perspective.

6.0 IMPACT OF THE CHRISTIAN CULT IN GHANA

Kwame Nkrumah sought to sideline religion in public life after independence, but Dr. Busia restored Christianity's national influence, emphasizing the "fear of God" (Atiemo, 2010). This shift was symbolized by modifying the national anthem to begin with God, reinforcing Christianity's role in Ghana's public and political sphere. In 1977, during Acheampong's regime, a long drought led to crop failure and famine, creating a sense of divine displeasure. In response, people sought divine forgiveness and intervention through pastors in a "National Week of Repentance and Prayer" (Atiemo, 2010; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). Christianity has deeply influenced public and official spaces in Ghana. Atiemo (2010) highlights prayer sessions at state functions, parliament, and the judiciary. The presidency also engages in prayers, with President Atta Mills accused of turning the castle into a prayer camp (Ghanaweb, 2015). In 2017, the government sponsored pastors, musicians, and religious leaders on a pilgrimage to Israel to pray for the nation, reflecting the state's value on the Christian God (citifmonline.com, 2017).

Freedom of worship in Ghana has allowed Christianity to flourish and influence national leadership. Many fellowships, like Women's Aglow, hold national prayer meetings. Prayer camps such as MOGPA, Mount Horeb, and Achimota Forest serve as pilgrimage sites (Buzz Ghana, 2018). Despite strong Christian zeal, moral decay has affected both leaders and ordinary citizens, including Pentecostal/ Charismatic Churches.

Some other reported impacts are observed in the ministry of religious leaders like prophets in the area of healing and deliverance. Alleged feats that have taken place include cripples rising to walk, the dumb regaining speech, and healing from various illnesses such as cancer, hepatitis, hypertension, stroke, and HIV/AIDS. Additionally, there are claims of dead persons being raised, along with many other miracles (Boaheng, 2021).

7.0 CURRENT MORAL DECADENCE IN GHANAIAN SOCIETY AND ITS CRITIQUE

The church has traditionally served as a moral compass in the society (Kudadjie & Aboagye-Mensah, as cited in Saa-Dade, 2015). However, in the contemporary Ghanaian context, certain Christian churches, especially Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches, have expressions that have drawn criticism for practices that appear exploitative rather than supportive of the vulnerable. Scholarly assessments reveal that significant financial burdens are often placed on congregants in exchange for spiritual services, with some religious leaders amassing considerable wealth while many followers face economic hardship (Nyezi, 2013).

These practices are reflected in the prioritization of fundraising over social welfare initiatives, with little emphasis on assisting the poor, sick, or marginalized within the church. Church-based welfare programmes are frequently selective, benefitting only those considered to be in good standing. Core Christian practices, such as the Lord's Supper and pastoral care, are at times neglected in favour of economic pursuits (Peacefmonline, 2018). Beyond the internal dynamics of the church, there is broader concern with the moral failure of some religious leaders who, despite occupying respected positions, engage in unethical behaviours that erode public trust. This mirrors the critique found in the text under review, where the prophet denounces religious and societal elites for thriving at the expense of the vulnerable (Koch, 1983). Scholars have further highlighted various forms of moral corruption associated with some prophetic ministries in Ghana. These include unethical practices such as visa fraud, monetary manipulation like money doubling, unlawful seizure of property, and the commercialization of religious items (Adjei, Oduro-Kwarteng & Frimpong, 2019; Quayesi-Amakye, 2013;

Anderson, 2019). Such ministries often operate with a profit-oriented motive, manipulating the desperation of adherents for personal gain. Allegations of sexual misconduct and abuse have also been noted as part of this pattern of moral decline (Boaheng, 2021).

These issues indicate a significant deviation from the church's prophetic roles in promoting justice and integrity. As Sanders (1970) argues, religious institutions that fail to confront societal injustices and instead exploit their members contribute to the very moral decay they are called to resist.

8.0 DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Israelite Cult and Worship Practices

Gleaning from scholars such as Williams (1972), Perdue (1977), Wickham (2009), Soggin (2001), discussed so far, the Israelite cult may be broadly understood as organised worship combining ritual practices, sacrifices, offerings, and festivals. It is also observed from the above experts that the cult served as a communal expression of Israel's relationship with God, sustaining divine favour through obedience, holiness, and atonement. Deduction from Wickham and Soggin's assertions, sacrifices were not merely ritual acts but embodied covenantal fidelity, encompassing burnt offerings, communal meals, and expiatory rites. These practices, from Wickham, stressed both the inner disposition of worshippers and the outward performance of ritual. Festivals such as Passover, Weeks, and Booths reinforced collective identity, supported the marginalised, and commemorated God's saving acts. Despite their significance, prophets such as Amos criticised these practices when they degenerated into empty rituals divorced from justice and righteousness.

8.2 Prophecy and its Function in Israel

Prophecy in Israel, from Sanders' perspective, functioned as divine mediation, with prophets serving as spokespersons of God's will. Their mandate extended beyond religious instruction to addressing social and political issues (Sharp 2009). Prophecy focused on declaring God's word for the present but occasionally involved predictions of the future (Koch 1982). Closely associated with prophecy was divination—the discernment of hidden realities (Marshall et al., 2001). Judging from Miller's (1987) assertion, priests often relied on instrumental methods such as casting lots, while prophets more frequently employed intuitive forms like visions and inspiration.

8.3 The Prophetic Office and Social Role

The prophetic office was multifaceted. From Osborne (1991), prophets communicated divine revelation, demanded covenantal obedience, preserved worship's purity, and acted as catalysts for religious reform. They also operated as the moral conscience of society, denouncing corruption, injustice, and idolatry while advocating for justice and righteousness (Hasel 1991). Some proclaimed divine judgement, while others articulated eschatological hope, linking fidelity to a vision of renewal (Vawter 1992). While both prophets and priests mediated Yahweh's will, priests preserved sacred traditions, whereas prophets delivered direct divine speech, often confronting leaders with accusations of corruption and injustice (Amos 6:1–6; Hos 5:10; Isa 1:23; Amos 8:4–6).

8.4 Findings from Amos' Critique of the Cult

Amos in particular condemned the worship at Bethel and Gilgal, associating it with covenant violations, social injustice, and moral decay. His critique did not amount to wholesale rejection of the cult but targeted rituals emptied of ethical content. He insisted that authentic worship required obedience to God and expression through justice and integrity. In this way, he rejected forms of worship that legitimised oppression or immorality, affirming that true devotion to God is inseparable from social ethics.

The rhetorical criticism highlights two authorial intentions: first, to satirically denounce Israel's excessive zeal in cultic rites, particularly the abominable sacrifice of leavened food, which neglected justice and righteousness; second, to vividly portray Israel's corrupted worship practices from Yahweh's perspective, exposing their hypocrisy and distorted religiosity. Yahweh's rejection of Israel is articulated in three dimensions. First, his explicit hatred and disdain for their festivals signified total repudiation. Second, his refusal to accept solemn assemblies underscored divine hostility. Third, his rejection of sacrifices and offerings demonstrated decisive severance, revealing that their worship lacked genuine covenantal fidelity. The use of satire further exposes Israel's religious hypocrisy, as public displays of piety masked profound moral failings. The people's zeal for ritual led them to offer excessive sacrifices, including burning leavened food as thanksgiving offerings—an act expressly forbidden by Levitical law (Lev 23:18). They proudly and publicly

announced these abominations (Amos 4:5), and the more they frequented shrines with such offerings, the more their transgressions multiplied.

Some scholars such as Bright (1972), Mowvley (1979), and Ward (1969) contend that Amos does not explicitly explain why Bethel and Gilgal were sinful, suggesting various reasons, including the notion that Jerusalem alone constituted a legitimate cultic center (Mowvley 1979). This study, however, demonstrates that Amos identifies the sin clearly: the offering of leavened food alongside unleavened sacrifices constituted an abomination. Consequently, repeated offerings did not reflect genuine devotion but amplified rebellion, revealing the true basis for the shrines' condemnation. Rhetorical criticism serves a pivotal role in interpreting this text, enabling the recovery of the *ipsissima verba*—the exact words of the Prophet—and uncovering his authorial intent. Through this approach, the text's use of satire, ethical critique, and covenantal admonition is made explicit, highlighting the inseparability of worship and moral integrity (Trible 1994).

8.5 Implications for Ghanaian Christianity

Ghanaian Christianity parallels Israel's cult, with visible devotion expressed through rituals, liturgies, prayer camps, and prosperity gatherings (Atiemo, 2010). When detached from ethics and social responsibility, such practices risk ritualism. Amos' critique underscores that worship divorced from justice is hypocritical, requiring covenantal faithfulness to God and neighbour (Kudadjie & Aboagye-Mensah, as cited in Saa-Dade, 2015). Prosperity-focused Pentecostal and Charismatic ministries in Ghana often equate material blessing with divine favour, neglecting justice (Nyezi, 2013; Quayesi-Amakye, 2013; Anderson, 2019).

Amos' critique highlights this hollowness, urging churches to realign worship with covenantal ethics, emphasizing justice, equity, and accountability (Sanders, 1970). Amos exposed Israel's intense worship amid corruption. Similarly, Ghanaian Christianity enjoys public prominence yet coexists with systemic injustice (Koch, 1983). This contrast mirrors Israel's crisis, emphasizing Amos' call for justice, which remains profoundly relevant in Ghana's socio-political context. In Ghana, religion has at times been reduced to empty ritual, neglecting justice (Boaheng, 2021). Amos' warning remains pertinent: worship without righteousness risks societal decay. The church must maintain integrity, speak truth to power, and uphold its moral conscience amid instability (Adjei, Oduro-Kwarteng & Frimpong, 2019).

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study calls for a reorientation of Ghanaian Christian worship from ritual performance to covenantal obedience, emphasizing justice, righteousness, and ethical living as integral to authentic devotion. Rituals, festivals, and vibrant expressions—such as revivals, healing services, and prosperity conventions—must serve as instruments of transformation rather than ends in themselves. Central to this is liturgical reform, reframing prayers, sermons, and songs as tools for moral formation. The church is urged to reclaim its prophetic vocation by training leaders who combine pastoral care with critique of corruption, inequality, and systemic injustice, while resisting political co-optation. Theological renewal is also required, particularly in moderating prosperity-oriented preaching with biblical imperatives of social responsibility and communal solidarity. Strengthened theological education should foreground ethics, justice, and prophetic ministry, equipping clergy as moral guides. Ultimately, the study affirms that worship divorced from righteousness is unacceptable, urging Ghanaian Christianity to embody holistic spirituality that unites devotion with social ethics.

10.0 CONCLUSION

Israelite worship maintained a relationship with Yahweh through obedience, sacrifices, and festivals, prioritizing attitude over offerings. Prophets, especially Amos, condemned corrupt worship that neglected justice, portraying Israel's shrines as sinful due to injustice. Yahweh, initially linked to El, became Israel's supreme deity, shaping their religious identity. Using George Kennedy's five-stage rhetorical criticism, this study analyzes Amos' judicial rhetoric, portraying Yahweh prosecuting Israel. Amos 4:4-5 and 5:21-27 critique Israel's misplaced focus on sacrifices over justice, employing irony, satire, hyperbole, and structured literary techniques like *inclusios*. The passage culminates in Yahweh's rejection of worship and a decree of exile. Amos' rhetoric exposes hypocrisy, condemning excessive rituals and depicting Israel's corrupt cult from Yahweh's perspective. While some scholars argue Amos omits reasons for Bethel and Gilgal's sinfulness, this study shows that he condemns their abominable offering of leavened alongside unleavened sacrifices, exposing ritualized rebellion and insincere devotion. Amos' message remains relevant for Ghanaian Christian churches, especially,

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Pentecostal/Charismatic persuasions, where miracles and prosperity often overshadow ethical leadership and social justice. Some churches exploit members financially, prioritizing wealth over social support, while corruption and moral decay persist. Amos' call to justice, integrity, and accountability is crucial for ensuring faith drives societal transformation. The study recommends applying these findings to Ghana's ruling class and public sector workers, emphasizing work ethics. Pastors should stress justice and righteousness, while churches must aid the needy, train unemployed youth, and support the sick. Biblical formation can help reduce corruption and reform society.

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