



# A text-immanent, narrative-critical and logotherapeutic reading of the book of Amos and the necessity of a scientific approach by its readers to prevent terror deeds

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## Abstract

A text-immanent and narrative critical approach to the Biblical book of Amos reveals that the prophet Amos had addressed the social injustices of his time. He addressed the issues of his day with the belief that it was the Lord God (Elohim) Almighty who had instructed him to do so. The leaders of the well-known terror groups, Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and the Islamic State (IS) are also addressing contemporary social issues that confront them with the belief that Allah (God) has prompted them to do so. While Amos had discovered meaning through what he had seen and what he had said about the Lord and his interventions, the terror groups find their meaning in jihad (holy war). The book of Amos confronts modern readers to take scientific contextual analyses seriously and it also makes them aware that believers need to do what is right without making use of any violence to effect some societal change. In contrast to this, the jihadists' interpretation of the Quran and their quest for a world under Sharia law are not in line with sound scientific contextual analyses and as a result led to unacceptable terror and violent deeds in practice – something that must be rejected at all costs.

**Keywords:** Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Amos, Boko-Haram, Islamic State, jihad, logotherapy.

## Introduction

A text-immanent and narrative critical reading (Deist, 1986:107; Ras 1996), combined with a logotherapeutic approach to the Biblical book of the prophet Amos (whose name means 'borne by God'), depicts a message from Amos (760–755 BCE), one of the sheep farmers from Tekoa, who addressed the nation of Israel (*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia - BHS*) / Jerusalem (*Septuagint - LXX*) regarding what he had seen in the days of Uzziah, also known as Azariah, the king of Judah and Jeroboam II, the king of Israel. This prophet from Judah has pictured God as a roaring lion (Amos 1:2) that has addressed the nations that have sinned against Him. The first section of the book (Amos 1:3-2:16) consists of eight poems of judgments against the nations of Syro -



Palestine and Israel (Prinsloo, 1987:241). Amos essentially spoke out against an increased disparity between the very wealthy and the very poor in society. His key prophetic themes were justice, God's omnipotence, and absolute divine judgment. The nations included: Damascus (Amos 1:3-3), Gaza (Amos 1:6-8), Tyre (Amos 1:9-10), Edom (Amos 1:11-12), Ammon (Amos 1:13-15), Moab (Amos 2:1-3), Judah (Amos 2:4-5) and Israel (Amos 2:6-9:15).

The message to these nations, including Israel, was clear: God will punish them because of their sins (Amos 3-6; Prinsloo, 1987:242-243, 249). According to Amos, Israel *inter alia* did not search for God, they trampled on the poor, oppressed the righteous, took bribes, deprived the poor of justice in the courts, and as a result they will face the Day of the Lord that will be a day of wrath (Amos 5:4-27; Mays, 1985:3). In short, the people of Israel did not serve God in the socio-political situation of their time in a just manner. YHWH, the God of justice, demands righteous living and not oblations. By constantly oppressing the poor and failing to be just the Israelites were behaving unrighteously and justice was to be ratified as a core of God's message in Amos' prophetic teachings.

This article interprets events of Amos from an interdisciplinary perspective. The events of those days and the current actions of Islamic radicals are bisected through theology and psychology (logotherapy). The authors attempt to juxtapose the attitude of Amos, that God will do what He proclaims and that no action from Amos is required, barring believing God. The omnipotence of God will result in His Word being fulfilled. The Jihadist approach of "*Allahu akbar*" ("God is great!") and engaging through violent means to bring about changes, particularly in societies that do not follow Islam, simulates a different unacceptable approach to faith.

### **Setting the stage- the epoch of Amos's utterances**

Amos claimed that he "saw what was going to happen to Israel" and what he has seen, he has proclaimed. The LXX expressed it through the words Λογοι Αμωσ...ούς ειδεν...και ειπεν (Amos 1:1-2). These words are presented in a short introduction that clearly indicates that the time of his address was when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam II, the king of Israel. The traditional dating of these two kings are in the eight century BCE

Jeroboam was reigning between the years 782/781 to 753 BCE and Uzziah between 767 to 740/739 B C. While Albright dates the beginning of Amos's prophetic career about 752 BCE, and Bright (1980:262) and Harrison opted for about 750 BCE (Harrison 1982:884), Freeman (1980:187) confines his prophetic ministry to the period 760-753 BCE. However, the findings of historical-critical methods indicate that it is rather safe to say that the prophet Amos was active in the middle of the eight century BCE but that the book of Amos does not have only one historical context (i.e., the middle of the eight century), but several, including the exilic and post-exilic times (Prinsloo, 1987:246-247).

### **Background of Israel during this period**

Although it remains problematic to sketch the socio-political and historical-cultural background as depicted in the present text of BHS (Prinsloo, 1987:246-247) it seems that trade and commerce flourished in Israel during this period and there was migration of labor from the rural areas to the city. The focus of the people was on material things and there was a particular appetite for luxury items. This preoccupation with materialistic goals went hand-in-hand with moral and religious depravity.



Bribery was common to accumulate land and wealth and there was corruption in the judiciary. The gap between the rich and the poor became ominously wide, and people were turning away from *Yahweh* to pagan religions. The ardent observer can easily relate the conditions of the time of Amos with contemporary societies. There was no social justice and it was especially the poor that suffered the most (Amos 2:6-8; 4:1; 5:10-12; 8:4-6; Harrison, 1982:885-886; Bright, 1980:262-263; Van Zyl, 1977:160-161; Unger, 1980:253; Soggin, 1986:282-285; Smith, 1989:111-112).

### **Amos's remedy for Israel**

Amos' remedy for national and social evils was straightforward. Immoral lifestyles must be abandoned, and people need not only to seek God but also to serve Him (Mays, 1983:12; Hayes, 1988:13). Amos emphasized that the nations, including Israel, will be punished by God because of their sins and social injustices (Davies & Rogerson, 2005). A constant refrain in this book are the words: "This is what the Lord says!" This expression emphasizes that, according to the book of Amos, the origin of this prophetic message is not from Amos, but from God himself (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). This emphasis is taken further by the constant repetitive use of the personal pronoun "I" that refers to God and what He will do (Amos 1:4, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14; 2:1, 5).

Amos based his message on his personal belief that it is God himself that is speaking to Israel through the prophetic anointing (Mays, 1983:12). According to BHS and the LXX, what Amos had seen, he now proclaims through a prophetic warning / message – and this message is simple: because of the people's sins, God will punish them. God places his people on the same level as the surrounding nations and He expects the same purity from all. The reasons for God's wrath are captured in chapter 5:1-6:7 where Amos (on behalf of God) addresses the social context of Israel in a practical manner. This nation's sins make Him take them into exile (Amos 6:7). Amos explicitly said that God will stir up a nation against Israel because of their wrong behaviour (Amos 6:14). The Israelites practicing of religiosity without righteousness was sinful and disrespectful to God.

### **Logotherapy**

Time-spatially, Viktor Frankl and Amos are from distinctly different historical-cultural settings, but both had believed in the omnipotent God. Frankl, the father of the psychological and existential concept and practice of logotherapy (Ras, 2019:121), believed that healing comes through meaning attachment (Frankl, 1962, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1986; De Vos, 1995; Guttman, 1996; Ras, 2000; 2013; 2017; 2019). By searching for meaning or by attaching meaning, or by discovering meaning, a person's life will become more meaningful, and this again will assist a person to get healed or to experience a meaningful life (Ras, 2000; 2010c; 2013; 2017; 2019). Thus, the search for meaning even in the middle of great misery and upheaval can constitute a potential solution to a person's suffering.

Reading the book of Amos from a text-immanent and narrative critical point of view (Ras 1996), but also from a psychological, more precisely, a logotherapeutic point of view Ras (2000 & 2010c; 2013; Ras, Ras & Zondi (2017) and Glas (2007:308), indicate that the prophet Amos has found his meaning in his perceived belief (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992:487) that he was sent by God and that he had a specific mission or task to fulfill, and that was, to go and deliver God's message of judgment to Israel (Amos 1:1-2 & 7:14-15).

This message can be encapsulated in the following words: God will punish the nations, including Israel, because of their sinful deeds (Prinsloo, 1987:249; Amos 1-2; 9:8). From a



phenomenological-existential point of view Amos is depicted in this book as the one who, on behalf of *Yahweh*, had addressed the sins of his people as he (i.e., Amos) had perceived and interpreted God's message. The text tells us that Amos was taken away from behind the sheep to prophesy against Israel (Amos 7:15). Amos' past existential and subjective encounter with God is implied in Amos 1:1-2 and 7:14-15. The present text of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) and the *Septuagint* (LXX) are using the words, עמוס אשר חזה ויאמר / Λογοι Αμωσ...ούς ειδεν...και ειπεν, that is: "Words of Amos, what he has seen...and what he has said..." (Amos 1:1). The book of Amos narrates in an anthropomorphic manner that Amos had conveyed what *Yahweh* (Amos 7:15-16) has revealed to him.

## Finding meaning

It is clear in the textual passages of this Hebrew book that Amos has found meaning in his perceived belief and conviction that it was God that had sent *him* to deliver the message of judgment and punishment. This subjective and personal encounter with God, described as a "calling away from behind the sheep" (Amos 7:15), has driven Amos, psychologically speaking, to face his adversaries like Amaziah (Amos 7:10-17), and to convey God's word with boldness. Amos' message was addressing a particular socio-political context in which the people had turned away from God.

Amos, in his state of mind, according to Strydom (2011: 222), was so convinced that he was doing the right thing on behalf of *Yahweh* that he could even confront the priest of Bethel, Amaziah, in king Jeroboam's sanctuary. He said that God will not spare the people of Israel (Amos 7:14 - 8:14), but that God will cut off the heads of all the people and that He will kill all those who are left with the sword (Amos 9:1). While Amos was even accused of a conspiracy (high treason) against king Jeroboam when he was delivering his message (Amos 7:10-11), he did not preach revolution or militancy, because he believed that *Yahweh* alone would execute vengeance (Bright, 1980:263).

From a phenomenological (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992:487) and logotherapeutic point of view, Amos could only have revealed this kind of bravery, to speak frankly without fear and prejudice, after he had discovered meaning for himself in God. This spiritual engagement with God, revealed through a psychological connection in his mind, and implied in the text, was the driving force that made him address the social inequalities and sins of the people. Amos' conviction that he was called by God (Amos 1:1-2 & 7:14-15), was his "meaning attachment" (Ras, 2010b). It was his assurance that his life is significant because, he (Amos) had believed that God had revealed himself to him through visions and dreams and through words (Amos 1:1; 7:12-16; 8:1-2; 9:1).

Amos found meaning in the fact that he was called by God to prophesy against Israel. He had answered Amaziah who had called him a seer. "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' Now then, hear the word of the Lord..." (Amos 7:14-16). These are the words of a man convinced of his mission.

## Amos's conviction

The text makes it clear that what drove Amos, was his conviction that it was the Lord who has called him and tasked him to go to Israel. The words עמוס אשר חזה ויאמר / Λογοι Αμωσ...ούς ειδεν...και ειπεν (Amos 1:1) are clear. He spoke to them about what he had heard and what he had seen. Amos, for example, saw a basket (Amos 8:1-2) with ripe fruit, symbolizing the nation of Israel who



no longer could escape the wrath of the Lord because they, *inter alia*, had trampled upon the needy and have neglected the poor (Amos 8:4). Amos spoke of God who will kill with the “sword” (בחרב - Amos 9:1-4), and that no one will escape, that God will hunt them down and that He will command the “sword” (LXX: τῆ ρομφαία – Amos 9:4) to slay them even when they are in exile (Amos 9:1,3-4).

The internalization of this “war talk”, coming from God, based on what “he had seen and heard,” was, according to Amos, the reason why he had left his sheep and the sycamore fig trees. It is this existential experiencing of meaning and meaningfulness that has made an ordinary farmer a brave prophet and an eschatological military type of communication officer, who used words, rather than weapons. He calls on his hearers to seek *Yahweh* and live (Peckham, 1993:183). Amos also was comforted by his belief that God will not destroy the house of Jacob and the fallen tent of David (Amos 9:8, 11), but that He again will bring them back from exile to their land (Amos 9:14-15). Despite the message, Amos is not pictured in the text as a militant revolutionary, but as an ordinary shepherd who now acts as a fearless prophetic messenger (Amos 7:14; Amos the fearless prophet - <http://www.agsconsulting.com/htdbv5/r5805.htm>).

### **Islamic Sharia law and the notion of Jihad**

The involvement of Islamic terror groups around the world e.g, Nigeria, Mozambique etc., necessitates a short overview of *Sharia* law and also “Jihad” (struggle). Islam as a religion includes a mandatory and very specific legal and political plan for society called *Sharia* (way or path). The prescriptions of *Sharia* are taken from the Quran and the Sunnah (the teachings and examples of Muhammad). Together, these two sources establish the principles and commandments of *Sharia* (Roelofse, 2014:7). The Muslims acknowledge the Old Testament including the book of Amos so one can expect that they will also read this prophetic book for guidance.

As Islam views their sources as revelations from Allah, they believe it is obligatory to build a good Islamic society (Davis, 2013: 2). “To violate Sharia or not to accept its authority is to commit rebellion against Allah, which Allah's faithful are required to combat” (Davis, 2013: 3). For the sake of clarity, it is prudent to define the term ‘Jihad’. There are essentially three definitions of the term in Islam. Firstly, it relates to a believer's internal struggle to live out the Muslim faith as best as one can. Secondly, it relates the ongoing struggle to build a righteous Muslim society. Thirdly, and for the purposes of this article it denotes the waging of a Holy war against infidels and the struggle to defend Islam with violent.

Muslims are called to wage “Jihad” (the “struggle” to overcome evil and to do good) and they believe that for any Islamic teaching on a particular matter, one must look to the Quran, the Sunnah (the path or traditions of the prophet Muhammad) and “their” accepted books (like Amos and other Old Testament prophets and Jesus (called “Isa”) for their spiritual guidance.

From some of these mentioned sources it becomes evident that a Muslim is required to struggle against a variety of things: laziness in prayer, neglecting to give *zakat* (alms), etc. But it is also clear that a Muslim is commanded to struggle in physical combat against the infidel as well. Muhammad's impressive military career attests to the central role that military action plays in Islam (Roelofse, 2014; Ras, 2010c7, 249-251).

Al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 (Ras, 2010c:13), which is a very active organisation and a former ruling party in Egypt. Writing about the teachings of Al-Banna, Fahmy (1997: 1) writes: “... only Islam can save mankind from itself. And Jihad on the individual and



international scale will be a necessary part of this process of change.” In the writings alluded to by Fahmy, Al-Banna argues that Muslims must take up arms against unbelievers. Davis (2013: 4) refers to the writings of Al-Banna and quotes him that: “[t]he verses of the Qur'an and the Sunnah summon people in general [with the most eloquent expression and the clearest exposition] to [do] Jihad...”

The phenomenological tenets of the two perspectives, namely Amos and his faith in God to bring about what He has decreed and Sharia law, that calls for action by its believers, clearly stand in contradiction to each other. Followers of Amos and / or Allah and the prophet Muhammad can easily become involved in physical conflict like in what they see and hear is happening in countries such as the Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Nigeria. Destabilising terrorist campaigns such as those fought by Boko Haram in Nigeria and al-Shabaab in Somalia and ISIS-related groups like in Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique, are good examples. Terror groups here get involved in things like kidnappings, piracy, bombings and sabotage in order to effect desired change (Roelofse, 2014:8).

## Terror Groups

Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and the Islamic State (IS) have all one thing in common, namely, they believe that through militancy and radicalism and through violent means, socio-political and spiritual change can be engineered and effected within geographical areas and in countries, once they target them (Ras, 2015). While Al-Qaeda originated in Pakistan and has a strong presence in Yemen today, Al Shabaab (Al Shabaab 2012; Hanson, 2011) operates mainly in Somalia while Boko Haram (Boko Haram, 2012) moves largely in the northern parts of Nigeria. The Islamic State (IS, also called ISIS, ISIL or Daesh) is an Al-Qaeda terror group that originated in Iraq, and is now the most well-known terror group in the world - operating in countries like Syria, Iraq, and on all continents, including Africa, Europe, the Americas and Asia, even if it only has an ideological presence.

The leaders of these four physically distinct but ideological related terror groups are believers or followers of *Allah* who believe that those who do not share their belief-system are unbelievers or infidels. The sins and decadent lifestyles of the Western world, especially that of the United States of America and its allies, are perceived by them to be a direct threat to Islam. (Roelofse, 2014:8). As a result of their religio-militant beliefs they want to establish an Islamic Caliphate, a theocracy where *Allah* is the supreme leader, and this by waging holy jihad (holy war) in order to achieve this specific objective (Bergen, 2006; Ras, 2010b:88, 90; 2015:20-28; News 24; SAPA).

While the name Al Qaeda means “the base,” originally referring to a physical military base, and later also to the militancy and radicalism of the movement (Ras, 2010c:4), the name Al Shabaab refers to the “The Youth” or “The Boys”, a Somali-based military group, linked to Al Qaeda ([http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/al\\_shabaab.html](http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/al_shabaab.html)). Al Shabaab wants to impose Sharia law on all people because of the very poor and deprived socio-political conditions that they are experiencing in their country (Kriesch, 2012).

The name Boko Haram, a Hausa name, basically means “Western education is sacrilege” or “sin.” The Arabic name of this group is *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad*, meaning “People committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko\\_Haram](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko_Haram)). Boko Haram had said through Abubakar Shekau: “We are proud soldiers of Allah, we never give up as we fight the infidels....” (News 24; SAPA).



The Islamic State (IS), also called the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS) or the Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL), are all linked through their common goal of Jihad, believing that what they do is the right thing because of their belief that it is Allah, through his prophet Muhammed, that will tell them what to do. Their reading and interpretation of the Holy Quran is the key to understanding why they practice what they preach. They commit violent acts because they find their existential meaning in the belief that being a *shaheed* or martyr pleases God (Ras, 2010a:113; 2010b:28; 2010c:193-196).

They use violence because they want to affect change in the socio-political environments where they are operating. Their answer in addressing social evils and to bring about social change in their historical contexts is through waging holy jihad or physical war against their enemies. There is no doubt that their jihad is based upon their interpretation of the Holy Quran that they believe comes from Allah (Ras, 2010c: 249-251; News 24; SAPA; Clotney, 2012; Mamah & Eyoboka, 2012). The politico-religio leaders of these four groups based their militant beliefs upon their perception that the Holy Quran emanates from Allah and that He expects them to wage jihad. The doing of jihad gives meaning to their lives and gives them a reason to live and a cause to die for (Ras, 2010a:113; 2010c).

People normally do what they do because of their belief-systems. The terror groups wage jihad because of their belief that Allah instructs them to do so. This instruction comes through their reading and interpretation of certain selective passages from the Holy Quran and their political and religious leaders that guide them to do so (SAPA, 2012; Mamah & Eyoboka, 2012; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Shabaab>; Hanson, 2011; Clotney, 2012). By waging jihad the members of these groups are united and striving for one common goal that direct them and give meaning to their lives. However, this violent kind of meaning attachment is not seen in logotherapeutic circles as healing because this kind of behavior is destructive and will lead in the long run to noögenic neuroses stemming from "existential frustration" (Ras, 2000; 2010c:91-93).

Whereas Amos claimed, he heard directly from God, through no intermediary, nor by reading any book or scripture, Jihad activists, read the Quran and are often moved by interpretations of Imams (religious leaders) also called Maulanas. While Amos had claimed he had heard from God himself, to bring his prophetic message, the radical Islamic activists are moved through their religious leaders who base all their actions on their perceived reading of the Holy Quran.

### **Interpreting and applying religious texts**

Reading the book of Amos and studying terror groups like Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and IS, makes one aware that the way people read and interpret religious texts like the Bible and the Quran, which are both historically embedded in particular historical and socio-political and cultural-linguistic backgrounds, may lead in practice to destructive and violent militant behaviour and radicalism if the text is engaged in a naïve and fundamentalist manner. This kind of textual engagement must be rejected because it does not stand up to scientific scrutiny and responsible exegesis.

The religio-political leaders of these four mentioned terror groups, that guide their members, are of the opinion that through waging jihad, they can alter their socio-political status-quo and gain power over others that are not thinking along their lines. This already has led, in practice to the killing of thousands of people. They address people through the barrel of a gun and other means and hope to alter the existing socio-political and belief systems of a target group through violent means. This they do in the name of the seventh century prophet, the Prophet Muhammad (570-



630 CE), who, according to their traditional belief-system, has handed to them the Holy Quran that contains the *ipsissima verba* of Allah (Zepp, 1992:273).

While the book of Amos, as reflected today in the text of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS)* and the Septuagint (LXX), depicts the prophet Amos as a person who also addressed the people of his day in the name of God, the difference is that Amos was speaking on behalf of *Yahweh* without getting involved in a holy war or any form of militant behaviour. He just delivered his message and left all further actions in the hands of his God.

Members of Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and IS, on the other hand, are focusing on the application of violence to force compliance from "non-believers" to comply with their perceived Islamic beliefs and Shariah way of life. Applications of violent force include but is not limited to drive-by shootings, assassinations, suicide bombings, ambushes, kidnappings, intimidation and killings (Al-Shabaab, 2012). Many of them do this because of their psychologically perceived belief in *Allah* who, they believe, expects military jihad from them (Ras, 2010a:113; 2010c:29-32).

### **Logotherapy, meaning attachments and texts**

In terms of logotherapy, all people want to live meaningful lives and are constantly in search of meaning. They want to find meaning in what they do and the influence of their actions and meaning is derived from the impact it has on others. This is also true when it comes to the reading of religious texts. The authors want to warn against a reading and interpretation of religious texts that leads to actions that are violent and life threatening.

Imposing belief systems, through violence, rather than through preaching and debate in a peaceful manner, is fraught with danger and is extremely intolerant. The challenge today is to make an ancient text like that of Amos, which is probably the product of a long editorial process (Hayes, 1988:13; Prinsloo, 1987:246-247), meaningful for readers in contemporary society who existentially believe and perceive that it is coming from God.

Christians, Jews and even Muslims who read the book of Amos will probably all attach different meanings to this prophetic message and will perceive and experience their existential encounter with the text differently. Without generalizing, Jews perhaps, will enjoy the comfort and the assurance that Jacob always will be there, as Amos has pointed out at the end of his prophetic message (Amos 9:11-15). Christians on the other hand will possibly read too much into this textual passage but will also probably find comfort in the assurance that just as God was with a remnant in Israel, so God will also be with them today despite all socio-political changes in the world. However, radical, and militant readers, depending on the particular text, will go further, and directly apply what they perceive to be God's words to them in their present socio-political circumstances and become revolutionary agents of change, using any form of weaponry, force and resources that they may find at their disposal.

### **Faithful readers**

Believers in the Bible always try to find their answers in God's Word (Zuck, 1991). Faithful Muslims do the same, but they read the Holy Quran. For believers it is all about discovering sense and meaning and to attach some meaning to one's life or to others. People do not just read a text. They want to get something from God for themselves (Robinson, 1983:5; Zuck, 1991). From an existential and logotherapeutic point of view, it is about people's perceived interpretation of things that make sense to them (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992:487) and that adds meaning to their lives (Frank, 1962; 1969; 1970; 1971; 1986).



## Religious interpretation

When reading Amos today, it is not just a matter of reading and discovering existential meaning for one's daily life. Any religious text is always historically and culturally embedded in a particular socio-political and socio-economic context. To interpret religious texts appropriately it needs scientific scrutiny (Deist & Burden, 1980:1) and thorough dissection to ensure that perceived truths and meaningful deducted information are historically and culturally unpacked from its religio-linguistic and socio-political environments.

Because contexts are constantly changing (West, 1995:7), constant reading and re-interpretations of any religious text are needed to ensure that the postmodern reader, who constantly has to adapt to the developments and dynamics of the time, is in a position to understand the message of the text and to make sense of it (Deist & Burden, 1980; Deist & le Roux, 1987; Fiorenza, 1989:5-18; Cotterell & Turner, 1989; Wendland, 1985). In fact, understanding the Bible, or any religious text, is a lifelong process (Zuck, 1991:15, 59-75).

## Amos was no Jihadist

In terms of modern day terror terminology, the prophet Amos, as portrayed in the book of Amos, was not a jihadist, but he definitely had a meaningful encounter with God that had altered him existentially in such a way that he had left his sheep and fig trees behind at Tekoa to deliver *Yahweh's* message of doom to his disobedient audience (Amos 1:1 & 7:14-15; Smith, 1989:3, 239-241).

Despite the present uncertainty about an exact date for the book of Amos and the precise *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* for the prophet's activities (Prinsloo, 1987:246-248), the text describes him in such a manner that it is obvious that Amos was spiritually driven. He had just delivered *Yahweh's* message. He was not physically involved in any form of militancy or radicalism that would make him one or other jihadist that wanted to overthrow the king or the government of his day. Although his message was filled with doom, it was not military-driven by his spear and his sword (Smith, 1989:4; Freeman, 1980:184-190; Amos 7:1-9:10).

## Radical Islamic Jihadists

Radical religio-political Islamic jihadists like those operating within the circles of Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and IS, find their meaning in jihad, and this meaning-attachment rests upon their belief-system. Fundamentalist militant-religious leaders tell them that Holy Quran is teaching literal jihad and by doing that they are pleasing *Allah* (Ras, 2010a:113; 2010b:29-36, 249-251; *The Holy Quran*: Sura II:190-191, 216; VIII:60, 63-65; IX:5, 111), and as a result, they see themselves as fighting a holy war. They are ideologically-speaking driven by this belief-system to wage war against the existing and present socio-political rulers of the day to establish an Islamic Caliphate and to install *Shariah* law.

While the eight-century prophet Amos came to just deliver a message from *Yahweh* to Israel, the modern-day leaders of terror groups like Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram deliberately and actively encourage militancy and violence to overthrow the present rulers of the regions in which they find themselves or that they target. Prominent leaders like Ayman al-Zawahiri (Al-Qaeda's leader), Al-Shabaab founder, Ahmed Abdi aw-Mohamud Godane (Ras, 2010b:140-143; Nigerian Tribune, 2012; Al Jazeera, 2012), Imam Abu-Bakr Shekau (of Boko Haram) and IS leaders, are all strongly emphasizing the holy jihad that they are waging on behalf of Allah. However, this kind of radical militancy does not feature in the book of Amos, and what they practice in the light of



their jihadist thoughts are not in line with the basic theological message of Amos (Freeman, 1980:184-190; Prinsloo, 1987:241-250).

### **Responsible scholarship and sound religious interpretation**

In terms of reading and interpretation of religious texts, a scientific and contextual responsible approach needs to be emphasized (Deist, 1980:3; Deist & Burden, 1980). This is applicable to both the Bible and the Quran. Every text is a historically generated text that must be read and understood in the context of its time. Any textual reading and interpretation must take cognizance of the historical-political, socio-economic, and the cultural-linguistic events, that have shaped and influenced the author/s and his/their texts. The intention of the author/s with their specific message/s aimed at their specific audience/s, also need to be highlighted in the light of their historical circumstances (Ras, 2010b:24; Deist & le Roux, 1987; Cotterell & Turner, 1989; Bromiley, 1979:61-80).

Without scientific and scholarly approaches to religious texts many zealous believers can be triggered to start religious wars (Ras, 2010a:23). Sound religious interpretation normally starts with a specific religious text that needs to be properly scrutinized and analyzed to establish its origin and its authenticity (Würthwein, 1957). The world of the text, the world behind the text, the world to which the text is referring, the world of the author and his readers, and the world of the modern-day reader, are all, for example, matters that need to receive proper attention. Socio-historical “embeddedness” is always critical in any scientific understanding of any text (Carroll, 1992:22-47; 48-139, 166).

Scientific and sound critical approaches will prevent naïve and fundamentalist approaches that basically ignore the different gaps that exist between the textual and historical events of the past and the events of today. Hermeneutics (the science of interpretation) correctly points out that we have to bridge “gaps” like the chronological (time gap), the geographical (space gap), the cultural (customs gap), the linguistic (language gap), the literary (writing gap), and even the supernatural (the spiritual gap), that is present in most religious texts (Zuck, 1991:15-18; Deist & le Roux, 1987; Deist & Vorster, 1986; West, 1995).

### **Different disciplines**

Many different disciplines are necessary to get closer to a better understanding of the texts that lie in front of us today. Different social sciences, for example, history, archaeology and anthropology, and ancient languages and disciplines like Biblical Hebrew, Hellenistic Greek and textual criticism, are all needed to reconstruct a more meaningful picture of the ancient world of the past, including that of Amos (Von Rad, 1980:102-109; Young, 1979:197-208; Waltke 1979:211-228; Motyer, 1979:253-281; Kaiser, 1979:285-305; Wiseman, 1979:309-335; Livingston, 1979:339-356).

Responsible readings of religious texts mean in praxis that the reader will constantly do reconstructions of the past to better understand the textual message. Without investigations and reconstruction there cannot be any responsible reading. A scientific reading of the text is not an option; it is an inevitable necessity (Deist, 1980:3). However, scientific readings without an attempt to make the past relevant for today are incomplete because science always aims to serve mankind, especially those living today (Robinson, 1983:5).

While the authors have approached the book of Amos in a text-immanent and narrative-critical and logotherapeutic manner, we did try, at the same time, to understand the terror groups from



within the logotherapeutic paradigm and their socio-political and historical-cultural setting. Broadly-speaking, text (“mirror”) and context (socio-economic, religio-political, socio-political, historical-cultural – seen as a “window”) always need proper scientific scrutiny to prevent artificial and fundamentalist interpretations. Without this insistence, texts can very easily become ideologies that will inspire some to become agents of military and revolutionary change, instead of messengers of hope, development, and peace.

### Concluding remarks

According to logotherapy people always try to find meaning in what they do. The terror groups and their leaders try to find their meaning in the doing of jihad according to their psychological and perceived interpretation of the Quran, their belief-systems and Allah’s voice. Their decision to opt for bloody violence and a reign of terror in the name of Allah to establish an Islamic Caliphate must be rejected in the strongest terms (Ras, 2010b; The Terror Threat from Somalia, 2012; Bauchi, 2012).

While the book of Amos depicts Amos as a person who had found his existential meaning through his *vocatio* and *missio dei*, he was not a jihadist, but simply a prophetic messenger that was taken away from behind his sheep and away from his fig trees (Amos 7:14-15) to say “*koh amar Yahweh*” (Amos 1:3). The present Hebrew and Greek texts of the book of Amos do not picture him in a militant way, running around and rallying people with a spear and sword, but simply portray him as an “*boqer*” and “*booles shiqmim*” (a herdsman and a nipper of sycamore figs) that had become an obedient prophetic messenger of “*adonay Yahweh*” (Amos 2:4; 3:11; 7:1; Koehler & Baumgarten, 1958:114 & 130).

Modern readers constantly need to engage in a scientific manner with the text and context of the book of Amos in order to conduct an exegesis in a responsible manner. The same applies to those who study the Quran. A denial of the unique historical-cultural background of religious texts like the Bible and / or Quran may easily lead to wrong exegesis, wrong ethical interpretations, and wrong behavior in practice. Any interpretation that favors any form of militancy and radicalism, based upon a religious text, immediately needs to be corrected in a scientific and responsible manner.

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