
An Augustinian reading of Micah 6,8, on Justice, Mercy and Humility

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Abstract: This article presents an Augustinian reading of Micah 6,8, focusing on the prophetic exhortation «to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God». The study begins with an exegetical analysis of Micah 6,1–8 within its covenantal and literary context, examining the prophetic critique of cultic religion and the ethical demands rooted in Israel's relationship with YHWH. Particular attention is given to the tripartite requirement of justice, mercy, and humility as the authentic response expected from the covenant community. The article then explores Augustine's interpretation of this passage in *De civitate Dei* 10.6, *Sermon* 48, and *Sermon* 49, together with relevant themes drawn from his other works. It argues that Augustine unders-

tands these three virtues not merely as moral obligations but as expressions of the interior offering of a life ordered toward God through Christ. Justice is grounded in ordered love, mercy manifests participation in divine compassion, and humility reflects Christ's kenotic self-giving. Consequently, visible ethical actions become signs of an invisible sacrifice united to Christ's salvific work. The study demonstrates that Augustine's interpretation transforms Micah's prophetic exhortation into a Christological vision of Christian discipleship oriented toward communion with God.

Keywords: Augustinian reading, humility, justice, Micah, mercy.

Una lectura agustiniana de Miqueas 6,8 sobre la justicia, la misericordia y la humildad

Resumen: Este artículo presenta una lectura agustiniana de Miqueas 6,8, centrándose en la exhortación profética de «practicar la justicia, amar la misericordia y caminar humildemente con Dios». El estudio comienza con un análisis exegético de Miqueas 6,1–8 dentro de su contexto literario y de la alianza, examinando la crítica profética a la religión cultural y las exigencias éticas arraigadas en la relación de Israel con YHWH. Se presta especial atención al requisito tripartito de justicia, misericordia y humildad como la respuesta auténtica que se espera de la comunidad de la alianza. A continuación, el artículo explora la interpretación que Agustín hace de este pasaje en *De civitate Dei* 10.6, el Sermón 48 y el Sermón 49, junto con temas relevantes extraídos de sus otras obras. Sostiene

que Agustín entiende estas tres virtudes no solo como obligaciones morales, sino como expresiones de la ofrenda interior de una vida ordenada hacia Dios a través de Cristo. La justicia se fundamenta en el amor ordenado, la misericordia manifiesta la participación en la compasión divina y la humildad refleja la entrega kenótica de Cristo. En consecuencia, las acciones éticas visibles se convierten en signos de un sacrificio invisible unido a la obra salvífica de Cristo. El estudio demuestra que la interpretación de Agustín transforma la exhortación profética de Miqueas en una visión cristológica del discipulado cristiano orientada hacia la comunión con Dios.

Palabras clave: Lectura agustiniana, humildad, justicia, Miqueas, misericordia.

1. Introduction

As the title itself indicates, this article offers an Augustinian reading of Mic 6,8. By an «Augustinian reading»¹, I refer to the manner in which Augustine interpreted this biblical text and its threefold requirement: «to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God». To me, such

¹ The present study adopts the expression «Augustinian reading» following J. Moon, *Jeremiah's New Covenant*:

An Augustinian Reading, Studies in Biblical Literature (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 3, who employs the term to describe an interpretation of Jer 31,31-34 shaped by Augustine's mature theological position after the anti-Pelagian controversy. Moon argues that the «new covenant» signifies not a replacement of the old covenant but the restoration of a covenantal relationship broken by human infidelity.

an approach presupposes an effort to understand both the meaning of Mic 6,8 within its original redactional context and Augustine's interpretation of the same passage. The diachronic (historical-critical) and synchronic (literary) approaches serve the former task, while attention to Augustine's hermeneutical practice substantiates the latter. Only when these two perspectives are adequately examined can an integration be achieved between the world of the prophet Micah and that of Augustine, thereby opening the possibility of relating their insights to another horizon—the world of contemporary readers.

I will attempt to interpret the prophetic exhortation of Mic 6,8 through an interdisciplinary methodology integrating historical-critical exegesis, literary analysis, and patristic theological interpretation. This essay argues that Augustine understands the command to practice justice, mercy, and humility not merely as ethical obligations but as expressions of an interior spiritual offering directed toward union with God. In order to establish this claim, a diachronic and synchronic reading of Mic 6,8 first situates the text within its prophetic and covenantal context, with particular attention to its redaction history, literary genre (Mic 6,1-8), and the semantic range of the key expressions «to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God» including their reception in the Septuagint tradition.

The study then examines Augustine's interpretation within the framework of late antiquity Christian exegesis, recognizing that his reading unfolds within the perspective of the Church's faith in the fourth and fifth centuries and is mediated through the Greek and Latin biblical traditions. Finally, these perspectives are brought into dialogue so that the prophetic text, Augustine's theological reception, and the experience of contemporary readers shaped by the Augustinian way of life may illuminate one another. In this way, the article seeks to demonstrate how Mic 6,8 continues to exercise theological and spiritual efficacy through its Augustinian interpretation directed toward union with God, inviting contemporary believers to respond anew to the call to discipleship in the present age.

In revisiting Mic 6,8 through Augustine's exegetical and theological vision, this study contributes to contemporary Augustinian scholarship by showing how biblical ethics and sacrificial theology converge within a unified spiritual anthropology. By recovering Augustine's interpretation

of justice, mercy, and humility, the article highlights the enduring relevance of patristic exegesis for theological reflection today, demonstrating that the prophetic call of Micah continues to shape Christian discipleship through the Augustinian tradition.

This study does not aim to provide an exhaustive exegesis of the Book of Micah. Rather, it adopts a focused approach that attends to the literary form and the semantic and theological density of Mic 6,1-8, particularly its key terms—justice, mercy, and humility—as they prepare for an Augustinian reading of the text. While broader historical and canonical considerations are acknowledged, the analysis intentionally concentrates on those elements most relevant for understanding how the prophetic exhortation is received and interpreted within Augustine's theological framework.

2. Micah 6,1-8 as a Covenant Lawsuit

The following analysis focuses on the literary and theological dimensions of Mic 6,1-8 that are most pertinent to its Augustinian reception. In the 1920s, H. Gunkel began analyzing the literary form of Mic 6,1-8 (cf. Isa 1,18-20; 3,13-15; 41,1ff.; 43,9ff.; Jer 2,4-9; Hos 2,4ff.; Ps 50,7-13; Ps 82), concluding that it should be understood as a prophetic lawsuit.² According to him, prophetic lawsuits were traditionally conducted in Israel at the city gates, particularly within the administration of secular legal proceedings. J. Begrich further developed Gunkel's work by classifying prophetic lawsuit forms, especially those found in Deutero-Isaiah.³ Through his analysis of the lawsuit literary form (*Gattung*) and historical setting (*Sitz im Leben*), H. J. Boecker likewise agreed with the Gunkel-Begrich position that the lawsuit originated within Israelite secular legal practice

² H. Gunkel, «Propheten Israels seit Amos», *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (1909-1913) 1553; cf. K. Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit* (Rib-Pattern), JSOTSup 9 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), 5-6; D. Davidson, «The Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective», *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 21 (2010), 45.

³ J. Begrich, *Studien zu Deuterjesaja*, TB 20 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1963), cited in D. Davidson, «The Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective», 46.

conducted at the city gates.⁴ He identified three principal elements of the lawsuit: (1) addresses preceding the trial, (2) speeches delivered before the assembled court during the proceedings, and (3) concluding pronouncements or verdicts.

A different proposal emerged in 1952 when E. Würthwein reconsidered the *Sitz im Leben* of the prophetic lawsuit and rejected the view that its setting was primarily juridical.⁵ For him, the appropriate background was cultic. Comparing divine lawsuit passages in Mic 6,1-8 with texts in the Psalms describing divine judgment within liturgical settings (e.g., Pss 50, 75, 68, 82; 96:11-13; 97:1-6; 98:7-9), Würthwein suggested that lawsuit language formed part of the oral proclamation of the Torah during covenant-renewal ceremonies. In such gatherings, the community's covenant fidelity was examined, and thus the cult provided both the formal and actual *Sitz im Leben* of the lawsuit.

F. Hesse, however, distinguished between cultic pronouncements and prophetic lawsuits. In his view, the cult pronounced judgment upon Israel's enemies rather than upon Israel itself, and Ps 50 should therefore be interpreted as an imitation of prophetic lawsuit language rather than its original setting. The prophetic proclamation, he argued, maintained an independence distinct from cultic declarations.⁶

In 1959, H. Huffmon introduced another influential proposal by interpreting Mic 6,1-8 in light of covenant-making procedures. Examining passages such as Isa 1,2-3; Jer 2:4-13; Ps 50; and Deut 32, he argued that YHWH's law court must be understood within the framework of covenantal relations, thereby coining the term «covenant lawsuit.»⁷ Huffmon evaluated competing theories regarding summoned witnesses—whether

⁴ H. J. Boecker, *Law and Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient Near East*, trans. J. Moiser (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 27–52.

⁵ E. Würthwein, «Der Ursprung der prophetischen Gerichtsrede», *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 49 (1952), 1-16, cited in D. Davidson, «The Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif», 46.

⁶ F. Hesse, «Wurzelt die prophetische Gerichtsrede im israelitischen Kult?», *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 65 (1953), 45-53, cited in D. Davidson, «The Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif», 47.

⁷ H. Huffmon, «The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets», *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78 (1959), 285-295.

natural elements served as judges (Gunkel),⁸ reflected secular courtroom practice (Scott),⁹ or derived from the heavenly council tradition (Cross).¹⁰ He ultimately concluded that the most convincing background lay in Hittite suzerainty-vassal treaties, particularly those invoking heaven and earth as covenant witnesses (cf. Deut 4,26; 30,19; 31,28). The similarities between Mic 6,4-5 and treaty preambles recalling a suzerain's benevolent acts further supported this interpretation.¹¹

J. Harvey extended Huffmon's research by examining Hittite diplomatic correspondence addressing covenant violations. Unlike Huffmon, who emphasized covenant formulas, Harvey focused on letters sent to unfaithful vassals, noting parallels between these documents and prophetic lawsuits.¹² The purpose of the covenant lawsuit, he argued, was to vindicate YHWH's moral and juridical righteousness amid Israel's historical disasters¹³ while simultaneously urging repentance so that divine grace might be renewed.¹⁴

W. Limburg later proposed a synthetic view, suggesting that the *Sitz im Leben* of the prophetic lawsuit incorporated elements of secular law, cultic practice, and international treaty traditions. In Mic 6,1-8, the prophet speaks on behalf of YHWH using forms of speech rooted in diplomatic and juridical discourse.¹⁵ This convergence of legal, cultic, and political dimensions underscores the formal and relational character of the prophetic address, situating it within a broader framework of covenantal accountability.

⁸ D. Davidson, «The Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif», 46.

⁹ R. B. Y. Scott, «The Literary Structure of Isaiah's Oracles», in H. H. Rowley (ed.), *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy* (New York: T & T Clark, 1950), 175-186.

¹⁰ G. E. Mendenhall, «Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law», *Biblical Archaeologist* 17 (1954), 26-46; cf. Davidson, «The Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif», 50.

¹¹ Huffmon, «The Covenant Lawsuit», 287.

¹² J. Harvey, «Le "Rib Pattern": réquisitoire prophétique contre Israël après la rupture de l'alliance», *Biblica* 43 (1962), 172-196.

¹³ Harvey, «Le "Rib Pattern"», 172-196.

¹⁴ Harvey, «Le "Rib Pattern"».

¹⁵ J. W. Limburg, «The Root rib and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches», *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969), 291-304.

In this study, I adopt this synthetic perspective, understanding Mic 6:1-8 primarily as a covenant lawsuit that integrates juridical, cultic, and diplomatic elements. Within this broader framework, the concept of רִיב (*rib*) becomes particularly significant. Building on this perspective, B. Gemser argued that the רִיב (*rib*) pattern reflects not merely a literary form but a broader forensic mentality within Israel's theological worldview.¹⁶ The controversy language expresses the conviction that YHWH, understood as a personal and moral ruler rather than an abstract system, maintains a divinely ordered moral reality.¹⁷ Thus, the רִיב motif portrays YHWH as the supreme judge whose judgments are righteous yet ultimately beyond full human comprehension.¹⁸

Not all scholars accepted these conclusions. De Roche argued that prophetic רִיב texts should not be described as lawsuits because legal disputes normally involve three parties, whereas prophetic controversies involve only two.¹⁹ He therefore proposed understanding רִיב more broadly as «contention» rather than formal litigation.²⁰ This proposal, however, appears unpersuasive. Even in modern legal understanding, a lawsuit may involve only plaintiff and defendant, and in prophetic texts YHWH himself functions both as prosecutor and judge.²¹ As Davidson and Nielsen observe, divine judgment in Israelite thought does not require a third-party adjudicator.²²

Subsequent critiques, such as that of Daniels, likewise questioned the existence of a distinct lawsuit genre.²³ Yet the structural coherence of

¹⁶ B. Gemser, «The Rib-or Controversy-pattern in Hebrew Mentality», in M. Noth - D. W. Thomas (eds.), *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, VTSup 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 120-137.

¹⁷ Gemser, «The Rib- or Controversy-pattern», 137.

¹⁸ Gemser, «The Rib- or Controversy-pattern».

¹⁹ M. De Roche, «Yahweh's Rib against Israel: A Reassessment of the So-Called "Prophetic Lawsuit" in the Pre-Exilic Prophets», *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983), 563-574.

²⁰ S. Roberts, *Order and Dispute: An Introduction to Legal Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (New Orleans: Quid Pro Books, 2013), 8-10.

²¹ De Roche, «Yahweh's Rib against Israel», 574.

²² Davidson, «The Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif», 46.

²³ D. R. Daniels, «Is There a "Prophetic Lawsuit" Genre?», *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 99 (1987), 339-360.

Mic 6,1-8 — introduction (vv. 1-2), accusation (v. 3), historical recollection (vv. 4-5), rejection of ritual compensation (vv. 6-7), and concluding exhortation (v. 8)— supports the interpretation of the passage as a covenant lawsuit. The repeated use of רִיב terminology, legal expressions such as עֲנֵה בִי «answer me», and the summoning of cosmic witnesses reinforce this juridical framework.²⁴

At the outset, Mic 6,1-8 presents identifiable participants in a judicial drama: the prophet as herald, YHWH as plaintiff, Israel as defendant, and creation itself as witness. As Nielsen notes, YHWH uniquely assumes the dual role of prosecutor and judge. This apparent tension reflects Israel's theological understanding of God, whose righteousness demands judgment while whose covenant love seeks restoration.

The offense under consideration is Israel's breach of covenant. Yet the lawsuit does not merely condemn; it aims at reconciliation. The historical recollection of YHWH's saving deeds (vv. 4-5) functions similarly to the historical prologue of Ancient Near East (ANE) treaties, reminding Israel of the covenant relationship already established. Key expressions — חסד, אהבת חסד, עשוות משפט, and הצנע לכת עם-אלהיך — thus articulate attitudes of covenant fidelity rather than merely ritual obligation.

Consequently, Mic 6,1-8 may be understood as a covenant lawsuit mirroring the structural features of suzerainty treaties: preamble, witnesses, accusation, historical prologue, stipulations, and concluding sentence.²⁵ The speech culminates in the climactic exhortation to «do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God,» which summarizes the ethical and spiritual demands of covenant life.

The passage may therefore be divided into three movements: the summons to trial (vv. 1-2), the recollection of divine beneficence (vv. 3-5), and the revelation of what YHWH truly requires (vv. 6-8). Israel's proposed sacrifices are rejected, for what God desires is not ritual excess but covenantal faithfulness expressed through justice, mercy, and humble communion with Him.

In view of the foregoing discussion, I believe that Mic 6,1-8 may rightly be understood as a covenant lawsuit in which YHWH confronts

²⁴ Harvey, «Le “Rib Pattern”», 178-179.

²⁵ Huffmon, «The Covenant Lawsuit», 287.

Israel concerning its breach of covenant fidelity. The juridical structure of the passage—summons, accusation, historical recollection, and response—culminates not in condemnation but in a revelatory clarification of what God truly requires of His people. While the earlier verses expose the inadequacy of ritual responses proposed by Israel, the speech reaches its theological climax in v. 8, where the divine will is expressed with striking simplicity and clarity.²⁶

Verse 8 therefore functions as the interpretive key to the entire lawsuit. It transforms the courtroom confrontation into an ethical and spiritual exhortation, revealing that covenant faithfulness consists not primarily in cultic performance but in a life shaped by justice, mercy, and humble communion with God.²⁷

It is precisely this movement—from external sacrifice to interior disposition—that provides the decisive point of contact with Augustine's interpretation. The prophetic demand articulated in Mic 6,8 thus opens a deeper question concerning the nature of authentic worship: not what is offered externally, but how the human person is inwardly ordered toward God. This question becomes central in Augustine's theological vision, where justice, mercy, and humility are understood as expressions of a life transformed in relation to God.

A closer examination of the linguistic, literary, and theological dimensions of v. 8 is therefore necessary, since it is through these terms that the prophetic exhortation becomes the foundation for Augustine's interpretation of the Christian life.

3. Micah 6,8: Justice, Mercy, and Humility

The following exegetical analysis examines the Hebrew text of Mic 6,8 alongside its Septuagint rendering, since Augustine's interpretation emerges within the Greek and Latin reception of Scripture.

²⁶ Davidson, «The Divine Covenant Lawsuit», 65; cf. F. I. Andersen - D. N. Freedman, *Micah* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 509.

²⁷ J. Rogerson, «Micah», in J. Dunn (ed.), *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 706.

	BHS	BGT	TRANSLATION
8a	הגיד לך אדם מה-טוב	εἰ ἀνηγγέλη σοι ἄνθρωπε τί καλόν	He has declared to you, O mortal what is good;
8b	ומה-יהוה דורש ממך	ἢ τί κύριος ἐκζητεῖ παρὰ σοῦ	and what does the Lord seek of you
8c	כי אם-עשות משפט ואהבת חסד	ἀλλ' ἢ τοῦ ποιεῖν κρίμα καὶ ἀγαπᾶν ἔλεον	but to do justice, and to love mercy,
8d	והצנע לכת עם-אלהיך	καὶ ἔτοιμον εἶναι τοῦ πορεύεσθαι μετὰ κυρίου θεοῦ σου	and walk humbly with your God?

In the context of the lawsuit, this passage speaks of Israel's offense as inexcusable since what is good has already been revealed in v. 8a (הגיד לך) (מה-טוב).²⁸ The Old Testament frequently presents YHWH's requirements under the rubric of מה-טוב (cf. Amos 5,14; Isa 1,17; Ps 37,27; Ps 34,14).²⁹ In this context, "the good" refers to the religious and ethical teaching already enshrined within the covenant between YHWH and Israel. Through the תורה, God's people had already been instructed concerning the right course of action. Thus, what is good (מה-טוב) consists in the performance of YHWH's will.³⁰ Israel is therefore called not to discover new obligations but to practice what has already been revealed.

In Mic 6,8, מה-טוב carries a nuance of preference in contrast to Israel's proposal of sacrificial offerings. The idea parallels Prov 16,16 (קנה-חכמה מה-טוב), where wisdom is preferred over gold. The symmetrical structure of v. 8ab highlights the fundamental concern of maintaining a right relationship with YHWH:³¹

²⁸ J. W. Miller, *Meet the Prophets: A Beginner's Guide to the Books of Biblical Prophets* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 134.

²⁹ J. L. Mays, *Micah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 141.

³⁰ G. Brin, «The Significance of the Form מה-טוב», *Vetus Testamentum* 38 (1998), 462-465.

³¹ F. I. Andersen - D. N. Freedman, *Micah* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 526.

הגיד				
	לך			
		אדם		
			מה-	
Verb	Pronoun	Noun	Interrogative	טוב
			ומה	
		יהוה		
	ממך			
דורש				

The verb הגיד (he has declared), a hiphil form of נגד (to declare), denotes divine proclamation and revelation. It is used elsewhere to describe God revealing His works (Ps 111,6), commandments (Ps 147,19), covenant (Deut 4,13), and even hidden or incomprehensible realities (Jer 33,3). As O'Connell observes, its most significant theological usage appears in liturgical contexts, particularly in calls to praise and vows of thanksgiving (cf. Pss 9,12; 50,6; 145,4; Isa 42,12; 48,20).³²

In Mic 6,8, YHWH himself is the subject of the verb, indicating divine revelation addressed to humanity concerning realities already known yet insufficiently lived.³³ What YHWH דורש (requires or seeks) from Israel surpasses outward ritual observance, demanding instead total dedication of the self.³⁴

The address is directed primarily to אדם (mortal), signifying humanity in general, yet concretely referring to the covenant people. YHWH specifies three constitutive elements of the good He seeks: עשות משפט (to do justice), אהבת חסד (to love mercy), and הצנע לכת עם-אלהיך (to walk humbly with your God).

³² R. O'Connell, «נגד», in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 3, 19-20.

³³ O'Connell, 19-20, «נגד».

³⁴ D. Simundson, «The Book of Micah: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections», in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 533-589.

The threefold requirement summarizes covenantal life. First, «to do justice» (עשות משפט) entails acting in conformity with truth and righteousness according to God's law, forming the basis of social fairness. Such justice is expected not only of leaders but of all members of the covenant community.³⁵ Second, «to love mercy» (אהבת חסד) signifies a response to God's saving love through faithful and compassionate action toward others. The people are called to mirror the covenantal fidelity God has shown despite their infidelity.³⁶ Third, «to walk humbly with your God» (הצנוע לכת עם-אלהיך) demands a life marked by vigilance before God—spiritually attentive, watchful, and mindful of the divine presence.³⁷ Such humility expresses obedience to God's will and fidelity to the statutes contained in the תורה.

The covenant framework is therefore essential for interpreting Mic 6,8. Patterned after Ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties, YHWH's covenant establishes stipulations guiding Israel's life.³⁸ Among these stipulations, justice, mercy, and humility take precedence over cultic performance. The prophet thus clarifies that God desires not sacrifice itself (vv. 6-7), but an abiding relationship grounded in faithful living.

The passage in Mic 6,8 consequently functions as an exhortation addressed to those already belonging to the covenant community. It articulates the fitting response expected of God's people. In the later development of Christian doctrine, Augustine would further interpret these three requirements, relating justice, mercy, and humility to the saving mission of Jesus Christ. His interpretation of this tripartite exhortation forms the subject of the following section.

³⁵ T. F. Torrance, «The Prophet Micah and His Famous Saying», *Evangelical Quarterly* (1952), 208.

³⁶ Torrance, «The Prophet Micah and His Famous Saying», 208.

³⁷ C. F. Dumermuth, «The Good Threefold Way», *American Journal of Theology* 8 (1994), 186-187.

³⁸ D. J. McCarthy, «Covenant in the Old Testament: The Present State of Inquiry», *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1965), 219.

3.1. משפט mišpāt

The noun משפט (*mišpāt*) occurs 422 times in OT and is a *mem*-noun derived from the verb שפט (*šāpat*) which generally means «to govern or to rule»,³⁹ a function mainly attributed to the judges in the OT. Ploeg argues that both the major and minor judges in the OT «were leaders endowed with charisms and called by YHWH in difficult circumstance in order to lead the men of their tribe or even neighboring tribes to battle» (cf. Judg 2, 16-19; 3,10; 4,4; 15,20; 16,31; 1 Sam 4,18; 7,15; 8,1; 2 Sam 7,7-11; 2 Kgs 23,22; Ruth 1,1).⁴⁰ Such attributes of the judges presupposed that they exercised civil authority which included the administration of justice.⁴¹

The verb שפט also means «to judge». As such, it implies a judicial function in an ANE trial. This happens when two disputants presented themselves before the competent authority or only before a third person to whom one's case was submitted in order to claim one's right (Cf. Gen 16,5; 31,53; Exod 18,16; Num 35,24; Deut 1,16; Judg 11,27; 1 Sam 24,13-16; Isa 2,4; Ezek 34,17; 20,22; Mic 4,3).⁴²

Following the ANE administration of justice, YHWH is sometimes portrayed as one who judges or makes a decision.⁴³ In such a forensic context, שפט appears as the authoritative act of discerning and deciding what is just and unjust, who is innocent and guilty.⁴⁴ In essence, it is an internal act.⁴⁵

³⁹ H.-J. Fabry, «שפט», in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry, vol. 15 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 411-426.

⁴⁰ J. P. M. van der Ploeg, «Studies in Hebrew Law», *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 12 (1950), 248-259, at 249; cf. H.-J. Fabry, «שפט», in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 15, 426.

⁴¹ H.-J. Fabry, «שפט», in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 15 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 426.

⁴² Van der Ploeg, «Studies in Hebrew Law», 248; cf. H.-J. Fabry, «שפט», in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 15, 420.

⁴³ Van der Ploeg, «Studies in Hebrew Law», 248.

⁴⁴ P. Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 185.

⁴⁵ Cf. Deut 16:18; 1 Kgs 3:28; Jer 5:28; Ezek 16:38; 23:45; Zech 7:9; 8:16; Lam 3:59.

Although usually rendered «judgment» in English translation, the term משפט encompasses what is usually understood now.⁴⁶ From a theological perspective, it refers to YHWH's act of judgment (Cf. Gen 16,5; 18,25; Exod 5,21; Judg 11,27; 1 Sam 24,13-16; 2 Sam 18,19-31; Isa 33,22; Jer 11,20; Ezek 7,3-27; Pss 7,9; 9,9-20; 10,18; 26,1; 35,24; 43,1; 50,6; 51,6; 58,12; 67,5; 75,3-8; 82,1-8; 94,2; 96,13; 98,9; Job 21,22; 22,13; 23,7; Lam 3,59; 1 Chr 16,33; 2 Chr 20,12).⁴⁷ This represents what is doubtless the most important idea for correct understanding of משפט.⁴⁸ The elder (זקן) at the city gate, or the priest (כהן) in the Temple, or the king (מלך) in the palace makes a decision or judgment on God's behalf. Therefore, those who are chosen to judge or rule must possess certain qualities such as fear of God. It means that they are «men who are trustworthy and who hate a bribe» (Exod 18,21; Deut 2 ;17,20 ;15-1,13 Sam 1 ;14,20 Kgs 28 ,12-3,9; Isa 5-11,1 ;6-9,5; Ps 1-2,10l; Prov 16-8,15).⁴⁹

משפט as judgment can either be human or divine.⁵⁰ A person makes a correct judgment or a «just» decision when it is made in conformity with God's Law. He or she gains merit and prosperity in conforming with God's Law. On the contrary, God is not bound by His own Law because His standard of the Law is His own Being. He acts according to His own nature which is the foundation of משפט and according to the covenant He has with Israel.⁵¹

⁴⁶ J. Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society: Aspects of Law and Legality in the Bible* (Oxford: University Press, 2011), 30.

⁴⁷ F. Büchsel, «κρίσις», in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 469-470; cf. G. Liedke, «שפט», in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 3, 1395.

⁴⁸ B. Johnson, «שפט», in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 89.

⁴⁹ Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 176.

⁵⁰ Justice», in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. X. Léon-Dufour, 2nd ed. (London: Cassell, 1996), 282-287.

⁵¹ R. Gleason, *Yahweh: The God of the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 37.

משפט as judgment has a wide range of meanings: e.g., as an act of deciding a case by God (Deut 1,17; Prov 16,33; 29,26; Mal 2,17); as place, court seat of judgment (Deut 25,1; 1 Kgs 7,7; Isa 28,6; Eccl 3,16); as process, litigation, before judges (Job 14,3; Eccl 11,9, 12,14); as case or cause presented for judgment (Isa 50,8; Job 13,18, 23,4; 1 Kgs 3,11); as sentence, decision of judgment (1 Kgs 20,40; Eccl 8,5) and; as execution of judgment (Jer 7,5; Ezek 18,8; Deut 32,41; Zeph 3,8).

משפט has also the meaning of «justice» or «rectitude» as an attribute of God (Isa 30,18; Gen 18,25; Job 40,8; Deut 32,4; Ps 111,7) or of a person (Ps 106,8; Prov 12,5; Job 29,14). God requires persons to do it (Isa ;1,17 56,1). It is the joy of the righteous (Prov 21,15) and rulers should know it (Mic 3,1; Prov 29,4). This virtue can be attained when one follows God's Law which is the norm of religious and moral life of every Israelite. משפט is also used for God's commandments or ordinances (Cf. Exod 23-21,1; Lev 28,26;18,5).⁵² Ploeg argues that the word משפט as commandment or ordinance is synonymous to several Hebrew words such as חק (statute), חקקה (enactment), תורה (law), עדות (testimony or witness), מצוה (commandment) and ברית (covenant).⁵³ To him, these concepts are interrelated with one another and their application in the OT is closely linked to Israel's religion. They are usually identified with the observance of both casuistic and apodictic laws indicated in the Pentateuch.⁵⁴ Hence, משפט is an ordinance that refers to «collection of religious rules according to which God wills to be served».⁵⁵ As such, it is usually used in the plural form משפטים.⁵⁶

In a forensic context, Johnson explains that every proceeding needs a decision. It is the highest expression of jurisdiction by the judging authority.⁵⁷ In the OT, a decision or verdict is qualified by some other terms: e.g., *sentence of death* משפט-מוות (Cf. Deut 21,22 ;19,6; Jer 16;26.11); *blood guilt* משפט דמים (Cf. Ezek 7,23); *just decision* משפט-צדק (Cf. Deut 16,18);

⁵² Gleason, *Yahweh: The God of the Old Testament*, 94.

⁵³ van der Ploeg, «Studies in Hebrew Law», 248.

⁵⁴ van der Ploeg, «Studies in Hebrew Law», 248.

⁵⁵ Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 250.

⁵⁶ R. S. Hess, «טפשמ», in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. W. A. VanGemeren, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1142-1144.

⁵⁷ Hess, «טפשמ»1142-1144 ,«; cf. Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 347-348.

true decision משפט אמת (Cf. Ezek 18,8; Zech 7,9); and *decision making for peace* ומשפט שלום (Cf. Zech 8,16).⁵⁸ Bovati explains that these qualifiers show how the magistrates' judgment becomes an expression of the truth and justice normative in social regulations in Ancient Israel.⁵⁹ Bovati also identifies the two sides of a sentence or decision: first, the declaration of innocence or guilt, who is right and who is wrong; second, the meting out of punishment which demands force to be applied to the guilty.⁶⁰ Thus, it can be read in some texts from the OT how YHWH strikes the wicked among the people of Israel (Ps 1,5; Isa 5,16; Ezek 5,8; Hos 6,5 ;5,1) as a form of sentence to them.⁶¹

As in many of its occurrences in OT, משפט here is essentially linked with the duty to observe the stipulations of the covenant with God. Although the word is often used in judicial contexts, the practice of משפט is not confined to the judges at the «gate» nor it is limited to the political and religious leaders. As the addressee in אדם (6,8) indicates משפט is intended «for the entire people of Israel»,⁶² reminding them «of their identity as creatures and vassal of Suzerain-YHWH (Mic 5-6,3)».⁶³ They are summoned to do justice, i.e., to follow God's covenantal laws and statutes which would ensure social cohesion and protect the rights of the people, especially the poor and the needy.

⁵⁸ B. Johnson, «טפשמ», in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 90.

⁵⁹ Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 351.

⁶⁰ Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 345.

⁶¹ B. Johnson, 91 «טפשמ».

⁶² J. Cruz, *Who Is Like Yahweh? A Study of Divine Metaphors in the Book of Micah* (Bristol: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 139.

⁶³ M. M. Ibita, «What to Me Is the Multitude of Your Sacrifices? Exploring the Critique of Sacrificial Cult and the Metaphors for Yhwh in the Prophetic Lawsuit (Micah 6:1-8 and Isaiah 1:1-20)», in H. L. Wiley - C. A. Eberhart (eds.), *Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement in Early Judaism and Christianity: Constituents and Critique*, Resources for Biblical Study 85 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 186.

3.2. חסד *hesed*

The word חסד occurs 245 times in the OT.⁶⁴ The ancient versions translate it in various ways: «kindness» (טִיבוּתָא) in Targum Aramaic; «mercy» (ἐλεος) in LXX; «mercy» (misericordia) in Vulgate. The Septuagint's rendering ἐλεος, later received by the Latin tradition as misericordia, becomes decisive for Augustine's theological interpretation. There is likewise a variety in the modern English translations: «kindness or loving-kindness or mercy» in KJV; «steadfast love» or «loyalty» in RSV; «kindness» or «love» in NASB; «unfailing love» in NIV. According to Whitley, the different translations may indicate the ambiguity of its meaning.⁶⁵

TWOT and *BDB* assume that חסד comes from the verb *ḥāsad* which means «to be good, or to be kind». This assumption seems to be suspicious because חסד as used in Lev 20,17 and Prov 14,34 has a negative implication. Both texts use the word to mean «shame or reproach». ⁶⁶ Stoebe suggests the Arabic word *hasad* (حسد) which means «to be envious» or «to be jealous» as a possible etymology of חסד but he realizes that it is impossible to draw out semantic conclusion from it.⁶⁷ Utilizing it as its root word, Zobel argues, becomes even more problematic.⁶⁸

In Mic 6,8, to love חסד emphasizes the act of doing or performing it. YHWH commands His people not only to practice חסד but to love it with a proper attitude that is rooted in filial and reverential obedience.⁶⁹ Sakenfeld, stresses that the prophet's choice of the verb underlines the aspect of a radically repentant life which YHWH seeks to His covenantal

⁶⁴ H.-J. Zobel, «חסד», in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 44.

⁶⁵ C. F. Whitley, «The Semantic Range of *Hesed*», *Biblica* 62 (1981): 519.

⁶⁶ H. J. Stoebe, «חסד», in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 449.

⁶⁷ Stoebe, «449», «חסד».

⁶⁸ Zobel, «45», «חסד».

⁶⁹ J. McKay, «Man's Love for God in Deuteronomy Deuteronomy and the Father/Teacher - Son/Pupil Relationship», *VT* 22 (1972): 435.

people.⁷⁰ Thus, for her, חסד in Mic 6,8 may be best interpreted as «loyalty» for «it involves active concern for the well-being of all the people of God».⁷¹ Rabbi R. Shapiro prefers to translate חסד as «grace» for it refers to «God's unlimited, unconditioned, and all-inclusive love for all creation».⁷² Tushima posits that it should be translated as «covenant loyal love» for it speaks of God's act to His covenant people who too are expected to elicit a corresponding loyal loving disposition in God's people towards him and to other members of the covenant community.⁷³

With these circumstances, it appears fitting now to recapitulate the meaning of חסד ורחמים in Mic 6,8. Those discussed above are all parts of the comprehensive understanding of the Hebrew word חסד. But it seems more appropriate that «to love mercy», as LXX and Vulgate recommend, is the most suitable meaning in the context of Mic 6,8. In the context of covenantal relationship contracted by YHWH, the suzerain and Israel as His vassal, it is undeniable that for many times, the people had become unfaithful to the promises they made to YHWH. Israel, although burdened with guilt for having broken the covenant, cannot lay claim to God's חסד on the basis of legal justice; yet they can and must go on hoping and trusting to obtain YHWH's חסד. When the people became aware of their infidelity, as discussed so far, the prophets as a messenger between YHWH and His people awakened this awareness, and so they appealed to mercy.

In describing חסד as mercy, the prophets link it with the incisive image of love on YHWH's part. In their preaching, mercy signifies a special power of love on the part of YHWH, which prevails over the sin and infidelity of the chosen people. Because of His love for them, His mercy is expressed by pardoning their sins, their infidelities and even their betrayals. When He finds repentance and true conversion, it is His mercy that brings His people back to grace. He manifests His mercy to His people and brings

⁷⁰ K. D. Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action: Loyalty in Biblical Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 103.

⁷¹ Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action*, 103.

⁷² R. Shapiro, *Amazing Chesed: Living a Grace-filled Judaism* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2013), ix.

⁷³ C. Tushima, «Advancing Justice in the Search for Peace: An Exegetical Study of Micah 6:8 as a Recipe for Peace in Africa», *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40 (2019), 5.

them aid and salvation because of His covenant with them. As He always fulfills His promises, so He also expects His people to do the same.

In effect, *חסד* as mercy is not only a notion that is applied to YHWH. It is also a characteristic expected of the whole people of Israel when they relate to one another as chosen by YHWH. The *חסד* of YHWH is always available to His people while He expects His people to emulate this quality that He so frequently demonstrates, even though the people's expression of it can be only a pale reflection of it.⁷⁴

In summary, *חסד* may be viewed as:

First, YHWH's fidelity to His people Israel in view of His covenant with their ancestors, Abraham and Jacob (Mic 7,20). It is associated with His mercy and compassion toward them (Mic 7,18). His fidelity and mercy empower every individual to be faithful and compassionate in dealing with one another. It has a profound effect on individuals because it is extended to those who practice it.

Second, the same mercy and compassion which He shows to Israel are required of His people. They, too, must practice *חסד* as mercy by being faithful to God and by showing compassion and mercy towards one another. *חסד* points to one important tenet in the OT Religion: the covenant. Israel, being chosen by YHWH, should mirror His mercy as well. As they were able to experience tangibly and spiritually His *חסד*, they were also called to extend His *חסד* to others inside or outside their community. At the heart of *חסד* is loving commitment within the context of a relationship. It represents both the attitude of loyalty and faithfulness to the relationship and to the related parties, and the corresponding kind and dutiful action, often expressed as help or deliverance, that arises from it. Hence, God's people are expected to also show *חסד* to God as their covenant obligation, expressed in faithfulness, obedience, devotion and most of all, mercy.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action*, 103-105.

⁷⁵ R. Routledge, «*Hesed* as Obligation: A Re-Examination», *Tyndale Bulletin* 46/1 (1995): 196.

3.3. **לכת עם-אלהים *hašnēa' lāket 'im 'ēlōheykā***

The biblical motif of «walking with God» provides the interpretive key for understanding Micah's exhortation.

3.3.1. **The Verb *הצנע* *hašnēa'***

הצנע is hiphil infinitive absolute of the verb צנע which means «to be modest, humble, lowly».⁷⁶ The verb appears only in Mic 6,8 and nowhere else, but the cognate adjective צנוע (humble) is found in Prov 11,2: «When pride comes, then comes disgrace; but with the humble (נועים) is wisdom».⁷⁷ In the Aramaic targum צניע:אצנע mean «retiring, modest».⁷⁸ LXX renders Mic 6,8d with the word ἔτοιμον (ready, prepared): «ready to go with your God» (ἔτοιμον εἶναι τοῦ πορεύεσθαι μετὰ κυρίου θεοῦ σου), NETS: «to be ready to walk with the Lord». The Vulgate has *sollicitum* (anxious, concerned): «anxious to walk with your God» (*sollicitum ambulare cum Deo tuo*). Because of the rare occurrence of הצנע in the Bible, its exact meaning is hardly established.⁷⁹

Limburg believes that the expression in Mic 6,8d «stresses the theological dimension of the sort of life God wants».⁸⁰ Note that Micah combines two important terms: the infinitive absolute הצנע which functions adverbially (humbly) and the verb לכת (to walk) which is a common metaphor in the Bible for the way of life.

3.3.2. **The metaphor *לכת עם-אלהים* (*lāket 'im 'ēlōhēm*)**

The metaphor לכת עם-אלהים (walk with God) with the preposition עם- (*'im-*) is found only in Mic 6,8d. However, a similar expression with the preposition את- (*'ēṭ-*) is found in Gen 24-5,22: «Enoch *walked with*

⁷⁶ BibleWorks, *WTT Database*, version 8 (2009).

⁷⁷ H. Ringgren, «sn'», in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 420.

⁷⁸ BibleWorks, *Targumim Database*, version 8 (2009).

⁷⁹ F. I. Andersen - D. N. Freedman, *Micah* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 529.

⁸⁰ J. Limburg, *Hosea-Micah* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 193.

God (וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים) after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty-five years. Enoch *walked with God* and he was not, for God took him». The same expression is found in Gen 6,9: «These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah *walked with God* (וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים)». Levi is also described as one who *walks with God* «in peace and uprightness» (Mal 2:6). It is to be noted that the expression found in Gen 24-5,22 and 6,9 comes from the priestly genealogies of Adam and Noah which are very formulaic.

The genealogy of Adam (Gen 32-5,1) uses a formula that begins with «live» (חַיָּה) and ends with «die» (מוֹת): e.g. «Adam *lived* . . . nine hundred thirty years and he *died*; Seth *lived* . . . nine hundred twelve years and he *died*; Enosh *lived* . . . nine hundred five years and he *died*; Kenan *lived* . . . hundred and ten years and he *died*; Mahalalel *lived* . . . eight hundred ninety-five years and he *died*; etc. The same formulation is used all the way down the line of Adam's descendants—except in the case of Enoch. Enoch is said to have «*walked with God* . . . three hundred sixty-five years Enoch *walked with God*, and he was no more, because God took him» (Gen 23-5,22). Enoch did not simply «live» like the others, he «walked with God». This suggests that «walking with God» was on a higher plain than just «living».⁸¹ The *hithpael* form of the verb הִלֵּךְ used with Enoch may indicate habitual manner of life.

Why does the author want to point to Enoch so specifically as an exception? It is not merely because he did not die. That in itself is reason enough to merit special attention, but it does not sufficiently explain the purpose of the author in this case. The author's purpose can be better seen in the way he has emphasized, through repetition, that Enoch «walked with God» (vv. 22, 24). The phrase «walked with God» . . . clearly means something to the author, for he uses the same expression to describe Noah as «a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time» (6:9), and Abraham and Isaac as faithful servants of God (17,1; 24,40; 48,15). Its use here shows that the author

⁸¹ Italics supplied.

views it as the reason why Enoch did not die. Enoch is pictured as one who did not suffer the fate of Adam («you will die») because, unlike the others, he «walked with God».⁸²

«Walk with God» and other similar expressions in the Bible, e.g., «walk before God» (Gen 17,1; 24,40; 48,15; 1 Kgs 2,4; 8,23, 25; 9,4; 2 Chr 6,14; 7,17; Pss 56,13; 116,9), or «walk in God's way» (Judg 2,22; 2 Kgs 21,22), etc. express fidelity to God through a life lived with integrity of heart and uprightness, acting according to His way, and keeping His statutes and ordinances. Undoubtedly, לכת עם-אלהם in Mic 6,8c has the same sense as ויתהלך חנוך את-האלהים in Gen 24-5,22. Both refer of a manner of life which is faithful to God and morally upright.

Having examined the significance of הצנוע and how הלך is used figuratively in the Bible to convey various religious senses, it is now high time to determine the meaning of Micah's exhortation הצנוע לכת עם-אלהים. Different English translations of the Bible and scholars render it in various ways: Hillers, «to walk wisely before your God» (NEB); Hyatt, «living wisely in fellowship with your God»; Thomas, «to walk circumspectly»; Goldman, «to walk modestly»; Allen, «to walk carefully»; Wolff, «to walk attentively with your God»; Robinson, «to walk in purity»; «to be ready to walk with the Lord your God» (NETS), and «to walk humbly with your God» (RSV, NIV, NJB, KJV, NAB, NAS, NRSV).⁸³ In our analysis, the exhortation in Mic 6:8d invites people to live a blameless and righteous life like Enoch and Job, who are said to have «walked with God» (Gen 6,9 ;24-5,23), or like Abraham and Isaac who have also «walked before God» (Gen 48,15 ;24,40 ;17,1). To the person who «walks uprightly» (הישר הולך) God's word will be a blessing (Mic 2,7).

With הצנוע functioning adverbially to describe לכת עם-אלהם, Micah also exhorts the people to be humble and lowly. The person who is blameless and upright must also be meek and modest. According to Ringgren הצנוע has the nuance of «a discreet or cautious, modest life characterized by an

⁸² J. H. Sailhamer, «Genesis», in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 74.

⁸³ S. Dawes, «Walking Humbly: Micah 6:8 Revisited», *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1988), 332.

acknowledgement of human limitations and an avoidance of presumption toward God».⁸⁴ Allen stresses that humility leads to a deeper fellowship with God. He says, «over against a natural tendency to self-centeredness and turning everyone to his own way, Micah counsels a life of fellowship with the God of the covenant».⁸⁵

It appears, then, that the phrase עַם-אֱלֹהִים serves as the nexus in understanding the third requirement. More than their secular or metaphorical rendition of the terms, the whole gamut of the third covenant requirement focuses on God. In view of this, לַכֹּת עַם-אֱלֹהִים may mean setting God at the center of human life, and thus takes on something like a stamp of eschatological existence.⁸⁶ It entails following a life that is based upon the ways of God. Mays sees it as «a way of life that is humble, not so much by self-effacement, as by considered attention to another. The humility lies in not going one's own way presumptuously, but in attending the will and way of God».⁸⁷ Hence, those who «walk humbly with God» are the ones who humble themselves before God and before others.

Aware that Israel's life is a partnership with God, each Israelite is described as walking with him. By virtue of His special relationship with them, the people of Israel were offered a communion that is based on YHWH's fidelity and sincerity to them. The act of walking humbly with God should help them recognize that it is only in Him that they should cling to because He is their leader. As a covenant community, their lives should be rooted and grounded in the character of YHWH. The only possible way the covenanted people of YHWH can emulate His character is to walk humbly with Him. It is only through this when they can pay attention to YHWH.

4. Augustine's interpretation of Mic 6:1-8

Augustine explicitly cites Mic 6,1-8 in three of his works: *The City of God*, Book 10 (civ. Dei 10), *Sermon* 48 (s. 48), and *Sermon* 49 (s. 49).

⁸⁴ Ringgren, «sn'», 421.

⁸⁵ L. C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 374.

⁸⁶ Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 395.

⁸⁷ J. L. Mays, *Micah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 142.

In these writings, the bishop of Hippo interprets the prophetic exhortation concerning justice, mercy, and humility within the broader theological horizon of sacrifice, conversion, and Christian life.

4.1. The *City of God*, Book 10

Augustine cites the tripartite requirement of justice, mercy, and humility in *The City of God*, Book 10, Chapter 5 (civ. Dei 10,5), within his discussion of *true sacrifice*. He argues that these requirements constitute the authentic sacrifice symbolized by the outward offerings mentioned in Mic 6,6-7.

4.1.1. Historical Context

De civitate Dei was written between 413 and 427 in response to accusations directed against Christians following the sack of Rome in 410. Prior to Christianity's rise, Roman religious life centered upon devotion to numerous gods and goddesses. Christians, however, refused participation in traditional sacrificial cults, professing faith in one invisible God. This refusal carried economic and social consequences: pagan religious practices lost financial support, while Christians were perceived as socially disruptive and politically disloyal.⁸⁸

The sack of Rome by Alaric the Goth intensified these tensions. Many pagans interpreted the catastrophe as divine punishment for abandoning traditional worship.⁸⁹ Reports of destruction, violence, and devastation spread throughout the Empire, shaking Roman confidence in its own permanence.⁹⁰ Augustine's preaching reflects the anguish of this

⁸⁸ J. Ermatinger, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 5-6.

⁸⁹ Cf. retr. 2,43,1.

⁹⁰ Cf. exc. urb. 3,3.

moment, as noted by U. M. Lang,⁹¹ while P. Brown highlights Augustine's remarkable pastoral sensitivity in guiding his congregation through collective anxiety.⁹²

Against accusations that Christianity caused Rome's downfall, Augustine sought to demonstrate that pagan sacrifices were themselves disordered forms of worship. As D. Kasprzak observes, Augustine aimed to show that Christianity offered the true resolution to Rome's moral and religious crisis.⁹³ Pagan sacrifices, he argued, represented a distortion of worship because what belonged to God alone was offered to lesser beings.⁹⁴

4.1.2. *Literary Context*

Book 10 of *The City of God* addresses the Platonists and examines whether worship should be directed toward intermediary spiritual beings or solely toward the true God. Within this argument Augustine cites Mic 6,6-8, emphasizing the prophetic distinction between external sacrifices and the interior sacrifice God truly desires.⁹⁵

⁹¹ U. M. Lang, «Augustine's Conception of Sacrifice in *City of God*, Book X, and the Eucharistic Sacrifice», *Antiphon* 19 (2015), 33.

⁹² P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 246.

⁹³ D. Kasprzak, «The Theological Principles Underlying Augustine's "City of God"», *Theological Research* 1 (2013), 96.

⁹⁴ Lang, «Augustine's Conception of Sacrifice», 34.

⁹⁵ Civ. Dei 10,5: «Item apud alium Prophetam: In quo, inquit, adprehendam Dominum, assumam Deum meum excelsum? Si apprehendam illum in holocaustis, in vitulis anniculis? Si acceptaverit Dominus in milibus arietum aut in denis milibus hircorum pinguum? Si dederò primogenita mea impietatis, fructum ventris mei pro peccato animae meae? Si annuntiatum est tibi, homo, bonum? Aut quid Dominus exquirat a te nisi facere iudicium et diligere misericordiam et paratum esse ire cum Domino Deo tuo? Et in huius Prophetæ verbis utrumque distinctum est satisque declaratum illa sacrificia per se ipsa non requirere Deum, quibus significantur haec sacrificia, quae requirit Deus». Latin text according to *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnhout: Brepols). Text consulted via <https://www.augustinus.it/latino/>. English translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

For Augustine, sacrifice (*sacrificium*) reaches its fulfillment in Christ's self-offering on the cross.⁹⁶ Christian worship continues this sacrifice, especially in the Eucharist,⁹⁷ understood—as R. J. Teske⁹⁸ and U. M. Lang⁹⁹ suggest—as both memorial and participatory offering. Sacrifice therefore transcends ritual slaughter and encompasses the whole life of the believer.

Ancient religious systems often relied on sacrificial exchanges intended to secure divine favor.¹⁰⁰ Augustine contrasts this mentality with Christian worship, insisting that sacrifice must involve interior transformation rather than external appeasement.¹⁰¹ True sacrifice consists not in destruction of victims but in right intention directed toward God. Hence, sacrifice becomes «the visible sacrament of an invisible sacrifice»,¹⁰² a sacred sign expressing interior devotion.

4.1.3. *The City of God* and Mic 6,8

When Augustine speaks of *verum sacrificium*, he refers to every act by which human beings cling to God in holy fellowship and are directed toward the supreme good in which true happiness is found.¹⁰³ Within this framework, the exhortation of Mic 6:8—doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God—expresses authentic sacrifice when performed for God's sake.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁶ Cf. civ. Dei 10,20.

⁹⁷ Cf. civ. Dei 10,20.⁹⁷ Cf. civ. Dei 10,25.

⁹⁸ R. J. Teske, *Augustine of Hippo* (London: Routledge, 2008), 253-269.

⁹⁹ Lang, «Augustine's Conception of Sacrifice», 34.

¹⁰⁰ J. B. Hennessey, «Thirteenth-century B.C. Temple of Human Sacrifice at Amman», in *Phoenicia and Its Neighbours*, 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 1985), 84; cf. J. Waszkowiak, «Pre-Israelite and Israelite Burnt Offering Altars in Canaan — Archaeological Evidence», *PJBR* 13 (2014) 43-69.

¹⁰¹ Hennessey, «Thirteenth-century B.C. Temple of Human Sacrifice at Amman», 84.

¹⁰² Civ. Dei 10,5: «Sacrificium ergo visibile inuisibilis sacrificii sacramentum id est sacrum signum est».

¹⁰³ Civ. Dei 10,6: «Proinde verum sacrificium est omne opus, quo agitur, ut sancta societate inhaereamus Deo, relatum scilicet ad illum finem boni, quo veraciter beati esse possimus».

¹⁰⁴ Cf. civ. Dei 10,6.

Thus Augustine spiritualizes Micah's prophecy. The prophet's ethical demands become expressions of interior worship opposed to pagan sacrificial practices. Augustine's interpretation responds directly to contemporary polemics: pagan sacrifices failed because they were offered to false gods,¹⁰⁵ whereas true sacrifice belongs exclusively to the one true God.¹⁰⁶ The prophetic text therefore serves Augustine's apologetic aim while simultaneously articulating a theology of interior devotion.¹⁰⁷

4.2. Sermon 48

Sermon 48 represents Augustine's first homiletic treatment of Mic 6,6-8, preached in 420 at the Celerina Basilica in Carthage.¹⁰⁸ Here Augustine reflects especially on justice and judgment.

4.2.1. Historical Context

During this period Augustine faced pastoral challenges arising from political instability and moral decline within Christian leadership.¹⁰⁹ As Brown notes, Augustine's community experienced uncertainty and discouragement following imperial upheavals and ecclesial tensions.¹¹⁰ The sermon addresses believers struggling to understand suffering and divine justice in a troubled world.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Cf. civ. Dei 10,20.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. civ. Dei 1,1.

¹⁰⁷ Civ. Dei 10,6: «Unde ipse homo Dei nomine consecratus et Deo votus, in quantum mundo moritur ut Deo vivat, sacrificium est. Nam et hoc ad misericordiam pertinet, quam quisque in se ipsum facit».

¹⁰⁸ J. Rotelle (ed.), *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, III/2: *Sermons 20-50* (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990), 327-332.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 314.

¹¹⁰ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 330.

¹¹¹ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 337.

4.2.2. *Literary Context*

The sermon consists of eight paragraphs structured around the Sunday readings, of which Mic 6,1-8 formed the Old Testament lesson. Augustine begins by recalling the question posed by the “mortal” seeking an appropriate sacrifice for God.¹¹² The prophetic response redirects attention from material offerings to self-offering: «You were asking what you should offer for yourself. Offer yourself».¹¹³

Augustine interprets Micah’s exhortation within the framework of sacrifice, emphasizing transformation of the person rather than ritual performance. He employs the African Latin translation, shaped by the Greek text, focusing not on philological detail but on moral and spiritual application.¹¹⁴

4.2.3. *Sermon 48 and Mic 6:8*

In this sermon Augustine distinguishes between *judgment* (*iudicium*) and *justice* (*iustitia*).¹¹⁵ Judgment concerns self-examination—the refusal to justify one’s sins—while justice governs one’s relation to others. Right judgment produces justice, since conversion of the self leads to righteous action.¹¹⁶

¹¹² A. Pellegrino, «Introduction», in J. Rotelle (ed.), *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, III/2: *Sermons 20–50* (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990), 50.

¹¹³ S. 48,2: «Lectio prima prophetica quid nobis commendaverit, me commemorante recolite. Quid dignum, inquit, offeram Domino? Quaerebat homo sacrificium quo placaret Deum vel quo placeret Deo. Curvabo, inquit, genu Deo excelso, placabo eum in milibus taurorum aut in denis milibus caprarum pinguium, aut offeram Deo fructum ventris mei pro peccato animae meae? Primogenita, inquit, mea offeram Deo meo pro peccato animae meae? Respondetur tibi, o homo. O homo, a quo respondetur, nisi a quo factus est homo? Respondetur ergo tibi, o homo, quaerenti quid offeras Deo, et unde places Deum vel unde placeas Deo. Respondetur tibi quid sit bonum, aut quid aliud Dominus exquirat a te, nisi ut facias iudicium et iustitiam et diligas misericordiam paratusque sis ire cum Domino Dei tuo. Quaerebas quid offerres pro te. Offer te. Quid enim Dominus quaerit a te, nisi te? Quia in omni creatura terrena nihil melius fecit te. Quaerit te a te, quia tu perdideras te».

¹¹⁴ Pellegrino, «Introduction», 50.

¹¹⁵ Cf. s. 48,2.

¹¹⁶ S. 48,2: «Ut displiceas tibi quod eras, et possis esse quod non eras».

The sermon emphasizes three themes: self-offering as true sacrifice, proper use of material goods, and the practice of justice grounded in interior conversion.¹¹⁷ Augustine thus connects Micah's exhortation with the Augustinian theme of interiority: transformation begins within the self and manifests outwardly in ethical living.¹¹⁸

4.3. Sermon 49

Sermon 49, preached shortly afterward at the shrine of Saint Cyprian in Carthage, continues Augustine's reflection on Mic 6:8 and develops themes introduced in *Sermon 48*.¹¹⁹

4.3.1. *Historical and Literary Context*

Augustine explicitly presents this sermon as a continuation of the previous homily. Although the Gospel reading concerned the Workers in the Vineyard (Matt 20,1-16), Augustine returns to Micah because the labor in God's vineyard itself signifies justice.¹²⁰

The sermon elaborates on five interrelated themes—namely, justice, faith, self-judgment, forgiveness, and communal responsibility. Augustine expresses the principle later summarized as «hate the sin but love the sinner» when he exhorts: «Nolite amare vitia amicorum vestrorum, si amatis amicos vestros».¹²¹

4.3.2. *Sermon 49 and Mic 6,8*

Here Augustine links justice inseparably with faith: «Do justice, believe; the just live by faith».¹²² Justice requires interior examination

¹¹⁷ Cf. s. 48,8.

¹¹⁸ Cf. s. 52,22.

¹¹⁹ S. 49,1: «Cum enim de sancto Propheta quod lectum fuerat aliquid exponere voluissem, lectum autem fuerat, quaerenti homini quibus sacrificiis placaret Deum renuntiatum esse nihil ab illo Deum quaerere-nisi facere iudicium et iustitiam et diligere misericordiam paratumque esse ire cum Domino, Deo suo».

¹²⁰ S. 49,1: «Opus enim in illa vinea, ipsa est iustitia».

¹²¹ Cf. s. 49,6.

¹²² S. 49,2: «Facite iustitiam credite: *Iustus ex fide vivit*. Difficile est ut male vivat qui bene credit. Credite ex toto corde, credite non claudicantes, non haesitantes, non contra ipsam fidem humanis suspicionibus argumentantes».

but also social responsibility. One who judges oneself rightly becomes a mirror (*speculum*) through which others may also be corrected.

Justice therefore entails loving persons while rejecting vice. Augustine deepens the interpretation begun in Sermon 48: justice arises from faith, interior judgment, and charity toward others. The ethical demand of Mic 6,8 becomes a program for Christian communal life grounded in love.¹²³

Comparing the two sermons reveals a thematic progression. Sermon 48 interprets justice primarily in relation to sacrifice and self-offering, whereas Sermon 49 integrates justice with faith and social responsibility. Together they show Augustine's idea of moving from interior conversion toward communal charity, culminating in the distinction between loving persons and rejecting sin.

5. Exploration of the themes of justice, mercy, and humility in Augustine

The preceding discussion examined Augustine's explicit interpretation of Mic 6,1–8 in three principal texts—*De civitate Dei* 10,5, *Sermon* 48, and *Sermon* 49—where the bishop of Hippo reflects on the prophetic exhortation «to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God» (Mic 6,8). We have seen that in *De civitate Dei*, Augustine interprets the tripartite requirement as referring to what he considers as true sacrifice. Furthermore, in *Sermon* 48, he understands justice (*iustitia*) primarily as right judgment (*rectum iudicium*) concerning oneself and the proper use of one's possessions. This interpretation is further developed in *Sermon* 49, where justice presupposes faith in God, self-judgment, and the capacity to love the person while rejecting vice.

We now expand this analysis by examining Augustine's broader theological understanding of justice, mercy, and humility across selected writings. Such an exploration serves to illuminate and validate the interpretation already identified in the three texts under study, demonstrating that Augustine's reading of Mic 6,8 is not incidental but deeply rooted in his wider theological vision.

¹²³ Cf. s. 49,7.

5.1. Justice

The term *iustitia* derives from *iustus*, meaning «upright», «just», or «righteous», and ultimately from *ius*, the right belonging to a citizen within the *civitas*.¹²⁴ In Roman thought, justice was commonly understood as rendering to each person what is due—a notion later described as distributive justice.¹²⁵ Augustine was familiar with this juridical framework, yet he transformed it by grounding justice in *caritas*, the love owed to God and neighbor.¹²⁶

For Augustine, Christian justice consists fundamentally in fulfilling the double commandment of love (Matt 22:37–40).¹²⁷ Justice is therefore not merely the recognition of rights or social obligations but an expression of rightly ordered love directed toward God as the supreme good and toward neighbor in charity.¹²⁸ In this sense, justice becomes theological rather than merely civic: it is love enacted according to God's will.¹²⁹

5.1.1. *Justice and Ordo Amoris*

Augustine situates justice within the framework of the *ordo amoris*, the proper ordering of loves.¹³⁰ Human beings inevitably love; the moral question concerns what they love and how they love it.¹³¹ When love is rightly ordered according to God's design, harmony emerges between human desire and the created order.¹³² Justice thus consists in loving God above all things and governing created goods according to their proper rank.

All virtues arise from rightly ordered love, while vice results from disordered love. Because love shapes identity itself, a person ultima-

¹²⁴ J. Boatright, «The History, Meaning and Use of the Words Justice and Judge», *SMLJ* 49/4 (2018) 727–728.

¹²⁵ Boatright, «The History, Meaning», 727–728.

¹²⁶ Cf. div. qu. 61,4.

¹²⁷ Cf. Trin. 8,10,14.

¹²⁸ J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999), 514.

¹²⁹ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 514.

¹³⁰ Cf. div. qu. 36,1–3; lib. arb. 1,11–15; c. Faust. 22,27; cat. rud. 14,1–2; ep. 140,4; Trin. 9,14; civ. Dei 11,17; 15,22.

¹³¹ Cf. conf. 13,9,10.

¹³² Cf. mor. 1,25,46.

tely becomes what he or she loves. Divine grace therefore becomes necessary to heal disordered desire and restore justice within the human heart.¹³³

5.1.2. *Justice and the Summum Bonum*

In *De civitate Dei* XIX, Augustine identifies God as the *summum bonum*, the highest good toward which all human desire is directed.¹³⁴ Eternal life constitutes true happiness, while separation from God represents the supreme evil.¹³⁵ Justice must therefore be understood in relation to humanity's ultimate end: living rightly means living in conformity with God's will and orienting one's life toward participation in divine goodness.¹³⁶

Divine justice does not contradict divine mercy; rather, punishment and reward alike manifest God's fidelity to moral order. Justice ultimately reflects God's goodness, since true fulfillment consists in communion with Him.

5.1.3. *Justice and Lex Naturalis*

Augustine further explains justice in the light of eternal law (*lex aeterna*) and natural law (*lex naturalis*).¹³⁷ The eternal law governing the cosmos is inscribed within human rational nature. Consequently, justice involves living according to the divine order already present within human conscience.¹³⁸

To violate natural law is not merely to disobey an external command but to act against one's own created nature.¹³⁹ Hence Augustine's exhor-

¹³³ Cf. c. Faust. 5,11.

¹³⁴ Cf. civ. Dei 19,1,1.

¹³⁵ Cf. civ. Dei 19,4.

¹³⁶ Nat. b. 7: «Quae ordinatio, quia eorum naturae non competit, ideo poena est; sed quia culpae competit, ideo iustitia est».

¹³⁷ Cf. div. qu. 53,2.

¹³⁸ Cf. s. Dom. mon. 2,9,32.

¹³⁹ Cf. lib. arb. 1,6,15.

tation to «enter into the sanctuary of God»,¹⁴⁰ understood as entering one's conscience, where divine justice is revealed interiorly.¹⁴¹

5.1.4. *Christ: The Justice of God*

For Augustine, Christ embodies divine justice itself. Creation reflects divine order through *mensura*, *numerus*, and *pondus*—measure, number, and weight—which together express harmony within creation and ultimately point toward the Trinity.¹⁴² Through Christ's saving work, this order is restored, enabling humanity to participate once again in divine justice.¹⁴³

Justice therefore involves interior transformation made possible through grace. Human free will, healed by grace, becomes capable of directing itself toward the good and cooperating in the restoration of creation's proper order.

5.1.5. *Justice in the Earthly City*

Still in continuity with Augustine's concern for ordering human relations according to divine justice, the bishop of Hippo explains how justice may be practiced within earthly society. He recognizes that certain structures—the family, the city, and the wider human community—provide the context in which justice is lived. All people desire justice and seek order in their relationships with one another.

Augustine's emphasis must be understood within the socio-political upheavals of his time. The sack of Rome in 410 AD and the gradual transformation of the Roman world introduced instability and social

¹⁴⁰ S. 48,7: «Donec introeam in sanctuarium Dei».

¹⁴¹ R. Dodaro, «Justice», in A. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 482.

¹⁴² J. McEvoy, «The Divine as the Measure of Being in Platonic and Scholastic Thought», in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, vol. 17, ed. J. Wippel (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 102.

¹⁴³ McEvoy, «The Divine as the Measure of Being», 102.

disorder, as new powers and new religious perspectives reshaped public life.¹⁴⁴ The traditional Roman understanding of justice, long associated with imperial authority, was being replaced by emerging social realities.¹⁴⁵ In this context, Augustine stresses the necessity of justice, peace, and order both personally and socially, insisting that a political community lacking justice is nothing more than a band of robbers.

Yet Augustine also acknowledges the fragility of justice in earthly life. Human judgment is prone to error, social relations are marked by conflict, and even so-called just wars reveal the misery of temporal existence.¹⁴⁶ Justice therefore cannot rest on sentiment alone but requires a free and deliberate choice of the good. Human beings must direct their will toward the *summum bonum*, choosing what is good through reflection, contemplation, and prayer. For this reason, Augustine maintains that the establishment of justice in society presupposes the prior transformation of the human heart, from which authentic acts of justice arise.¹⁴⁷

5.1.6. *Justice and the Temporal Order of Things*

If justice presupposes the *ordo amoris* and fidelity to the *lex naturalis* established by God, then its observance necessarily concerns temporal realities.¹⁴⁸ Yet justice is not limited to them, for its full realization consists in loving God above all things and giving Him what is due.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ J. W. ERMATINGER, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), 1–6.

¹⁴⁵ P. Geary, «Barbarians and Ethnicity», in *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, ed. G. W. Bowersock et al. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001), 107–29; N. Cantor, *Antiquity: From the Birth of the Sumerian Civilization to the Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Perennial, 2003), 43–46; J. Moorhead, *The Roman Empire Divided: 400–700* (Great Britain: Pearson, 2001), 35–65.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. civ. Dei 19,7.

¹⁴⁷ For instance in civ. Dei 19,12 where Augustine discussed some instances when a human person can make a choice for himself or herself so as to attain peace.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. div. qu. 36,1–3; lib. arb. 1,11–15; c. Faust. 22,27; cat. rud. 14,1–2; ep. 140,4; Trin. 9,14; civ. Dei 11,17; 15,22.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. civ. Dei 19,21; div. qu. 61,4.

While definitive justice will be fulfilled only at the end of time, believers are called to use temporal goods according to God's will.¹⁵⁰ As pilgrims in the present world, the citizens of the City of God possess peace by faith and direct their desires toward eternal happiness. Justice therefore begins in this life but reaches completion only in eternity. Conscious of their pilgrimage, Christians strive to establish a more just social order while living not according to the flesh but according to God, keeping their hope fixed on the life to come.¹⁵¹

5.2. Mercy

The Latin term for mercy, *misericordia*, derives from *miser* (miserable, wretched, or unfortunate) and *cor* (heart). While some linguists trace *miser* to a Proto-Indo-European root meaning «to lament» or «to be emotionally affected», Augustine understands *cor* in a distinctly biblical sense: not merely as the seat of emotions but as the center of the entire human person. The heart signifies the locus of spiritual, intellectual, and moral life. Mercy, therefore, engages the whole person — mind, heart, body, and soul— and cannot be reduced to mere sentimentality.¹⁵²

Augustine employs the term *misericordia* extensively throughout his writings, describing it as a compassionate movement of the heart prompted by another's misery and expressed through concrete assistance whenever possible.¹⁵³ As with his understanding of justice, Augustine connects mercy to Christ's twofold commandment of love—love of God and love of neighbor. Mercy thus becomes, for him, the true sacrifice pleasing to God. The sacrificial prescriptions of the tabernacle and the

¹⁵⁰ J. Couenhoven, «St. Augustine's Doctrine of Original Sin», *AugStud* 36.2 (2005): 373; R. Edwards, *The Flight from Desire: Augustine and Ovid to Chaucer* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 15.

¹⁵¹ Cf. civ. Dei 14,9.

¹⁵² G. Knight and R. Ray, «Heart», in *Bible Dictionary and Concordance* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour, 2002), 137.

¹⁵³ L. Swift, «Giving and Forgiving: Augustine on Eleemosyna and Misericordia», *Augustinian Studies* 32.1 (2001): 26.

Temple attain meaning only when accompanied by acts of mercy, which reveal the interior disposition God truly desires.¹⁵⁴

5.2.1. *God as the Source of Mercy*

Augustine consistently attributes his own conversion to divine mercy.¹⁵⁵ Throughout the *Confessions*, he recounts how God's grace both forgave past sins and prevented further wrongdoing. In Book II, he acknowledges that his transformation resulted not from personal strength but from God's merciful initiative, which melted away sin and restored him to life.¹⁵⁶

By emphasizing divine mercy as the beginning of conversion, Augustine underscores a fundamental theological principle: God always takes the first step toward humanity. Human response, though necessary, remains secondary to divine initiative. Mercy is therefore not primarily a human achievement but a participation in God's prior act of love.

5.2.2. *Christ: Image of God's Mercy*

For Augustine, Jesus Christ constitutes the concrete manifestation of divine mercy.¹⁵⁷ Christ nourishes, heals, and restores humanity, making visible the compassion of God.¹⁵⁸ Whenever believers act mer-

¹⁵⁴ Civ. Dei 10,5.

¹⁵⁵ For instance conf. 1,6,7; 1,18,28; 1,18,30; etc.

¹⁵⁶ Conf. 2,7,15: «*Quid retribuam Domino, quod recolit haec memoria mea et anima mea non metuit inde? Diligam te, Domine, et gratias agam et confitear nomini tuo, quoniam tanta dimisisti mihi mala et nefaria opera mea. Gratiae tuae deputo et misericordiae tuae, quod peccata mea tamquam glaciem solvisti. Gratiae tuae deputo et quaecumque non feci mala: quid enim non facere potui, qui etiam gratuitum facinus amavi? Et omnia mihi dimissa esse fateor, et quae mea sponte feci mala et quae, te duce, non feci. Quis est hominum, qui suam cogitans infirmitatem audet viribus suis tribuere castitatem atque innocentiam suam, ut minus amet te, quasi minus ei necessaria fuerit misericordia tua, qua donas peccata conversis ad te? Qui enim vocatus a te secutus est vocem tuam et vitavit ea, quae me de me ipso recordantem et fatentem legit, non me derideat ab eo medico aegrum sanari, a quo sibi praestitum est, ut non aegrotaret, vel potius ut minus aegrotaret, et ideo te tantumdem, immo vero amplius diligit, quia per quem me videt tantis peccatorum meorum languoribus exui, per eum se videt tantis peccatorum languoribus non implicari.*»

¹⁵⁷ Cf. nat. et gr. 5,5.

¹⁵⁸ S. 38,8: «eget Christus, quando eget pauper».

cifully toward others, Augustine teaches, Christ himself acts through them.¹⁵⁹

This conviction appears clearly in Augustine's interpretation of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). The Samaritan represents Christ, who heals wounded humanity, carries it to safety, and entrusts it to the Church symbolized by the inn. The two coins given to the innkeeper signify the double commandment of love. Through this allegory, Augustine presents mercy not merely as moral obligation but as participation in Christ's saving work.¹⁶⁰

5.2.3. *Almsgiving as Manifestation of Mercy*

Mercy assumes many concrete forms —forgiveness, care for the sick, and assistance to those in need— but Augustine places particular emphasis on almsgiving (*eleemosyna*).¹⁶¹ He exhorts Christians to share with the poor what they relinquish through fasting, thereby transforming personal discipline into communal sustenance.¹⁶²

For Augustine, almsgiving participates in salvation because it expresses living faith.¹⁶³ Christians, especially those possessing wealth, are called to recognize Christ present in the poor.¹⁶⁴ The believer becomes *pauper Dei*, a «beggar of God», continually dependent upon divine mercy and therefore obligated to extend mercy to others.¹⁶⁵

5.2.4. *Mercy as a Sign of Faith*

Augustine further describes mercy as a sacrament of faith.¹⁶⁶ A sacrament, understood as a *sacrum signum*, signifies a reality beyond

¹⁵⁹ Cf. s. 25,8.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. s. 171,1–2.

¹⁶¹ Cf. s. 39,6.

¹⁶² Cf. s. Dom. mon. 2,2,7.

¹⁶³ Cf. gr. T. Nov. 36,13.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. s. 39,4.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. s. 61,7–8; s. 53,10.

¹⁶⁶ A. Fitzgerald, OSA, «Mercy, Works of Mercy», in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. A. Fitzgerald, OSA (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 558.

itself.¹⁶⁷ Acts of mercy therefore function as visible signs of invisible faith.

This occurs in two complementary ways. First, acts of mercy imitate Christ's compassion toward humanity. Second, they presuppose recognition of Christ's presence in those served, as expressed in Matt 25:35–40.¹⁶⁸ Mercy thus becomes an act of spiritual vision: believers perceive Christ not with bodily eyes but through faith.

Consequently, Augustine insists that almsgiving must arise from love rather than fear of punishment. Charity motivated solely by anxiety about judgment fails to express authentic faith; true mercy flows from love for Christ himself.¹⁶⁹

5.2.5. *Mercy as Christian Responsibility*

Augustine exhorts all Christians, regardless of social status, to practice mercy as an essential dimension of discipleship.¹⁷⁰ As scholars such as D. Dunn observe, Augustine rejects the notion that poverty exempts anyone from charitable responsibility.¹⁷¹ For him, wealth and poverty are ultimately soteriological realities rather than merely economic conditions.¹⁷²

Both rich and poor depend upon God and upon one another.¹⁷³ The poor provide the wealthy an opportunity to grow in charity, while the wealthy serve as instruments of God's providence. This reciprocal relationship reflects humanity's shared condition as beggars before God.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁷ Civ. Dei 10,5: «sacramentum, id est sacrum signum est».

¹⁶⁸ S. 239,7: «... Haec faciendo agnoscimus Christum in bonis operibus, non corpore, sed corde; non oculis carnis, sed oculis fidei ...».

¹⁶⁹ Cf. civ. Dei 21,27,3.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. en. Ps. 75,9; 86,5; 147,13; s. 38,8; 113B,4; 239,6–7; civ. Dei 21,27.

¹⁷¹ D. Dunn, «Augustine's Homily on Almsgiving», *JECH* 3.1 (2013): 6.

¹⁷² Dunn, «Augustine's Homily on Almsgiving», 6–7.

¹⁷³ Cf. s. 56,6,9.

¹⁷⁴ K. Van Til, «Poverty and Morality in Christianity», in *Poverty and Morality: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, eds. W. Galston and P. Hoffenberg (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 70.

Augustine's teaching also anticipates later Christian reflection on social inequality.¹⁷⁵ Mercy challenges systems that perpetuate privilege and exclusion by directing believers toward solidarity rooted in dependence upon God.¹⁷⁶ In this way, acts of mercy contribute not only to individual salvation but also to the moral transformation of society.

5.2.6. *Mercy and Covenant Love*

Augustine's understanding of mercy closely corresponds to the biblical concept of *hesed*, covenantal love marked by faithful compassion. Mercy begins with receiving God's love and extends outward toward others. One cannot show mercy without first experiencing it.¹⁷⁷

God's supreme act of mercy is revealed in the sending of His Son for humanity's redemption. Christ's death on the cross therefore becomes both the source and model of merciful living. By participating in this divine mercy, believers enact the prophetic exhortation of Mic 6:8 and embody the covenant relationship restored through Christ.

5.3. Humility

The term «humility» derives from the Latin *humus*, meaning «earth», while the adjective *humilis* signifies what is lowly or grounded. The noun *humilitas* and its cognates appear more than 1,700 times in Augustine's writings, revealing the centrality of this virtue in his theology and spirituality.¹⁷⁸ Although humility may appear to suggest psychological self-deprecation or diminished self-worth,¹⁷⁹ Augustine understands it differently. Christian humility does not deny one's gifts or capacities;

¹⁷⁵ G. Gutiérrez, «The Violence of a System», 93.

¹⁷⁶ Ward, «Porters, Catapults, Community, and Justice», 58.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. en. Ps. 126,14; s. Dom. mon. 2,11,39.

¹⁷⁸ D. W. Ruddy, *A Christological Approach to Virtue: Augustine and Humility* (Ph.D. diss., Boston College, 2001), 52.

¹⁷⁹ C. R. Snyder and S. J. Lopez, *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 413.

rather, it acknowledges that every good originates from God and therefore leads the believer to gratitude.¹⁸⁰

Humility directs the human person beyond the self toward the divine source of all goodness. The humble recognize that authentic hope lies not in self-sufficiency but in dependence upon God. For Augustine, humility functions as the remedy for humanity's fundamental illness: pride. Pride caused the fall of angels and humanity's original sin and remains the root of all sin (Cf. Eccl 10:13). Whereas pride blinds and enslaves, humility restores spiritual vision and freedom. Thus, while pride wounds humanity, humility heals it.¹⁸¹

5.3.1. *Christ as the Foundation of Humility*

Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, constitutes the supreme manifestation of divine humility. Augustine describes Christ through numerous titles: *humilis deus*,¹⁸² *auctor humilitatis*,¹⁸³ *magister humilitatis*,¹⁸⁴ *doctor humilitatis sermone et opera*,¹⁸⁵ *medicus humilis*,¹⁸⁶ *via humilitatis*,¹⁸⁷ *fundamentum humilitatis*,¹⁸⁸ and *norma humilitatis*.¹⁸⁹ Christ is therefore not only the model but also the source and foundation of humility.¹⁹⁰

To know Christ is to know His humility, which is not merely an ethical example but the very path of reconciliation between God and humanity. Augustine famously teaches that the way to God is «first humility,

¹⁸⁰ Ruddy, *A Christological Approach to Virtue*, 52.

¹⁸¹ Cf. civ. Dei 12,6.

¹⁸² Cf. cat. rud. 4,8.

¹⁸³ Cf. s. 77,11.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Jo. ev. tr. 25,16.

¹⁸⁵ s. 62,1: «magister humilitatis verbo et exemplo».

¹⁸⁶ Cf. s. 22,1.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Jo. ev. tr. 5,3.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. s. 69,2.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. s. 126,11.

¹⁹⁰ S. 68,11: «humilis non eris, nisi eum qui propter te humilis jactus est adtenderis. Disce a Christo. quod non discis ab homine: in ilia est norma humilitatis; ad hunc qui accedit, prius in ipsa humilitate formatur, ut in exaltatione decoretur».

second humility, and third humility».¹⁹¹ Humility is thus both salvific and exemplary: it reveals how salvation is accomplished and how believers are called to live.¹⁹²

5.3.2. *Humility in God's Plan of Salvation*

Christ reveals humility through His *kenosis* (Phil 2:7), emptying himself in the Incarnation in order to restore humanity's broken relationship with God. By becoming human, the Word enables humanity to participate in divine life. The humility manifested in Christ's incarnation, passion, and death lies at the heart of salvation history.¹⁹³

Augustine emphasizes that humanity, lost through the misuse of free will, is restored through divine grace. Only the humility of God—expressed in the suffering and sacrifice of Christ—can heal human pride. Through this divine self-humbling, communion between God and humanity is restored.¹⁹⁴

5.3.3. *Humility and Pride*

Augustine interprets humility most clearly in contrast to pride (*superbia*).¹⁹⁵ In *De civitate Dei*, pride is defined as the elevation of the self in place of God, seeking human praise rather than divine approval and ultimately producing isolation and domination. Drawing upon the

¹⁹¹ Cf. ep. 118,22.

¹⁹² E. Portalie, *A Guide to the Thought of St. Augustine*, trans. R. L. Bastian (Chicago: Regnery, 1960), 172–173.

¹⁹³ S. 174,2,2: «Christus Iesus venit in mundum peccatores salvos facere. Attende Evangelium. Venit enim Filius hominis quaerere et salvare quod perierat. Si homo non perisset, Filius hominis non venisset. Ergo perierat homo, venit Deus homo, et inventus est homo. Perierat homo per liberam voluntatem: venit Deus homo per gratiam liberatricem».

¹⁹⁴ Trin. 4,4: «Porro iniquorum et superborum una mundatio est *sanguis iusti* et humilitas Dei, ut ad contemplandum Deum quod natura non sumus per eum mundaremur factum quod natura sumus et quod peccato non sumus».

¹⁹⁵ E. TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 107–113.

account of the Fall (Gen 3) and Sirach 10:13, Augustine identifies pride as the beginning of sin.¹⁹⁶

Humility, by contrast, restores right relationship with God. The humble love God as the *summum bonum*, from which proper love of self, neighbor, and creation flows.¹⁹⁷ Pride generates disordered love (*amor sui*) that replaces love of God (*amor Dei*), whereas humility reestablishes the right order of love.¹⁹⁸ Biblical tradition consistently portrays pride as destructive—alienating persons from God, disrupting community, and leading ultimately to downfall.¹⁹⁹

5.3.4. *Christ's Humility as Antidote to Pride and Despair*

The New Testament presents Christ's humility most vividly in the hymn of Phil 2,6–8. Christ's self-emptying reveals both the depth of divine love and the gravity of human sin. His obedience unto death transforms humiliation into redemption and despair into hope.²⁰⁰

Augustine teaches that Christ's humility not only heals pride but also liberates humanity from despair.²⁰¹ By humbling himself, Christ conquers sin and death, demonstrating that divine love reaches humanity even in its fallen state. The Incarnation reveals both God's condescending mercy and humanity's need for healing.

Augustine's own conversion exemplifies this dynamic. Reflecting on his spiritual journey, he recognizes that God was always present within him even while he searched externally: «You were within, but I was outside».²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ Sir 10,15 (Vulgata): «quoniam ab eo qui fecit illum recessit cor eius quoniam initium peccati omnis superbia qui tenuerit illam adimplebitur maledictis et subvertet eos in finem».

¹⁹⁷ Cf. doc. Chr. 1,23,22.

¹⁹⁸ H. Ringgren, «sn̄», in *TDOT*, vol. 12, 420.

¹⁹⁹ R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, ed. R. Hoerber (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 115.

²⁰⁰ D. Bertschmann, «Is There a Kenosis in This Text? Rereading Philippians 3:2–11 in the Light of the Christ Hymn», *JBL* 137.1 (2018): 241.

²⁰¹ Cf. Trin. 4,2,4.

²⁰² Conf. 10,27,38: «intus eras et ego foris».

Humility thus becomes an inward journey in which God heals the human heart from pride.

5.3.5. *Humility as True Self-Knowledge*

In the *Confessions*, Augustine insists that knowledge of self and knowledge of God are inseparable.²⁰³ Through inward reflection, the person discovers both personal limitation and divine intimacy.²⁰⁴ His famous prayer—«May I know myself; may I know You»²⁰⁵—expresses this unity.

Humility therefore entails radical self-awareness grounded in truth. By acknowledging dependence upon God, individuals come to understand their proper identity as creatures made in God's image.²⁰⁶ Interior silence and introspection enable the believer to encounter Christ dwelling within. Only the humble can truly listen to this interior teacher.²⁰⁷

5.3.6. *Divine and Human Humility*

Augustine distinguishes between divine humility and human humility. Christ's kenotic descent cannot be literally imitated, since humanity cannot become divine. Human humility instead consists in relinquishing pride and recognizing one's creaturely dependence.²⁰⁸

Yet imitation remains possible through participation. By knowing oneself truthfully, one discovers one's place within the ordered structure of creation. As scholars note, humble self-knowledge aligns the interior order of the soul with the divine order of reality, producing what Augustine calls the *tranquillitas ordinis*—the tranquility of order.²⁰⁹

²⁰³ Cf. conf. 10,5,7.

²⁰⁴ Cf. conf. 3,6,11.

²⁰⁵ Sol. 2,1: «noverim me, noverim te».

²⁰⁶ G. Matthews, «Knowledge and Illumination», in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds. E. Stump and N. Kretzmann (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), 176.

²⁰⁷ Cf. vera rel. 39,72.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Jo. ev. tr. 25,16.

²⁰⁹ Ruddy, *A Christological Approach to Virtue*, 150.

As individuals grow in self-knowledge, they recognize God's goodness and respond with gratitude and praise, acknowledging creation itself as a gift.²¹⁰

5.3.7. *Humility and Eternal Life*

Humility ultimately directs the believer toward eternal life.²¹¹ Just as Christ's descent in humility led to exaltation (Phil 2,8–9), so those who embrace humility will share in divine glory.²¹² Augustine observes that where humility is present, majesty is revealed; where weakness appears, strength is manifested; and where death is endured, life emerges.²¹³

The path of humility, however, remains inseparable from suffering. Participation in Christ's exaltation requires willingness to drink the *calix humilitatis*, the cup of humility.²¹⁴ Through this participation in Christ's suffering, believers are gradually conformed to Him and prepared for eternal communion with God.

6. Conclusion

This study has sought to offer an Augustinian reading of Mic 6,8 by bringing into dialogue the prophetic text, its exegetical foundations, and Augustine's theological interpretation. The analysis of Mic 6,1–8 as a covenant lawsuit has shown that the prophetic critique is not directed against sacrifice as such, but against its reduction to external performance detached from covenantal fidelity. The climactic exhortation in v. 8 — “to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” — thus emerges as the authentic response required of God's people, one that integrates ethical action and relational communion with YHWH.

²¹⁰ Cf. en. Ps. 144 [145].

²¹¹ Cf. Jo. ev. tr. 104,3.

²¹² B. McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, vol. 1: *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 205.

²¹³ S. 160,4: «Ubi humilitas, ibi maiestas; ubi infirmitas, ibi potestas; ubi mors, ibi vita».

²¹⁴ Cf. s. 96,3.

A close examination of the key terms *חסד*, *משפט*, and *לכת הצנע לכת* has further demonstrated that these expressions cannot be understood merely in juridical or moral categories. Rather, they articulate a comprehensive vision of life ordered according to God's will: justice as right relationship grounded in divine order, mercy as faithful participation in covenantal love, and humility as a mode of existence lived in attentive communion with God. In this sense, the prophetic exhortation already points beyond external observance toward an interior disposition that shapes the whole of human life.

Within this framework, Augustine's interpretation of Mic 6,8 reveals the full theological depth of the prophetic text. He understands justice, mercy, and humility as expressions of an interior offering in which the human person is directed toward God through Christ. What the prophet demands as covenantal fidelity, Augustine interprets as the transformation of the self into a living sacrifice. Thus, ethical action is not abolished but fulfilled, becoming the visible expression of an invisible devotion ordered toward the supreme good.

In bringing together the prophetic and Augustinian perspectives, this study has shown that Mic 6,8 is not merely an ethical summary but a theological synthesis of the Christian life. The movement from external sacrifice to interior disposition finds its fulfillment in a life conformed to Christ, in whom true worship is realized. Justice, mercy, and humility are therefore not isolated virtues, but dimensions of a unified spiritual existence rooted in communion with God.

For contemporary readers, this Augustinian reading of Mic 6,8 offers a renewed understanding of discipleship. In a context where religious practice can again risk becoming externalized or fragmented, the prophetic call—interpreted through Augustine—invites believers to a deeper integration of life, where action flows from interior conversion and all is directed toward God. In this way, the ancient exhortation of Micah continues to speak with enduring theological and spiritual force, calling each generation to rediscover the meaning of authentic worship as a life wholly offered to God.

6. Bibliography

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