

**PSYCHO-SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES ON MATTHEW 5:21-26: A HERMENEUTICAL  
RESPONSE TO THE ANGER PROBLEM IN CONTEMPORARY UGANDA**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

I, Nairuba Rose, declare that this thesis, titled Psycho-social perspectives on Matthew 5:21-26: A Hermeneutical response to anger problem in contemporary Uganda is my own work and that all sources I used have been acknowledged as reflected in the references.

Signature

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Date

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## **SUPERVISORS' APPROVAL**

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Psycho-social perspectives on Matthew 5:21-26: A hermeneutical response to anger problem in contemporary Uganda.” has been written under our supervision and is now ready for examination with our approval.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my late parents Mr. Ibanda John and Mrs Juliet Kobusingye, Whose efforts enabled me to reach to this level. Your words of encouragement, guidance and inspiration can never be ignored even though you rested they are still fresh in my memory and enabled me to remain focused even when I felt weak.

To my supervisors who worked tirelessly to ensure that I finish this study. Your continuous guidance, advice and inspiration gave me strength to finish my research work.

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Above all I dedicate this thesis to the Almighty God who gave me the courage, strength, stable mind and financial ability needed to finish my Thesis.

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## ABSTRACT

This study combines social science critical approaches to the Bible and hermeneutics of appropriation to examine the theme of anger in Mathew 5:21-26. Jesus taught about the problem of anger from the perspective of murder. Accordingly, the root cause of murder is anger, which has to be dealt with. The study takes a documentary analytical approach, and it endeavours to generate theological reflections on the theme of anger in contemporary Ugandan context. Social science criticism of the Bible involves the exegetical task which analyses the social and cultural dimensions of the text and of its environmental context through the utilization of the perspectives, theory, models, and research of the social sciences. In this study, Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:21-26 elicits significant questions on the relationship between anger and murder. Anger is a psycho-social problem, which is well articulated in social science disciplines. Although the narrator of Matthew 5:21-26 does not connect Jesus to any formal social science backgrounds, Jesus' ability to analyse murder from the context of anger is interesting in the theological reflections of the person and character of Jesus. Anger related emotions generally have far-reaching consequences, which affect both individual persons and the community. Furthermore, the hermeneutical approaches centre the problem of the spoken words in fuelling anger. Anger, apparently is conveyed through communicative utterances by use of words and expressions. The study concluded by emphasising the need for proper anger management skills, and all stakeholders (counsellors, pastors, teachers, social workers, etc.) approach anger emotions from a broader perspective. This may include understanding the anger generating factors and history of both culprits and victims of anger.



## CHAPTER 1

### 1.0 GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Murder is a phenomenon in the contemporary world as it was in the Biblical times. According to United Nations data, as reported in (world population review, 2023), El-Salvador is the leading country in the world whose murder rate is over 60% per 100,000 people. Other countries that constitute the top 10 murderous countries include: Honduras (41%); Venezuela (49.9%); United States Virgin Islands (49.3%), Jamaica (56.4%); Lesotho (43.6%), etc., while South Africa is the leading nation on the African continent with 35.7%. These international trend trackers enlist murder and homicide incidences, but do not pay much attention to the root causes of murder. The study revealed poor anger management skills as the root cause of murders. It is however, not meant to express an ironic view that countries with highest murder cases are the angriest countries, but affirm that anger, being a psycho-social manifestation triggers murderer's impulses and responses.

The post-apartheid South Africa, at least it can be argued may constitute high rates of murder on the continent because of the trauma and effects of apartheid, which left people socially dispossessed and psychologically disoriented. The same can be argued about the United States, due to slavery and modern day racism. On the other hand, Japan with the least murder rates of 0.2% (world population review, 2023) in the world may have unique socio-economic and psycho-social orientations associated with anger management. This is to say that, anger mismanagement can result into murder, as attested to in Matthew (5:21-26). The current study contextually analyses Matthew (5:21-26) in relation to murder and anger in the Ugandan context.

According to the UN statistics, 10.52 out of 100,000 people get killed every year in Uganda, (World Bank, 2021), enlisting factors such as domestic disputes, interpersonal violence, violent conflicts over land and other resources being responsible for the increased cases of murder in Uganda. The above factors trigger anger feelings that affects one's psychology making the offended to be mentally upset and physically empowered. This state makes an angry person to take actions of revenge towards the thing or person who is perceived as having distracted one from attaining his or her goal. Empirically, both print and digital media are awash with news about murder. We deeply condole with families of individuals such as Kenneth Akena, who was murdered in Nakawa (Observer, 2016); wives and husbands who have been murdered by their spouses, exemplified by Rovinah Muheki, who was burnt to death by her husband in Rubanda alongside her three children (Muhereza, 2023); and victims of land conflicts in areas like Masaka, Mukono, and Kayunga. Additionally, we remember children killed due to the brutalities of their stepparents (Kyaiswa, 2011).

To reiterate, the problem of anger is a human problem. It was phenomenon in the Bible world as it is in the contemporary society. Uncontrolled anger leads to social evils in the society such as murder, destruction of property, hatred, and divorce among others. The Bible is widely read in the contemporary contexts as the word of God and in fact a moral guide. The context of Jesus' teaching on anger is that of the sermon on the mountain, and informs that anger management is a spiritual virtue. A deeper examination of Jesus's sermon reveals that anger has deep psychological and sociological underpinnings, which begs for analysis. The examination of the text of Mathew 5:21-26 reveals close etymological affinities with psycho-social aspects of anger today. This study is therefore important in analysing these etymological correspondences with a view of churning a nuanced theological understanding of the text of Mathew 5:21-26.

## **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Jesus' teaching on murder (Matthew 5:21-26) centres anger as the root cause of murder and its related consequences. It is by dealing with anger that cases of murder and its related consequences can be dealt with. Jesus' intervention portrays that anger is not only a serious social and psychological problem with far reaching consequences, but it is also spiritual and historical and has been part of human civilizations. There are however no academic scholarly articulations of hermeneutical nature (so far known) that attempt to analyse Jesus' teachings in relation to the psycho-social phenomenon of anger in the contemporary context where anger continues to manifest in various ways among all human beings irrespective of gender, race, age and social status. The question of the correlation between Matthew 5:21-26 with the contemporary sociological and psychological understanding of anger is not explored. The current study is an endeavour to analyse Matthew 5:21-26 within the psychological and sociological theoretical underpinning to generate a theological contribution to the contemporary understanding of anger and make suggestion for anger management.

## **1.2 General Objective**

1. To hermeneutically analyse the problem of anger in Mathew 5:21-26 in relation to its psycho-social implications.

## **1.3 Specific Objectives**

1. To examine Jesus' teachings on anger in Mathew 5:21-26.
2. To explain anger as a Psycho-social phenomenon
3. To examine the corresponding relationship between, Mathew 5:21-26 and psycho-social understandings of anger.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What is the context of Jesus teaching and understanding on anger?
2. What is the psychological and sociological understanding of anger?
3. How does the psycho-social knowledge on anger inform better understanding of Matthew 5:21-26?

### **1.5.1 Scope of the Study**

### **1.5.2 Geographical scope**

The study is not limited to a particular vicinity. This is due to the universal nature of anger. Averill (2012) puts it clearly that anger is an emotion possessed by all without any form of doubt. All over the world people feel and express anger in more similar ways than they actually admit. Marsh et al (2005) revealed that facial demonstrations of fear and anger are universal

social signals in humans. It's very easy to recognise an angry person by facial expressions such as; frown face, tightened muscles and narrowed eye brows. Matsumoto et al. (2010) affirmed that angry facial expressions are genetically encoded in all humans, resulting in a biological-based universality in the display and identification of anger.

Anger problem is as old as humans implying that its part of human evolution. Martin (2020) asserts anger as part of human development. Emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, aggression, joy can easily be recognised in both humans and non-humans. This emotion is commonly experienced by people across different localities. Kovecses (2000) says anger is universal and at the same time may vary from culture to culture. He agrees on sameness of anger aspects across different groups like Chinese, Japanese, Hungarian, Zulu, English and Wolof. Matsumoto et al (2010) says all humans have cultures and cultures endorse the modification of universal angry expressions. Therefore, limiting anger to a particular community is a mistake since it is one of the most experienced and conveyed emotion world-wide.

### **1.5.3 Time scope**

The time parameters of the study cannot be specified due to the fact that anger cannot be traced. Angry feeling and expressions had hitherto been part of humans. Potegal & Novaco (2010) observe anger as a lived emotion since the beginning of recorded history. One of the oldest books in the whole world (Bible) reveals aspects of anger in the Old Testament, God is presented as angry (having a burning nose) whenever people sin (Deuteronomy 9:8, Exodus 15:7, 32:10-11, Numbers 11:1-2, Job 4:9 etc.). Cain killed his brother Abel due to anger and many other angry episodes are mentioned in the two sections of the Bible. In the New Testament Jesus would experience anger (Mark 11; 15, John 2:15-17 etc.). The feelings of hostility (anger) is as old as humans making it

had to set a time frame work in which the study was conducted. Anger is, has been and will always be part of human society and what we aim at is not doing away with it but to embrace proper anger management skills.

#### **1.5.4 Content scope**

The research is limited to social scientific approach in the study of the Bible, combined with hermeneutics of appropriation. The bible version used is NIV. All the relevant references in this research paper are therefore derived from the NIV version.

#### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study will redound to the benefit of society considering that anger plays an important role in the psycho-social development of both the individuals and communities. The tremendous evils resulting from the problem of uncontrolled anger justifies the need for proper understanding of the psycho-social aspects of anger. The problem of anger is as old as humans, from the biblical point of view basing on Jesus' teaching on murder in Mathew 5:21-26 clearly indicate anger as a grave sin and the root cause of various evils in the society today murder inclusive. Anger should be understood as a serious psycho- social problem and be managed appropriately in order to have peace in our societies and harmonious relationships with our neighbours and God.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1.0 Introduction:**

This section explores other scholarly write ups made on the study at hand. There are various books, articles, magazines both published and unpublished discussing about Matthew 5:21-26 each taking their own direction of exegesis.

### **2.1.1 Literature reviewed:**

Abuor (2021) discussed Matthew 5:21-26 and his major intension was to reveal the connection between anger and murder. He equates anger to murder, and further articulates that anyone proved guilty of being angry in one way or the other is considered to be a sinner. God hates anger of any form, and the bearers of anger are deprived of offering at the altar. The writer clearly portrays anger as hindrance to God's blessings and prevent one from sacrificing to God. One should leave the offertory and first make peace with the offended and later bring the offertory to the altar. In the same way, Gundry (2011) gives a literal translation of Mathew reading and interpreting verse by verse so as to come up with a reliable explanation of scriptures for the present readers. Like Abuor, Gundry's approach is linguistic and theological. The study of endeavour takes a different trajectory of using social science criticism, to generate meaningful grounded theological reflections on anger.

Koplitz (2018) studied Mathew 5:21-26 using the Hebraic method of bible study where he employed the process of discovery so as to interpret and understand the scriptures focusing on the linguistic and cultural dynamics surrounding the text. He discovered that Jesus teaching in Mathew communicated a deeper meaning and understanding of the law compared to what the earlier

teachers of the law had passed unto the people. Koplitz observes that Jesus' teaching in the text of Matthew aimed at unveiling the impacts of anger to the church where he digs into the earliest church established by apostles which he claims to have suffered from anger problems. This anger has continued to surface, escalated disagreements which led to separation of believers and has affected the growth and expansion of the church to date. He concluded that anger results into division of the church and to deal with this problem Jesus' teaching on anger should be understood culturally and linguistically. He came up with this write up to be used in church services as a sermon. Koplitz therefore offers a theological interpretation of Matthew to be used for liturgical purposes. In other words, he based on this analysis to formulate a sermon unlike the current study which is not a sermon but an academic analysis of Matthew 5:21-26 employing social science criticism of the Bible so as to understand the text of Matthew in the contemporary Ugandan situation.

Goldstone (2017) analyses Matthew 5:21-24 in relation to Exodus 21:22. His verse selection covers some parts of the study; however, he puts emphasis on the relationship between the Old Testament (Exodus) and the New Testament (Matthew) pointing out the underlying aspects between the two texts that is murder, anger and altars. Goldstone asseverates that there is a positive relationship between Exodus 21:22 and Matthew 5:21-24. On the other hand, Moenga (2020) views Matthew 5:21-48 in light of grace and the law, accordingly these form the general theme upon which the Sermon on the Mount can be understood. Jesus' teachings passed onto the disciples could only be achieved by divine mercy other than human efforts. The author pays less attention on Jesus' in-depth teaching on anger as the underlying factor for the occurrence of various evils but instead tries to give a detailed study of how the disciples can put Jesus' teachings into practice, which he says is only possible by the Grace of God.



Viljoen (2006) analyses Jesus' teaching in Matthew in relation to the Torah. He considers the position of Jesus on the Torah and makes an investigation whether Jesus had come to abolish the law which is contained in the first five books of the Old Testament or to ensure that the law is accomplished. He discovered that Jesus' teachings especially in Matthew 5 during the sermon on the mount was a clear indication that Jesus was not against the teachings enshrined in the Torah, but giving a deeper meaning of the law that was passed on to the people in ancient times and was still relevant to his audience. Viljoen views Matthew 5:21-48 as part of Jesus' attempt to realize the meaning of the law, which is different from the trajectory of the study at hand which seeks to analyse and interpret Matthew 5:21-26 in relation to the psychological and sociological perspectives on anger.

Clarence (2022) examines the relationship between psychological capital and the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount entails Matthew 5 -7 covering the present area of study. The writer found out that the psychological capital intends to offer mental well-being of an individual which is not different from Jesus' intentions concerning his teachings on the sermon of the mount. Jesus' teaching aimed at full realisation of humanity through equipping his listeners with tools needed to live a happy and significant life. Though Mathew 5:21-26 is part of the sermon on the mount, Clarence's concern was to reveal that both psychological capital and the sermon on the mount have similar goals. However, the study at hand aimed at giving a hermeneutical approach to Mathew 5:21-26 in relation to the psycho-social understanding of anger which the latter study did not focus on.

Talbert (2010), in his book *Paideia commentaries on the New Testament* reveals a brand-new approach to the reading of Matthew. He analyses the text in its cultural, historical, literal, and

theological contexts so as to generate the meaning of Matthew. He discusses the entire book of Matthew giving a brief view on Matthew 5:21-26 where he interprets the text, derive its literal meaning and proceeds to interpretation of other chapters. The text at hand is denied a detailed interpretation it deserves. Therefore, the current study attempts to fill the lacuna by using psychological and sociological overtones in the text of Matthew specifically on the issue of anger being the prime cause of various evils in the society today.

France (2007) elucidates on the sixth commandment prohibiting murder, giving an interpretation of the commandment in its original form. The author commentates on the forms of capital punishments and the sanctity of life to the Hebrew law. Death sentence was uncommon, and this aimed at protecting life at all costs. To impose this penalty there were procedures to follow and fulfil and in case any of the legal requirement was not fulfilled this penalty would not be administered. France's work aimed at revealing the value of life using historical and linguistic approaches to bible interpretation however the study at hand employed hermeneutic and social science criticism of the bible so as to generate proper meaning of the text in Matthew 5:21-26.

In the contemporary world anger is understood as an emotional state that may range in intensity from Mild irritation to intense fury and rage Elana (2007). It involves a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure or hostility which is both physiological and psychological response to a perceived threat to self or loved ones. Anger controls everybody regardless of who they are Wallace (2018). It is a universal and far reaching, touching us all in moments of crisis but we must control it for our own benefit.

It is a common human experience, and we all encounter it more often than we like to admit. Anger destroys true peace of mind or sense of wellbeing, and this is why it is viewed as a double-edged

sword which can harm the angered person and the target person or a group. Like Wallace, William (2003) asserts that, thousands of people all over the world are verbally abused physically assaulted, maimed or murdered every day because of anger and rage. Families are ruined, marriages ended, children traumatized, careers lost, opportunities missed, and personal and public property destroyed” due to anger. The author made an endeavour to explain the sociological impacts on anger which makes the emotion harmful to both the angered person and the community as well without engaging the biblical teaching in Matthew 5:21-26. However, the study at hand employed both psychological and sociological perspectives on anger in the contemporary world to hermeneutically analyse Jesus’ teaching on anger in Matthew 5:21-26.

This is not to posit that the current study is a groundbreaking social-scientific study of the Bible. There are many write-ups of scholarly and journalistic nature on this methodology. Maston and Reynolds (2018) have analysed the New Testament anthropologically. Among other things, this edited volume explores the anthropological ideas of the New Testament. It deals with basic human question like what it is to be human, essence of family life, Christological anthropology, among others. The same is the case with works of Labahn and Lehtipuu (2010). Whereas these two edited volumes are excellent pieces of work, their study is a documentation of history as seen from the perspective of an anthropologists.

The same pattern is followed by other Western scholars using different social scientific perspectives on the Bible. Norman K. Gottwald (1982), wrote about the sociological criticism of the Old Testament. Among other things, Gottwald deals with the social life of the people in the Bible, starting with the patriarchs and their migration patterns.

### **2.1.2 Conclusion**

The existing body of literature reveals the lack of a comprehensive examination of anger concerning the Bible and social sciences. Additionally, it highlights a distinct effort to creatively explore the connection between human emotional challenges, theories in social science, and religious texts. Bridging religious and social scientific perspectives on human issues is crucial for academia to align with real-world complexities. The ongoing study is an endeavour to appropriate proper anger management skills in Matthew 5:21-26 with knowledge derived from social science disciplines of psychology and sociology to come up with a balanced approach to solving anger related problems in the contemporary Uganda.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1.0 Introduction:**

This chapter entails the research design, methods and approaches that were used in writing this research.

### **3.1.1 Research Design**

The study is descriptive and analytical, using qualitative research approaches. The researcher described and analysed the Biblical text of Mathew 5:21-26, from the social science perspectives and related the study to the contemporary phenomenon of anger and murder. Using sociological and psychological perspectives of anger, the study attempts to hermeneutically assess the problem of anger in Matthew 5:21-26, and following the theoretical frame work of hermeneutics of appropriation, relate the study to the contemporary society.

### **3.1.2 Hermeneutical Methods and Frameworks**

The study follows the social science criticism of the Bible and hermeneutics of appropriation. This methodology is relevant to the study because of the phenomenon of anger being both social and psychological problem, which is prevalent in the contemporary society. Jesus' teaching is a timeless lesson which has to be embraced by all generations, especially as we struggle with anger related emotions and consequences. Besides, the study of Matthew in contextual hermeneutics of appropriation is one way the academia makes the classic texts like Matthew 5:21-26 relevant. It is a way of enlivening the Bible through academic trajectories. Suffice to state, the Bible is one of the most popular and read books by Africans. Ancient biblical narratives deal with real human situations like relationships, matters of life and death, crises, joy and sorrow, among others, which

may have important lessons or contribution to our dealings with human issues in the modern society.

In this way, the study describes how anger is perceived in sociological and psychological terms. Works of various writers from these fields of study are reviewed and descriptively presented. In the final analysis, attempt is made to read the text of Matthew in collaboration with the psycho-social perspectives of anger and murder. This is in a way similar to comparative documentary analysis, but rather different because the ancient Bible text is written in different time-space and for a different purpose and audience, unlike contemporary social-science documents which are research based and academic oriented. The attempt in this research is to integrate the Bible knowledge and teachings with contemporary academic findings, as part of the ongoing creative academic efforts and endeavours to make sense of the scriptures in the contemporary world. Religious materials have often been associated with matters of faith and idealism. Yet, such materials like the Bible are layered with real life issues, which if embedded in scientific analyses can generate meaningful etymological values and resources in dealing with contemporary life challenges.

### **3.1.3 Hermeneutics of Appropriation**

Hermeneutics of appropriation is a theory developed by Rugwiji (2020), as a way of reading, interpreting and transmitting of ideas and practices between the Ancient Biblical text and a contemporary situation.

Hermeneutics of appropriation applies themes (hence, thematic analysis) which is different from contextual biblical hermeneutics that largely center on contemporary interpretation of biblical

narratives (Rugwiji 2020). Like the Contextual Biblical Hermeneutics, Hermeneutics of Appropriation involves a deliberate attempt to instigate contemporary concepts and ideas into reading the biblical text but the difference is that rather than causing an interface between the context of text and reader's context, "Hermeneutics of Appropriation is an approach of biblical interpretation which deals with appropriation of relevant themes in a contemporary situation" (Rugwiji 2020). It involves the interpretation of scriptures scientifically with a view of applying a theme to a differing context from which it originated.

It conveys the 'other' possible meaning by utilizing relevant themes from the biblical text (Rugwiji 2020). According to Rugwiji, (2020) the Bible is an ancient text and therefore cannot be appropriated in a contemporary context in a straight-forward way; biblical themes can. He contends that ancient biblical themes can apply in every context but ancient biblical contexts don't. Critical New Testament scholarship should interrogate themes such as: politics, power, democracy, economy, poverty and suffering among societies (Rugwiji 2013). The use of appropriation therefore, "offers an important starting point in understanding the different emphases in Biblical Hermeneutics" (West, 2010:22). For the purpose of this study, I employed a Hermeneutics of Appropriation; in which the shared knowledge values generated from the social scientific criticism of Matthew 5:21-26 is contextually appropriated as theological reflections on the problem of anger.

#### **3.1.4 The Social Science Criticism of the Bible**

According to Barton (1997), social science criticism of the Bible is a development from historical criticism. As such, it is part of the overall task of interpreting the Bible texts in its ancient Near Eastern milieu. But unlike historical criticism, which asks historical questions of "dating,

authorship, language, genre, historical background, the history of the tradition, and the particularity of historical events narrated in the texts,” social-scientific criticism focuses on different questions related to social patterns and taken-for-granted cultural conditions most likely to have characterized the Bible world. In essence, “Social-scientific criticism of the Bible is that phase of the exegetical task which analyses the social and cultural dimensions of the text and of its environmental context through the utilization of the perspectives, theory, models, and research of the social sciences” Barton (1997). According to Neufield (2019), social-scientific approaches to the Bible is based on the view that “meaning in language is embedded in a social system that is shared and understood by speakers, hearers, and readers in the communication process.”

The role of the social-scientists approaching the bible is to investigate the social features of the form and content of the texts along with the factors that gave shape to them. He or she seeks to explore and expose the intended consequences of the communication process. It is from these perspectives that the text of Matthew 5:21-26 is being examined. The study makes an effort to explore and expose the communicative ideas on Jesus’s teachings on the problem of anger and murder, and how these communicative ideas are shared by the ancient audience, and the contemporary reader and believer of the Bible. Salient in this examination is the phenomenon of anger, which seems universal, historical, human, spiritual and above all dangerous. The profound message in the social scientific study of the text is anger and its consequences, and how to deal with the reality of anger.

### **3.1.5 Instruments of Data Collection**

#### **Documents:**



The primary data collection method used in this study is document analysis. This is because the study is library based. This research method involves analysing documents as the data (Grant 2022). This was the preferred method for data collection because of the complexity of the research topic, which would have otherwise called for enormous financial and time resources to carry an extensive field research. Documentary analyses has been acclaimed as a resource method that mitigates some of the challenges associated with other data collection methods like interviews and observations. Because it involves reading pre-existing materials, there is less or no human contacts which may call for ethical approvals (Morgan 2021). Library materials like textbooks, journal articles, newspapers, magazines and Bible commentaries and lexicons were used as the study materials. Attempts are made to glean relevant information to back up the arguments in this study. Internet sources especially digital magazines and newspapers served as a key source of information.

Newspapers were used to generate ideas on the contemporary manifestations of anger and murder in various parts of Uganda. It was observed that different newspapers worth noting (New vision, daily monitor and the independent among others) were filled with anger related cases which manifested the seriousness of the problem of anger and its related consequences in the contemporary situation. Stories in both printed and unprinted newspapers were key in portraying the sociological impacts on anger. Murder, insults, property destruction and distortion of relations resulting from aggravated anger were reached at using information reported in the different Newspapers.

In conclusion, the study recognizes the timeless relevance of Jesus' teachings on anger and murder and endeavours to integrate biblical wisdom with contemporary academic insights. By employing

social science criticism of the Bible, the research delves into the social and cultural dimensions of the text, shedding light on the communicative ideas behind Jesus's teachings and their applicability to both ancient audiences and modern readers.

## **CHAPTER 4: THE CONTEXT OF JESUS' TEACHING IN MATTHEW 5:21-26**

### **4.1.0 Introduction:**

In this chapter, the study shall focus on the socio-cultural environment in which the context of Matthew lies. To have a deeper meaning of Matthew 5:21-26, it is important to understand the realities that informed the teaching and its immediate audience. The section examines key words in the text, the religious and cultural milieu of the text in order to understand its purpose and force. Context plays an important role in hermeneutics. As Barsalou (1982) holds, context offers an important aspect in understanding the meaning of words. For one to really understand the proper meaning of a word, a concept or a statement it must be put into the proper context in which it was said.

Bible context involves understanding both the words surrounding the Biblical passage you are studying and the environment, history, culture and literary devices used as well. Spinoza (2004) confesses that, the historical context upon which a text was formed is fundamental in Biblical interpretation of the meaning of the text. The historical context here denotes a number of things such as the author, place of publication, audience, origin and the circumstances that led to the production of a selected text. This study is crucial because it helps Biblical scholars explore the Bible in its vibrant colour rather than reading it in black and white. Reading a particular passage in the Bible or selecting a word in a discourse without reading the whole story is suicidal, for it can be used in an opposite way or out of context rather than bringing out the real implication of a word.

Bible verses are interconnected therefore each verse does not stand on its own but it is intrinsically connected to the whole flow of the Bible. When reading a certain passage in the Bible and trying

to examine the context of that verse, we ought to first pull back a little and look at the paragraphs before and after it so as to reveal the proper context upon which something is said. Originally verses and chapters were not part of the texts, but a latter innovation thus partial reading of the Bible is erratic for it does not convey the proper meaning it was meant to do. In the contemporary society there is a general problem especially with many Pentecostal preachers and the majority of Bible readers, who isolate Bible verses, interpret them literally to suit their needs. This is done without examining the context upon which the selected verse was produced leading to improper interpretation of the Bible. This chapter intends to overcome such issues by analysing the context upon which the selected passage was produced in order to come up with the right meaning of the text.

The bible in the contemporary world is regarded as a Library of books attributed to various authors and composed in different periods of time. Basing on the Christian view its composition was greatly inspired by the Holy Spirit Hill (1959). Whereas from the Scholarly lenses it was influenced by the atmosphere and the events that transpired at the time of its composition. The Bible is divided into two sections termed as the Testaments, The Old Testament and the New Testament. To derive proper meaning of the texts found in both Testaments, there is a need to make a flashback on the environment in which the text was produced.

When reading the Old Testament it is clear that God spoke to the prophets and the people directly. However as we turn to the New Testament there is a great change from God to Jesus Christ, from prophets (oral word of God) to scribes (written word). Ironside (1914) confirms the end of prophetic office in the Old Testament with prophet Malachi. On closure of the book of Malachi one is introduced to the New Testament by a gap of one page. It is a page which shadows a period

of four centuries equivalent to (400 years). Surburg (1975) holds that much of the New Testament events were influenced by this period which is known by many as the inter-testamental period, or 400 silent years. Carter (2006) claims that the 400 years identified as “silent years” is really not silent. A lot happened from the last book of the Old Testament to the appearance of John the Baptist baptizing in the New Testament. The last book in the Old Testament that is the book of Malachi presents a scanty population, desolate land, cities full of rubbish and poverty characterised the majority of the masses.

At the beginning of the New Testament the land seems highly populated under the control of a foreign power (Roman Empire), Greek was highly used throughout the Roman Empire and Hebrew was replaced by Aramaic. One wonders what exactly happened from Malachi to the New Testament, same environment, same population but different terminologies used. What happened? The numerous changes in the New and Old Testaments can be explained by the events that took place in between the testaments. There are various records that explain the events that transpired within this period like the records of Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel etc. found in the Old Testament. These events are also obtained by reading the inter-testamental literature such as the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Philo and Josephus’ writings and the Dead Sea scrolls, which influenced much of the New Testament writings.

The New Testament revealed a new face of Jewish community embedded with new facts and situations. It also brought on scene a new figure called Jesus Christ whose life, ministry, death and resurrection forms the central part of the synoptic gospels (Mathew, Mark and Luke). Jesus Christ also known as Jesus of Nazareth (Mark 1:24) was a first century Jewish preacher and a religious leader. He was born during the reign of King Herod the Great around 4 or 6 BC and

lived in Palestine in the first century AD under the foreign rule of the Romans. Carter (2006) writes that, these texts are produced in a world dominated by a foreign power (Roman Empire) in the decades between 50 and 100 in the first century. Jesus Christ claimed to be the divine son of the most High God (Matt. 11:25, Mark 1:1), this brought him opposition from the teachers of the law (Pharisees) for they knew His parents that is Joseph and Mary from Nazareth.

The gospels (Mathew and Luke) present His birth as being divine (Matt 1:20, Luke 2:9). However Talbert (2010) assert that, it was a common practice in the “Greco-Roman precedents where the ancient Mediterranean people narrated stories of miraculous births between gods and humans”. Humans would beget children from gods. Outstanding personalities would be attributed to miraculous birth for instance King Alexander is believed to be a son of Jupiter Hammon. Arrian a second century AD writer says of Alexander the Great “I cannot suppose that a unique man like you was born without some divine influence” (Anab.7.30). Superiority over others would be linked to divine origin; this may have influenced the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ as well. He became popular because of his authoritative teachings, Power to forgive sins (Matt 9:2), performed a number of miracles and above all he was crucified, died but it is believed that He rose on the third day after his burial and He is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Jesus lived in the Jewish community of Judea, practiced Judaism and much of his teachings were influenced by the Jewish laws. He is believed to have died around AD 30 or 33 at the age of 33, however some say 36 years. Though He died at a young age his teachings and ministry remained a legacy not only in the Roman Province of Judea but across the world than any other figure of the time. The Roman Empire provides the religious framework and the context for the New Testament claims, language, structures, personnel and scenes upon which the texts are produced.

It is not by mistake that the New Testament contains titles that are unknown to the Jewish world but known in the Roman world such as Emperors, Provincial governors who acted as Roman leaders among others, it's due to the political, social, religious and economic influence of the Romans.

The Jews were subjected to a foreign rule which demanded each Jew to observe the Roman policies such as payment of Roman taxes. This led to the division among the Jews since there was a section of the Jews (Sadducees) deployed by the Romans to collect taxes on behalf of the Romans. Though it was the same group (Jews) they were divided alongside religious, political, economic and cultural lines due to differing ideas among the groups which instigated anger among many Jews. As earlier noted that Jesus lived at the time when the Jews were under Roman rule, his teaching was greatly inspired by the events of the time, and it is not surprising that Jesus quotes to his audience the Old Testament law against Murder which many of them understood plainly without unfolding the deeper meaning of the commandment which included anger. The life undergone by the Jews at the time influenced Jesus' teaching.

The book of Matthew presents Jesus of Nazareth giving a sermon on the mountain to His disciples about murder. In His teaching it is clear that anger is the root cause of murder and its related consequences. This is illustrated in the passage below obtained from (Matthew 5:21-26) and it is as follows; the text was obtained from the New International Version bible (NIV B)

*5:21: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment'.*

*5:22: But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or*

*sister, 'Raca' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

*5:23: Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and remember that your brother or sister has something against you,*

*5:24: leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.*

*5:25: "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer and you may be thrown into prison.*

*5:26: Truly I tell you; you will not get out until you have paid the last penn.*

In order to understand the selected text above there is need to dig into the environment or atmosphere that surrounded Jesus' teaching on anger. It is right to suppose that Jesus' teaching is based on various contexts such as the, historical, social-cultural and religious contexts. He introduced His teaching by quoting the Old Testament commandment about murder, (Ex. 20:13). "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment". This teaching was passed unto the disciples by Jesus Christ their master and it is part of the Sermon on the Mount. Critically, it implies that these were not Jesus' words but rather an earlier instruction given to the people long ago which Jesus used retrospectively. Therefore Jesus was not the first Rabbi to teach about murder and this is evidenced from the above quotation which proves that the teaching was not alien to his audience (disciples). He thus taught from known (Old Testament law) to unknown, simple to complex. Therefore Jesus' teaching on murder is influenced by the Old Testament teaching in the following ways:



#### **4.1.1 The Old Testament /Historical Context on Murder**

The historical context upon which the text on anger was formulated originated from the Old Testament teaching on Murder. According to the KJV dictionary murder is defined as the act of unlawful killing of a human being with premeditated malice done by a person of sound mind. The act of Murder was categorized into two that is intentional and accidental murder each was given a special punishment. For instance, intentional murder was punished by death of the culprit while accidental murder was punished by Exile. Leviticus 24:17, “Anyone who takes the life of a human being is to be put to death”. The person carrying out this act is known as a Murderer, killer, liquidator, slayer, terminator among others.

The term murder is a transliteration of the Hebrew verb “retzach” which can be translated as “to kill without justification” or “to kill unlawfully”. The verb can as well be used to mean laws of decency and family integrity like sexual immoralities such as incest, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality). As it is written in (Leviticus 20:10-21) .The punishment to the adulterous is death just as it is to the murderer. France (2007) asserts that, the Old Testament comprises the history of Israel. In order to understand the history of the Israelites then the Old Testament must not be ignored, for it is very fundamental in the life of the Israelites whom we refer to as the Jews in the New Testament.

The Jews trace their history from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God revealed himself to Abraham and made a number of promises to him. These promises were to be acquired on the principle that certain obligations be fulfilled, predominantly is the belief in Yahweh. The promise of land (Canaan) to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:7) which directly states that, “The Lord appeared to Abraham and said, “To your offspring I will give this land”. The Jews refer to

Abraham as their grandfather and claim to be the Chosen nation. As part of the covenant, God revealed to Abraham that his descendants will be strangers in a foreign country where they will be enslaved for four hundred years. Fortunately after this time, they will be freed and their oppressors were to be punished by Yahweh the God of Israel prior the liberation. The Israelites were to obtain the land that God promised to their ancestors.

When the Israelites left Egypt under the leadership of Moses, to the land that God promised Abraham their fore father, the Lord God gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites Smith (2014). Since they had increased in number and formed community laws were needed to avoid social evils that may crop up amongst them. These laws were to be kept so as to live in harmony with God and fellow Israelites. One of them is the decree prohibiting them, from killing. Barmaki (2013) claims that, it was a Taboo to murder before God. This commandment was aimed at promoting social harmony and emphasising the sanctity of human life as Grondelski (2003) affirms the morality envisaged in the commandments.

Thus the unlawful act of taking one's life can be seen from various perspectives, that is the religious context and on the other hand as a social context. Murder itself usurps God's power over creation and at the same time distorts harmony in the universe. The act of Murder is disastrous as it involves persecuting the weak. Throughout history God is presented as a fair Judge (Genesis 18:25) and is always at the side of the abused rather than the abusers. For peace to prevail in the world created by God decrees were put in place to guard and protect all life thus formulating the command against murder.

The Torah which comprises the Ten Commandments given to the Israelites by God demanded an act of love. The New Testament affirms Love as the greatest commandment. That is why it calls

one to love the Lord your God unceasingly with all your heart, soul and strength and at the same time calls for the love of one's neighbour as self. The act of love aimed at ensuring protection over life. Murders are enemies of love and to prevent the act of killing one must love genuinely.

The obedience to the commandments of God brings rewards and disobedience to the commandments is punishable. For example, (Exodus 20:5-) portrays an example of the commandment given by God to the Israelites which states, "You shall not bow down to idols or worship them; for I the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. Those who observe the commandments are to be rewarded but those who disobey the commandments are to be punished. At the introductory part of the sermon on the mountain Jesus said do not think that I have come to abolish the law but to fulfil its details. This reveals why Jesus carefully introduces his teaching by quoting what the law demanded, "you shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Further he used the adultery law to teach on lust. France (2007), In his commentary "The Gospel of Mathew and Judaic traditions", He mentions Rabbi Philo, Josephus, and Ben Sirah among others in their works deterring the Jews from any social activity/ emotional involvement that might evoke bad behaviour. It is from this background that Jesus quotes the Old Testament Law which his audience was familiar with. Murders are at the front of God's judgement and punishment.

The book of Numbers portrays various ways of killing that are regarded unlawful for example killing anyone outside the context of warfare with a weapon or with unarmed combat, shedding innocent blood or accidental killing required the accused to take asylum to another city (Deuteronomy 4:41, 19:3-10, Joshua 20:3) . The cities of refuge were put in place to safe guard

the one who kills unintentionally. However during time of war the Bible doesn't refer the actions of killing as Murder since it is done as means of defence. The act is also not regarded as murder if the victim was Israel's enemy.

The Torah (The first five books in the Old Testament) prohibits murder and whoever commits this primordial sin had to be punished: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed for in the image of God, God made mankind" (Genesis 9:6). This can be further illustrated by the popular Babylonian phrase "An eye for an eye", "tooth for tooth", "fracture for fracture" meaning that whatever you do unto someone it should be done unto you and at the same time it meant equality and justice. There are numerous killings in the Bible right from the creation story where the first act of murder is identified in the book of Genesis. Cain took the life of his brother Abel (Genesis 4:10-11) - "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand". This act led to judgment passed by God to Cain. He was put under a curse and driven into exile.

For God made man in his own image which means that Man shares the likeness of God and for every life which is lost an accountability must be given to Him, ( Gen 9:5 ) "And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being". Jesus in his teaching cautioned his audience about anger which was commonly expressed and undermined, it was okay to feel and demonstrate feelings of annoyance by the congregation but it was forbidden to kill, Jesus unbosomed anger to be deadly as murder and the cause of many evils in the society.

All capital offenses were punishable by destructive activities which involved slaying, killing and murdering. According to the Biblical law there were a number of offenses punishable by capital punishment. As Erez (1981) writes, “these offenses were classified into religious offenses such as violation of the Sabbath, idolatry and false accusations against the innocent and were punishable by death penalty”. The death penalty was rarely practiced by Jewish courts. Some teachers of the time such as, Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiba argued for its full extermination due to the fact that any death was seen as diminishing the image of God in man.

The act of Murder involved repayment for example following the Priestly code the victim’s next of kin (avenger of blood) is allowed to exact retribution on the suspect in a city of refuge. However upon the death of the high priest the avenger of blood ceased the right to revenge. Restrictions against revenge were put in place to safe guard the society against acts of murder. The Old Testament scriptures which Jesus and his listeners were aware of demanded for protection over life that is why he initiated his teaching from the Old Testament law against murder.

Life is sacred and abuse of it diminishes God’s power over creation. Every Human life matters and is known by God from before the foundation of the world. All human beings were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and made by him (Genesis 2:7) and known by Him (Jeremiah 1:5). The sanctity of life can further be understood using the Biblical narrative of the fall of man whereby in Gen 2:17 the Lord God commanded man to eat from any tree in the Garden of Eden except from the tree planted in the middle of the Garden the known as the “Tree of Life”. James (1966) reveals that the Tree of life was regarded to be sacred. The prohibition of man from eating fruits from the tree of life implies that life is very precious and holy. The eating of fruits from the Tree of life brought about Man’s punishment and suffering in the world passed on from one

generation to another. The rabbinical tradition further stress that, saving of a life is more valuable than honouring the biblical commandment on observing the Sabbath. Erez (1981) puts it that;

The sanctity of life is so central to Hebrew law that it requires even the desecration of the Sabbath or Yom Kippur (The holiest day in Jewish religion) in order to treat an injured one-hundred- year old person, whose death is imminent, even if treatment will prolong his life only by one hour or so.

Implicitly life is valuable that it may even call for violation of the Sabbatical law. It is a necessary evil to break the sabbatical law than having any of the smallest life lost. In the situation where life is in danger or ought to be lost, then the preservation of life is given priority. According to the Rabbinical tradition in the situation of a choice between committing murder and committing suicide it is better for one to “take own life than life of another person”. Barmaki (2013) added that Life and death are God’s prerogatives. It is God with power over all life, death occurs at the end of each life and by God’s will thus every life that is lost must be natural other than caused. All lives lost through unnatural means will require accountability before God. To affect this Jesus taught his audience about anger which can compromise one’s reasoning capacity and lure him or her into acts of murder.

The commandment that prohibited murder was strictly observed and whoever disobeyed it was taken to the court. This informs Jesus’ idea of taking the culprits of anger to courts of law. He was knowledgeable about the legal system of his time which called for punishment of law breakers. Since it was well known that the law must be observed from the time of Moses to the audience of Jesus’ time, he employed similar procedures to the victims of anger whose acts may as well result into murder. These punishments aimed at restoring order and deter others from committing similar offence. According to the Jewish Virtual library, shedding of blood is seen in the Jewish law as the gravest and most reprehensible of all crimes (cf. Maim. Guide, 3:41), killing was a very serious

offence and this is demonstrated in its sanction by capital punishment of the culprit. The commandment prohibiting murder can also be seen as a legal issue governing human relationships. The Ten Commandments can be categorised into two that is, the first four commandments that deal with man's duty to God and the remaining six relate to humans Smith (2014). However the decree condemning murder concerns God as the sole provider of life and at the same time the one in charge of all creation. Thus unlawful killing is an abuse of God's image in man and it destroys man's relationship with God and fellow man. To prevent this, Jesus explores the underlying factor that may lead to murder and he equates the murderer's punishment to that of the angered person.

After the destruction of Solomon's temple, the Israelites were captured and taken into exiles by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II (586-538). They strongly believed that the exile was due to their failure to observe the law. During the exile scribes emerged well acquainted with the law and explained the meaning of the sacred writings to the group of Jews. This might have formed a foundation of Jesus' statement that "you have heard that it was said ". For he knew the ways in which the law was passed on from one person to another. After the defeat of the Babylonians, Persians the Jews were granted freedom to go back to their ancestral land. Jews under the Persian rule enjoyed religious freedom for example they were allowed to worship their God and observance of the Jewish law. Jesus' teaching about murder and anger arises from the Jewish background of exile which frustrated majority of the Jews.

Relating murder to anger by Jesus Christ had a historical, social and religious background which He wanted his followers to know about so as to avoid sinning through being angry. In Mathew (5:21-26) Jesus Christ taught against anger which according to him is a root cause of murder.

(Genesis 4:6) It is clearly stated that prior to Cain's killing of his brother Abel angry feelings are identified in him by the Lord. It is right to suppose that the inner feelings of arousal caused by anger may lead one into action without which the action may have not been performed. Murder was prohibited by God in the Torah specifically in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:13) and whoever is pronounced guilty of shedding blood was taken to the court (Sanhedrin).

The teaching on murder has a social connotation in the way that it brings a curse to the culprit and the entire land. Numbers 35:33 states that, "Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it". Gen 4:8-15 brings out the story of two brothers that is Cain and Abel who offered sacrifices to God, however Cain's offering was not appreciated by God because he offered crops of poor quality. This antagonised their social relations which provoked Cain's anger. He became annoyed with his brother Abel for his offering was appreciated by God. Cain holds a grudge against his brother and planned to kill him. Cain's plan was successful and he killed Abel then the Lord God said to him "what have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.

Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the Earth" Genesis 4:8-15. Cain having killed his brother Abel he was put under a curse and the land where Abel's blood poured was cursed as well. Meaning that shedding of an innocent blood leads to a curse. However in the case where one is murdered mysteriously by anonymous figure but found in your land this is enough to bring disgrace to the land. A ritual must be performed by the Levitical priest so as to pronounce blessings



upon the land. Without this, the Land will be put under a curse, (Deuteronomy 21:1-9). This is because the Israelites and the Lord their God dwells on the land, acts of murder defile the land and makes God to abandon the land.

In a society where there is constant shedding of blood that society is pronounced immoral. It is characterized by hatred, gossiping, underdevelopment, poverty, drunkenness, high crime rate, and many other social evils. The world was created by a moral God and this is expected out of man since he shares the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Therefore, any form of immorality diminishes this image. In order to live in a socially moral world evils such as murder were prohibited by God for he knew that man was a social being, living in a given society, where laws must be enacted for harmony to prevail.

The act of Murder is a sign of hatred, selfishness, jealousy, spiritual immaturity, anger and above all is a disobedience of God who prohibited it and promoted love. Leviticus 19:18 says “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord - Prov 17:17, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity” - Prov 10:12, “Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs”). Shedding of blood is unholy and it destroys man’s relationship with God and in turn puts the culprit in sin leading to God’s judgment. In order to overcome all sorts of judgment that is God’s judgment and earthly judgment by courts one is bound not to kill which formed a basis for Jesus’ teaching about murder. Jesus said to the Disciples whoever is angry with a brother or a sister will be subjected to Judgment which is similar to those who murder implying that an angry person can as well be a murderer so to avoid this; one has to resist any form of anger for this can result into murder.

Barmaki (2013) note that, shedding of blood is a symbol of lawlessness in the society and criminality (Isaiah 1:15; Proverbs 1:16, 18), “Men of blood” are lawless criminals (2 Samuel 16:7-8; Proverbs 29:10), and “cities of blood” are places of corruption and wickedness (Nahemia.3:1). Homicide destroys the civilization of the world therefore it ought not to be done. Cities without laws that prohibit various forms of criminality are under chaos, innocent blood is shed, and false accusations are made, injustices practiced to sum it up all, they are simply covered up by all sorts of criminality. Thus the prohibition of murder by God aimed at achieving peace and harmony in the society leading to development. Jesus had it in mind that anger can turn good people into lawbreakers that is why he taught his audience about the repercussions of being angry worth mentioning is murder.

“You have heard..., that it was said to people long ago” implying that this decree was passed on to the listeners some time back. Therefore it is an historical command which the current listeners are aware of but due to the fact that they did not read it on their own .Its full message may have been distorted, misinterpreted or diluted. Since it was now second hand information to the listeners. (Exodus 24:6-7) states that, “Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar, then he took the book of the covenant and read it to the people. They responded we will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey”. This verse clearly spells out that most of the people to whom the law was given didn’t know how to read and write this explains why it was just read to them. The act of reading the law to the congregation partly reveal that the listeners were unable to read and above it was a style of preaching that scriptures were not read by anybody but attributed to certain people performing religious functions like priests and latter scribes.

In support the book of Nehemiah records how the law was read to the gathering at the feast of Tabernacles (Nehemiah 8:4-6); “Ezra the scribe stood upon on a wooden platform made for the purpose....And He opened the book of the law in the sight of all the people and when he opened it all the people stood up and Ezra praised the Lord, the Great God”. Jesus was familiar with the oral method of preaching which involved reading of the scriptures to the congregation and he knew that the teachers of the law did not give the full details of the Law thus missing out the interpreting and reading the law to the Israelites.

#### **4.1.2 The Jewish Court (Sanhedrin)**

As earlier indicated that the present study is an analysis of the text of Mathew describing the context of Jesus teaching on anger as the genesis of murder and other evils in the society .Jesus in his teaching revealed that culprits of murder and anger were to be taken to court. The Sanhedrin was the Jewish court responsible for religious and legislative duties among the Jews. Jesus’ teachings reveal that the culprits of murder and anger were to be subjected to judgment. (Matthew 5:22) “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, Raca, is answerable to the court...” To understand this statement, the historical nature of the court system in Roman- Judea province has to be analysed using the following questions; what was the nature of the court? What was the composition of the court? Who were the Judges? What punishments would be given to the law breaker?

The formation of courts was a divine decree among the Israelites ( Deuteronomy 16:18), “Appoint Judges and officials of your tribes in every town the Lord your God has given to you, they should be fair to the people and free from any form of bribery to ensure justice in the land your God is

giving you”. Courts were established to deter people from committing sins for they were physical and mandated to pass any judgment which scared people from sinning. Rabbi Kaplan (2009) asseverates that, seventy one members comprised the great Sanhedrin. Its beginning is traced way back in the days of Prophet Moses whom God instructed to gather seventy members for Him “gather for me 70 men of the elders of Israel and bring them to the Tent of meeting, so that they should stand there with you”. This is believed to be the first assembly (Sanhedrin) seventy elders Moses exclusive; on adding him they become seventy one which is the actual number of the Jewish Supreme Court. This number is fixed because it was instructed by God Himself. Whatever decree passed from God to the people is not questioned, and no one has the capacity to change it. It is from the superior to inferiors. All the members of the Assembly were to be ordained (Numbers 27:22-23) Moses did as God instructed him, “he took Joshua and made him stand before Eleazer the high priest and the entire assembly ...laid hands upon him as God had commanded”. This became a provision for future members joining the council.

The Sanhedrin a transliteration of the Greek word “synedrion” meaning sitting together, assembly, congregation or council. It was the Jewish court in charge of legal and religious matters. Petro (2011) asserts that, the Sanhedrin initially dealt with a number of tasks like administration, legislative and jurisdiction. Danby (1919) maintain that, “The Sanhedrin implies treats of the higher legislative courts, their constitution, authority and the methods of procedure”. It was the highest court of appeal and it collaborated with the smaller courts to ensure equality among the Jews. The court system in Judea comprised of three levels that is, the Supreme Court was the Great Sanhedrin with seventy one (71) judges followed by lesser courts with twenty three (23) judges and the lower courts consisted of only three (3) Judges. The lower courts also known as the Beth Din court which dealt with civil and criminal matters which required minimum scourging

or small fines. These fines influenced Jesus' teaching in Matthew where he stated that the victim of anger shall be subjected to payment of a penny. Matthew 5:26 indicate that once peaceful means of settling matters have failed then a price must be paid so as to meet the penalty for the crime committed. There existed different crimes handled by the three courts as attested by Rabbi Hirshberg (1926) the Jewish court in Judea had three levels each handling specific cases. Minor cases were handled by the lower courts and at times they would be handled as a private matter. The lesser court of 23 Judges dealt with normal capital offenses while the greater Sanhedrin handled complicated matters and offenses of National importance. The number of Judges in all the three levels of the court was never an even number but odd number, this was done on purpose to avoid draw. Danby (1919) affirms that, "The court must not be divisible equally". One would be acquitted in case one judge say the suspect is guilty whereas the other two says, He is innocent. On the other hand one would be convicted in case two judges pronounce him guilty whereas one says he is innocent. The court was based on the rule of the majority against minority.

The Supreme Court (Sanhedrin) was situated in the Jerusalem Temple in the hall of Hewn Stones. It was located in Jerusalem the Jewish capital city and it was only one. The lesser courts of 23 Judges existed in the vast centres and cities, lower courts (Beth Din) were located at the gates of the small towns and existed in all towns in and outside Ancient Palestine where the Jews lived. The Assembly was under the lordship of a High priest also known as "NASI" or President. At the time of Jesus, the high priest was Caiaphas and he belonged to the Sadducee party (Matt 26:3). Below the president was a vice president then followed by Elders who acted as Judges.

According to Rabbi Hirshberg (1926) says, For one to be eligible for membership in the lower courts of three Judges, age was considered, twenty five (25) years was the minimum age of

qualification. From Twenty-Five (25) years to forty (40) years one was permitted to serve as a judge in the court of twenty-three (23) judges and lastly for one to serve in the greater Sanhedrin would be Forty (40) years and above. The Great Assembly met regularly except on the Sabbath and on festival days as stated by Petro (2011). The Sanhedrin comprised of members with special qualities, they were to possess knowledge of the Torah, wisdom, humility, good reputation discernment, loving and above all God fearing. (Exodus 18:21) "Choose able men amongst the people, men with reverence for God, trustworthy, honesty and make them officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Rabbi Kaplan (2009) says, In case of any ineffectiveness of the council member, replacement was lawfully allowed. For instance Members who developed health issues and those who were very old would be substituted.

During the court processions, members sat in semi-circular rows to make it easier to view one another. There existed two clerks who sat at the either end carrying out secretariat work, taking minutes of each meeting. Students of law would join the court sitting in the rows opposite to the members of the council. The accused took the middle place facing the Elders. The president sat on a raised place facing the judges. The defendant dressed in a black garment and wore scruffy hair. It was a way of identifying him or her and a form of torture. All the members were expected to be present at any ruling. The credibility of the ruling depended upon the presence of all members of the council. Absence of any member would make the judgment ineffective therefore a substitute would be appointed in case of absenteeism. The authenticity of any judgment also depended upon the availability of the Council president. His absence would make the ruling in valid. To avoid the unauthenticity of rulings all members of the Sanhedrin were instructed to be around at any ruling.

The concept (Sanhedrin) is commonly used in the New Testament for about 22 times along with elders (Luke 22:66, Acts 22:5). It is mostly identified in the passion narratives of the gospels during the trial of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. It is as well identified in the book of acts as a judicial court which investigates and persecutes the infant Christian church. Membership to the Sanhedrin is less known however after the destruction of the second temple representation was by appointment.

Rabbi Kaplan (2009) claims that, the council had a mandate to keep and interpret the Oral Torah. This was done by the professionals such as the scribes who had expertise in matters regarding the Law. These courts worked hard to ensure social justice and harmony in the Jewish communities. And they acted on behalf of the Greek and Roman powers to represent the affairs of the Jewish people. The members of the Sanhedrin though not educated as the modern judges they were greatly respected for their superior reasoning capacity and investigation. They worked hard for justice rather than monetary gains, it was after thorough investigation that one was convicted, by the court rather than the public, however after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Romans most of these courts ceased functioning and the few that were permitted to operate had to obtain three-judge courts to ensure the observance of justice among the Jews.

During Jesus Christ's time, the Jewish court comprised of members from the Jewish sects. The Sadducees had the highest percentage of membership compared to the Pharisees. These were the existing religio-political parties at the time. Most writers belonged to the Pharisee party. They were the minority in the council. Philo says there were six thousand Pharisees during the first century. They spent most of their time in the Synagogue and they were referred to as the people of the Law. There existed a number of people claiming to be the messiah. So, the council was

obliged to point out the expected Messiah of the Jews. The New Testament depicts messengers assigned to go to John the Baptist to find out whether he was the awaited messiah (John 1:19-22). These were commissioned by the council.

The court worked hard to ensure justice and equity among the Jews. Life was given a greater consideration over death. As the Mishnah observes that, a religious court that executed someone once in 70 years was regarded destructive. This reveals that Judaism is anti- murder and that capital punishment is more seemingly theoretical than practical. This explains the various legal requirements demanded by the rabbis of the Talmud in order to carry out capital punishment like existence of witnesses, warning of the victim before he commits the offence, a well detailed description of the circumstances surrounding the offense among others all were put in place so as to hinder the occurrences of the sentence. Concerning the topic on capital punishment, The Rabbinical literature assert that,

A Sanhedrin which executes once in seven years is known as destructive. Rabbi Eleazer Ben Azariah says, "Once in seventy years". Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiba say, "If we were in Sanhedrin no man would ever have been executed". Rabbi Shimeon Ben Gamliel says, "They (Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiba) would cause the proliferation of blood shedders in Israel" [Makkot 1, 10].

This passage reveals that the law regards to capital punishment was more theoretical than practical. It was maintained in the Jewish law to deter people from committing capital offenses but in actual sense this punishment was uncommon in the Jewish courts of law. It was meant to regulate people's behaviours in order to achieve peace and harmony in the society.

Further the Mishnah requires that capital cases had to be decided by a Sanhedrin of 23 Judges. If the conviction in a capital case was unanimous but rendered too quickly, the accused was acquitted



on the assumption that the judges had not adequately considered the possibility of the defendant's innocence. Danby (1919) stated that "The Jewish court system was to be fair and just while carrying out judgment as it was known as the counsel for defence".

Therefore various procedures and impediments we put forward so as to belittle the occurrence of Murder in the Jewish communities. For instance the idea of witnesses was established in courts of law to ensure that life of the suspect is protected against unlawful killing. This was done by investigating the circumstances surrounding the crime. The testimony from more than one person who was present at the scene. Wells (2004) defines a testimony as an oral statement uttered by an individual to act as evidence before courts of law. The biblical world demanded for oral testimonies before conducting any trial. The spoken words acted as first-hand information compared to the written words that is why the oral testimony was preferred. Ancient near East courts called for a judicial oath which they would regard as testimony Wells (2004). He further said that the oath involved swearing by one or more deities to confirm the veracity of the matter. Two witnesses were demanded for any capital offense such as murder (Numbers 35:30; Deut 19:15) and decision made was based on the veracity of their testimonies. They had to testify that they were present at the scene of the crime which is under investigation and should have seen all the material elements with their eyes rather than basing on speculations. Deuteronomy 17:6 states that;

On the testimony of two or three witnesses a person is to be put to death, but no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness. The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting that person to death, and then the hands of all the people

If a witness has a grudge against the defendant then decides to accuse him falsely, (Deuteronomy 19:18-19), indicate that "The Judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness

proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against the fellow Israelite, then do to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party”. Witnesses were vital in a capital offense and not everyone would be, as Erez (1981) writes: The two witnesses had to be free adults, sound in mind and body, of unquestioned integrity, and devoid of any family relationship to the defendant and of any personal interest in the case.

This means that witnesses were important for their testimonies involved life. For that reason not everyone was permitted to bear witness in the courts of law. Pigeon-flyers, dice-player, a usurer, relatives to the suspect like a brother, paternal or maternal uncle, brother in law, step son, father in law, enemies, friends were not regarded as witnesses. This is because any relation would tamper with the testimony leading to unfair ruling. The witnesses played a vital role in courts, if their testimonies were authentic then the suspect would be convicted, however false witness would lead to conviction of an innocent person and this is against the Ten Commandments, “though shall not accuse anyone falsely”. The double sins (unfair judgment based on inaccurate testimony and false accusations against an innocent person) committed by the one who gives a false testimony can only be handled by having the erroneous person be treated in the same manner as the suspect would.

Additionally, the witnesses were supposed to be keen that each one of them was present and observing whatever was going on, if one of them was not attentive then their testimony was pronounced invalid. They were to be observing from the same place and must have warned the suspect before committing the offense that what he or she is perpetrating to do would result into a capital punishment. If the suspect was not warned by the two witnesses then the death penalty could not be passed. Criminals would be imprisoned or exiled rather than be executed this is because according to the Jewish law life is the most valuable gift that God gave man so must be

protected by all means. Non capital offenses would be tried by all except capital offenses would be handled by professionals who were regarded as experts in law. These included priests, Levites who belonged to the Greater Sanhedrin. While dealing with non-capital offenses a descending order was followed, starting from the seniors to juniors however capital cases demanded for an ascending order from the juniors to seniors. The order in passing the rulings in capital cases started with the juniors to prevent dependence on the elders' views. Since capital cases involved death penalty, strictness was observed while handling such cases to avoid the execution of an innocent person.

After the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, AD 70 by the Romans and the dispersion of the Jews, the Great Sanhedrin reconvened in Jamnia. Its powers were greatly reduced, remaining with authority in religious matters. The supremacy of the council over legislative and political issues was no more. Petro (2011) holds that, "the court lost power over capital punishment to the Roman Governor during the time of Jesus". This explains why Jesus Christ was taken to Pontius Pilate who was the presiding governor of the Roman province of Judea (Mark 15:1-15, Mt 27:11, Lk 23:1-23). The Romans appointed leaders who presided over national matters scrapping off the role from the council.

#### **4.1.3 Punishments to Culprits of Capital Offenses.**

Following Jesus' teaching on anger, it is clear that the repercussion of murder and anger is punishment (Judgment). It is being short-sighted that one may think of Judgment without punishment or rewards. Where there is judgment one may be convicted or set free. In the Ancient Near East there were numerous offenses punishable by a death penalty worthy noting is murder

(the unlawful act of taking one's life). This punishment was administered in various forms as explained:

The Bible presents mainly three ways in which capital punishment was carried out that is, stoning, burning and hanging. Stoning was majorly a judicial form of execution in biblical times. Edna (1981) observes that, "the means of stoning is not differentiated whether stones would be thrown at the perpetrator nor the perpetrator be thrown at stones". What is clear is that, this form of execution was carried out by the entire assembly starting with the witness and it was done to all without discrimination whether native or foreigner, (Lev 24:16; Deuteronomy 21:21). This decree aimed at ensuring equality among the people that is a native or foreigner, rich or poor, man or woman, noble or commoner, slave or freed, rather than carrying out prejudice based on social status.

Burning was another method of execution performed to those found guilty of capital punishment and it was also done to magnify the punishment of stoning (Joshua 7:25). It was a usual form of penalty in the Old Testament (Genesis 38:24). Leviticus 20:14 reflects that the culprits of incest specifically sexual relations between mother in-law and son in law should result into death by burning them in the fire. When one was pronounced guilty over such an offense then the victim would be stoned to death as the punishment for breaking the family guides to morality. The third methodology used to punish one found guilty of a capital offense was hang (Deuteronomy 21:22) the Bible reveals that a person who dies through hang should be buried that same day because anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse, (Deuteronomy 21:23). It is not surprising to find the same form of punishment was passed onto Jesus of Nazareth, due to the fact that it was a usual way of punishing those found guilty of committing capital offense. Hanging did not start

with Jesus Christ it was practiced earlier before his coming to deter others from committing a similar offence since it was done in the open space.

Capital punishment was evident in the Roman Empire accompanied by the establishment of prisons for those awaiting trial. Executions were done in the public and the means of execution were tormenting for the victim and frequently a form of entertainment for the bystanders especially the Roman officials. This is evidenced by the use of execution scene by some people as decorations in their homes. Prisons were put in place for the accused waiting for trial and the convicted awaiting execution. The idea of imprisonment was unknown form of punishment in the Roman Empire. The form of punishment in the Roman Empire depended upon the social status of the accused and the kind of offense committed, punishment ranged from monetary fine, labour on public project, exile or death of the convicted.

The penalty of a given offense depended on your citizenship status and the social class where one belonged. Ashby (n.d) asserts that, Roman citizens belonging to the Senatorial and equestrian category were given lighter punishments compared to ordinary citizens worse to non-citizens. However if the victim was a slave the punishment would be more severe than to a free stranger. Roman citizens were categorised into two groups that is; The *Honestiores* consisted of senators, equestrians, soldiers and local official, others belonging to none of these categories were *Humiliores* regardless of the wealth. Penalties were accorded basing on the category where one belonged the *Honestiores* would be exiled or beheaded once convicted whereas the *Humiliores* would die by burning, beasts or crucifixion. The *Humiliores* unlike the Non-citizens were accorded a better treatment. Local courts existed in all the province of Italia, each court handled

specific crimes, most violent crimes and all property crimes comprising ordinary people were considered “civil matters”.

The provincial governor had full control over the people in his province. He was however expected to act with some level of honour, excessive corruption and mistreatment of citizens would lead to his Trial in Rome. Crucifixion was a form of punishment administered during the Roman period to the Non Roman-citizens due to its humiliating factor. It was for slaves and it involved torture of the culprit. The victim was hung without clothes (half naked) publicly on the cross. It was meant to deter the public from committing a similar offense. The Roman cross upon which one would be hanged differs from the commonly known Christian cross. The Christian cross has a vertical beam transacted by a perpendicular beam above the middle of the vertical beam however the Roman cross used for hanging criminals was an upright stake upon which culprit was bound with hands above their heads most likely taking a T-shape. Crucifixion was real not a fiction as many ancient sources refer to it. Josephus for example describes a number of crucifixions that took place in Judea at about his time. It was a slow but agonizing form of death. The suffocation which one was exposed to would lead to death.

#### **4.1.4 The Religious Context under Which the Text Was Written**

Jesus lived at the time when Jews were categorised into Religious sects and He conflicted with these groups on a number of issues. Evenly the different religious groups often conflicted with each other along the practice and interpretation of the Law which culminated into quarrels amongst these groups and demonstration of feelings of annoyance resulting into murder. Whenever one’ teaching differed from that of the teachers of the law, they would look for ways of trapping and suing that person, and ensure that the person is convicted and later killed. This is

affirmed by the killing of Jesus Christ whose teachings varied from the teachings of these religious sects which led to his arrest and eventual death by crucifixion. Jesus was crucified due to allegations from these groups. The inter-testamental period witnessed the emergence of new Jewish sects such as the Sadducees, Pharisees, Scribes, Essenes, zealots among others. These influenced Jesus' teaching on anger. They changed the face of the New Testament from the Old Testament where such groups were unheard of. These groups were influential in the Jewish life especially in religious and political matters. After the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 586 BC the Jews attributed this phenomenon to their disobedience of the law. This made them to devise means to prevent such event from befalling again. The exile made their focus to shift from sacrifice in the Temple to full observance of the Law of Moses hence changing attention from the priestly acts to scribe instructors of God's law.

The Law became difficult (it involved many details) and hard to comprehend and this created a need for professionals who would interpret it. This led to rise of new groups which claimed to be experts in the law worthy noting were the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees whose major task was to read and interpret the law to the congregation. In most cases the law would be second information to the listeners due to the fact that not everyone would be allowed to interpret it and in doing so, the law experts were highly treasured and this made the majority to be proud and assumed full authority over the law which Jesus questioned in Matthew 5:19-20.

#### **4.1.5 The Scribes**

The Scribes emerged as a result of the neglect of the priestly roles by the Priests Schams (1998). This new group took over priestly duties of teaching the congregation the law of God handled to the Israelites through Moses. The priests had neglected their roles and concentrated on the study

of the pagan cultures due to the Greek and Roman influences which created a gap in matters of the study of scriptures Schams (1998). The Scribes rose to fill this gap. They were lawyers whose major task was to copy the scriptures. They concentrated on the law and all that concerns it in full details. They later shifted from copyists to teachers of the scriptures (Ezra was a scribe, Neh 8:2-8). They comprised of professional writers and interpreters of the Scriptures.

They were few and formed a small and exclusive class. They were mouthpiece and representatives of the people. They captured the attention of congregation by their professional reading and interpretation of scriptures. The scribes were accorded title of honour “My Master” translated as Rabbi in Hebrew language. This title was also attributed to Jesus in John 3:2 by Nicodemus who belonged to the Pharisee party. They were known by different names depending on the five periods of existence. They were called Sopherim 458 to 300 BC from the time of return from Babylonian captivity lasting to the demise of Simon, The Tanaim (repeaters or teachers of the law in the New Testament times, The Amoraim (Hebrew the expounded wise men, doctors of the law who were authorised to record and expositors of the Halachah (220 A.D to the completion of the Babylonian Talmud about 500 AD).

The Saboraim (from Hebrew, To Think or to discern) the teachers of the law after the conclusion of the Talmud 500 to 657 A.D, The Gaonim the last doctors of the law in rabbinic succession from 657 A.D to 1034 up to the time of Jesus Christ, Jewish law became an extensive and complicated science. The scribes conducted their teachings in synagogues, the Temple and other places in the outer court (Lk 2:46, John 18:20, Mk 14:48). They acted as judges in courts of law, and they would pass sentence in the court of justice. They were members of the Sanhedrin.



#### **4.1.6 The Pharisees**

The term Pharisees also meant the “separated ones”. They separated themselves from any external influences of the Greeks and Romans, remained holy excluding themselves from tempting actions like corruption. The Pharisees are believed to have originated from the priestly group of Jewish separatists during the Maccabees revolt. The revolt started when the Jewish priests decided to observe their true worship rather than worshipping Antiochus Epiphanes. They stayed away from Greek and roman influences so as to practice the teachings of their religion. Petro (2011) contend that, this group comprised of mainly lay people and they were the minority in the council. Philo says that they were six thousand Pharisees during the first century. They spent most of their time in the Synagogue and this accorded them a lot of respect from the people.

They were teachers of the Law who taught the Jewish children in synagogues and mainly matters concerning the law. The Pharisees were greatly known as the people of the Law. They observed three doctrines that is immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body and the existence of Angels and demons unlike their counterparts the Sadducees who greatly neglected the three doctrine. On a number of occasions this group conflicted with Jesus as regarding to the interpretation and practice of the law (Mk 2:24, 3:6, 7:5, Mt 22:15, 23:1, Mt 12:2,Lk 6:2). Jesus charged them for emphasizing the traditions of Men rather than the real intention of the law. Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, the great teacher Gamaliel, and his student Saul who later came to be known as St Paul belonged to this group.

#### **4.1.7 The Sadducees**

The Sadducees also meant the “righteous ones”. They emphasized the written law and rejected all books except the Torah (five law books of the Old Testament). They were more occupied by political matters at the expense of religious matters. The Sadducees belonged to the priestly group of religious leaders. They were unfriendly to the Pharisees and would only unite upon a common threat (Jesus). They were considered hypocrites because, “externally wore religious identifiers yet internally were true politicians”. They were less liked compared to the Pharisees due to their interactions with the ruling party (Romans). This group obtained a lot of wealth from the Romans whom they worked with and betrayed their fellow Jews. They were in charge of Temple administration and ritual ceremonies. The Sadducees comprised of educated people and were the majority in the Council.

Matthew 5:1 reveals that Jesus’ teaching (sermon on the mountain) took place on a mountain. One may wonder why Jesus chose a mountain instead of a plain or valley. France (2007) observes that, Judea was mountainous which explains why Jesus carried out his teaching at the mountain. Throughout his teachings it is evident that Jesus was a good teacher who taught from known to unknown, Judeans were used to mountainous environment, so it is not surprising that Jesus carried out his teaching up on the mountain for the audience were familiar with such an environment. The existence of different religious groups among the Jews issued in misunderstandings, for each group would conflict with each other along doctrines, beliefs and practices. This fuelled feelings of annoyance which Jesus witnessed and influenced his teaching in Matthew 5:21-26 about anger as the underlying factor for murder.

#### **4.1.8 The Political Context under Which Text Was Produced**

The New Testament texts composed between 50 and 100 in the first century, originated in a world dominated by the Roman Empire. The Empire constitutes the world in which the New Testament was born and it formed the world in which the early Christians lived. France (2007) holds that, the Romans regarded themselves superior than any other race at the time. Jesus Christ who is the central figure of the New Testament texts especially the gospels lived at the time when Judea was under the Roman control.

The control of the Jews by the Romans influenced much on the New Testament writings. The characters of the Empire are identified in New Testament texts as Emperors (Luke 2:1), provincial governors (Mark 15:25-39) and soldiers (Acts 10). The Jews subjected to this rule were powerless, oppressed, and voiceless and had no hope of changing the imperial system, Carter (2006). Dominion was ensured by the strong military strategies of the Romans. They employed military threats (violence) so as to make the Jews compliant to the Roman policies, Carter (2001).

In Matthew Jesus warned the disciples against use of violence or military power and called for peaceful relationship between the Jews and the Roman authority. Douglas (1994) affirms that “Jesus revealed that the leadership of the governors was performance of God’s work and whoever opposes them was indirectly opposing God”. Similarly Rome claimed its Empire was ordained by the gods. 1 Peter 2:17 calls upon the early Christians to “Fear God, honour the Emperor”. This implies that there was a thin line between politics and Religion. Jesus a religious leader was crucified by the Romans because He posed a threat to the Roman system (political). Further Jesus described the brutality of the Romans in Matthew 20:25, “you know that the rulers of the Gentiles

lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. The ruthless nature of the army made the Jews uncomfortable and desired to have self-rule.

The Roman Empire shaped the political, economic, social and religious framework and the context for the New Testament claims, language, structures, personalities and the scenes. Further Carter (2006) asserts that, The Empire was very hierarchical, with vast disparities of power and wealth. It dominated people around the Mediterranean Sea in the first century, extended to Britain in the Northwest through the present-day France and Spain to Europe, Turkey and Syria in the East, and along North Africa to the South. The Empire is believed to have dominated an estimated population of 60 to 65 million people belonging to different ethnicities and cultures. The minority ruling class life was comfortable however the majority none elites life was very troublesome. The empire was an aristocratic where power concentrated in the hands of a few, about 2 to 3 percent of the population. They shaped the social affairs, exercised power, controlled wealth and enjoyed high status.

Judea was subjected to foreign rule and it became part of the Roman Empire in 63 BC as part of the province of Syria. Udoh (2005) says that, this happened after the war where Aristobulus the second was defeated by Pompey the Great with the help of the Jewish loyal forces leading to loss of Jewish independence. In the Ancient world, the political matters moved hand in hand with the economic issues, of a particular group of people. This is not different with the Roman province of Judea. The empire was an agrarian one; its wealth and power were based on agriculture. It was hereditary rather than democratic government. They exploited cheap labour with slaves, small scale farmers; local and imperial elites levied taxes on the subjects by taxing the production, distribution and consumption of goods Carter (2006).

The Jews were subjected to different foreign powers which included; Pompey (63-47 BCE), under Julius Caesar (47-44 BCE), Cassius and Antony (44-37 BCE), under Herod the Great and his successors (37 BCE-6 CE) then the Roman Governors (6-70 CE). After the Jewish loss of independence to the foreign powers which can as well be synonyms to colonisation, new policies were introduced to the colonised state. For instance, under Pompey, the Jews were introduced to a new policy which demanded the payment of tribute to Rome. The Jews at the time lost their sovereignty politically and economically to the Romans. Initially the Jews paid tithes and offertory into the temple treasury this was done as a way of supporting the priests who were responsible for religious matters of the Jews.

Further, Herod the Great imposed more taxes onto the Jews. This came to be known as a system of triple taxation; Udoh (2005). He says that Herod's own excessive taxes were paid followed by the payment of tribute to Rome as well as the payment of the Jewish temple taxes and tithes. According to Richard.A. Horsley in Udoh's article, to Caesar what is Caesar's he writes that, "Herod exploited people economically to maintain his lavish court, extensive building projects and his astounding munificence to the imperial family and to Hellenistic cultural causes". Rome's world was very exploitative and enriching a few but destructive for the rest. The poor were supposed to pay numerous taxes yet those who were rich were exempted from paying taxes. This propelled Jesus to utter the statement in Luke 8:18, "To those who have, more will be given, and from those who don't have, even what they seem to have will be taken away."

The peasants experienced excessive economic pressure since Herod increased taxes and it was the base of his economic strength. There were various taxes imposed on the Jews at the time such as: poll tax, income tax and property tax, salt tax, crown tax, sales and occupational tax, house tax,

custom duties and sundry payments. In agreement, Klausner (1929) confirms the numerous taxes payable by the Palestinians to the Romans like: water tax, city tax, a tax on meat, salt, road tax and house tax. Frontier taxes also were levied and were very stressing at every stopping place, a tax would be demanded. It is believed that in various occasions the price of a good exceeded one hundred times its original cost due to excessive taxes levied from whole sellers by the Romans to the different taxes collected from the retailers to the consumers. It is claimed that after Herod's demise some Jews demanded from Archelaus a reduction of both annual and sales taxes. After the death of Herod the great his province was divided amongst his sons as per His request to the Roman Emperor. It is claimed that during the era of Herod Antipas just like his father Herod the Great the Jews were burdened by numerous taxes like: land tax (on produce), poll tax, fishing tolls, custom duties, purchase and sales taxes (on slaves, oil, clothes, hides and other valuable commodities), professional tax (on leather workshop, butchery, the use of water) and religious dues. Later a group of people went to Augustus and complained of Herodian taxation in an effort to buttress their demand for the abolition of the monarchy (A.J.17.307-8, B.J.2.85-86).

The various taxes at the time of Jesus Christ ranged from bars and rings of Gold and silver which were used as medium of exchange by the Jews before the introduction of coins. Campbell (1996) asserts that, the values of the bars and rings of Gold and silver were determined by a system of weights of which the standard was a shekel which was equivalent to 224 grains. The Jewish shekel was the highest valuable silver coin used in Palestine. A half shekel was equivalent to the Didrachmon and the Drachme was half a Didrachmon, Muirhead (1907). The temple tax was believed to have been half a shekel.

The Roman coins included: the Denarius or Denarion, the Assarion and the Kodrantes. The denarius is the equivalent of a penny in the Bible. It was used to pay a worker for a daily work performed in the vineyard and it was the coin used to pay the Roman taxes instead of the Jewish currency. The payment of Jewish taxes was strictly using Jewish currency rather than the Roman currency. In the event that one had Roman coins he or she was supposed to employ money changers to change it from Roman currency to Jewish currency in order to offer in the Jewish temple. The Jewish coin was referred to as a Lepton, which is translated as mite in Mark 12:42. It was equivalent to half of a Kodrantes. The widow whom Jesus credited as the best giver, offered two Lepta into the Temple Treasury.

The Jews hated tax collectors due to their corruption. They overtaxed them in order to pay what the Romans had demanded and remain with a portion to enrich themselves at the expense of the tax payers. To obtain more finances the tax collectors introduced illegal taxes which were paid on top of other legal taxes, Tenney (1967). This system of taxation angered the Jews and it brought about strong hostility towards the publicans (Tax collectors) to the extent that their money was unacceptable at the synagogue or Temple and whoever associated with the tax collectors automatically became an enemy of the Jews.

Jesus Christ also paid tax and encouraged others to do the same (Matt 22:17-22) and his association with the tax collectors made many Jews to reject him as a messiah. The messiah whom the Jews awaited was to overthrow the Roman government with its brutal systems, however when Jesus came instead of liberating the Jews he instead encouraged them to continue paying Roman taxes “give that which belongs to Caesar to Caesar and that which belongs to God to God”. This

frustrated many Jews and a number abandoned following Jesus' teachings declaring him as a false messiah.

The heavy taxes imposed on the Jews by the Romans, made their life so hard despite the poverty which most of the Jews were in, taxes would only be increased. Surburg (1975) says that, the Jews were very poor most of them earned a living as small scale farmers. Carter (2006) observes that, many Jews suffered from famine, poor health, and high infant mortality rates with 50 percent of children dying before making ten years. Most adults wouldn't celebrate fifty birth days, majority died at thirty or forty years of age. However, the life span of the elites was longer. The little they obtained again was subjected to skyrocketed taxes. Some Jews failed to raise the required taxes and these were sold into slavery in the neighbouring communities. Anxiety and stress became part of the population. Survival was by chance, poor crop returns meant food shortages, limited seedlings for next year, limited trade, family breakups and forced rural- urban migration. Life in the cities was chaotic especially for non-elites characterised by dense population, water shortages, infectious disease, floods, and ethnic tensions among others.

The sweat, suffering, exploitation of the non-elites sustained the elites' luxurious lives. The mistreatments the elites subjected to the non-elites were so demeaning and in turn it provoked angry feelings, resentment and increased inferiority complex among the peasants. This led to violence for example the revolt in Judea against the Romans in 66-70 CE, Protests such as: destruction of property, evading taxes, working slowly or complete refusal to work or attacking symbols of domination among others which are manifestations of anger. James Scot a known scholar summarised the protests using an Ethiopian proverb which states that, "The general, or Emperor or land owner or governor or master passes by the peasant bows, and passes gas. Bowing



down was a sign of respect however the act of gassing demonstrated anger. The situation in which the Jews lived, made them develop hatred, hostility and angry feelings which propelled Jesus' teaching on anger in Matthew 5:21-26.

The Jews at the time witnessed a number of succession wars and a lot of people were murdered as Josephus states that, "Syrian soldiers were allowed to massacre 40,000 men, women and children during wars of succession". Jews were tortured without discrimination whether male or female, young or old for failure to abide by the laws of foreign powers such as Hellenistic laws during the era of Alexander the Great, for example Eleazer the elder was persecuted to death due to his refusal to eat unclean food (pork) - 2Maccabees, taxation laws, worship of foreign gods among others. The Jews under the Maccabees fought to liberate themselves from foreign rule in order to restore their political, economic and religious freedom. It is from this basis that Jesus introduces his teaching on anger by first reminding them about the decree against murder which was already taking place in the Jewish communities.

This background is crucial and worth noting for it helps in interpreting accurately the situations or contexts to which Jesus and the Apostles spoke. Having the knowledge regarding the social, cultural, political contexts upon which the New Testament was written gives a clear view on the Text, why it was written, events that propelled the message and how we can apply the similar text to our own situations today.

#### **4.1.9 The Understanding of Anger in Matthew (5:21-26)**

Jesus' teaching on anger was a continuation of the sermon on the mountain which incorporates the beatitudes. In his teaching Jesus clearly points out anger as the root cause of evil in the society.

Murder as one of the evils resulting from uncontrolled anger together with its consequences can be dealt with by proper control of anger. Jesus passed on this teaching at the time when the Jews were subjected to foreign rule. They expressed anger on various occasions for instance as regards to the issue of tax which the Romans subjected to the Jews, the destruction of the second temple, loss of the Jewish independence to foreign powers, economic hardships, disease, famine, discrimination by the Romans among others.

According to Matthew, anger is understood as a psycho- social problem. It starts from the social events happening in the society that evoke the psychological response to a perceived threat. It is not by mistake that Jesus points out murder and insults (social evils) linking them to anger. When one is angry, He or She loses self-control and can do anything including insults. Continuous feelings of anger may lead to psychological problems which may result into health problems. Anger is portrayed as a universal emotion in the text, this is evidenced by the phrase “Anyone who is angry” this implies that all of us can be victims of anger at one point. The universality of anger makes it relevant because it speaks to all of us without discrimination. Without any form of discrimination humans and animals experience anger.

Matthew 5 also portrays anger as a sin. This is pointed at when Jesus reveals that whoever is angry with a brother or sister will be subjected to Judgment. As the culprits of murder were subjected to Judgment, likewise the culprits of anger. Judgement breeds punishments. Scalise (2011) pointed out that anger is as sin of Hatred and it is the opposite of love referencing with St. Paul’s teaching about love in 1 Corinthians 13, there is a remarkable difference between the features of love and those exhibited by an angry person.

Anger destroys one's relationship with God. Matthew 5:23 NIV indicates that, one must first examine himself or herself before giving an offering as it is written "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar, first go and be reconciled to them, then come and offer your gift". This statement reveals that for one to be righteous before God he or she must be in good terms with others. Here religious hypocrisy is revealed, you can't be in good terms with God and in bad terms with others. It is common of people to think that others don't matter only God matters. Jesus clearly puts it that for God to acknowledge one's offering the relationship with others is significant that is why reconciliation is demanded before communicating with God through offering. If one goes ahead and gives an offering without reconciling with those, he or she has been angry with them the offering will not be appreciated. Matthew 5 reveals that anger antagonizes harmony in the society. It is a sign of mistrust and selfishness since the angered would wish to be understood while failing to understand others.

### **Conclusion:**

This chapter emphasizes the vital role of understanding the socio-cultural and historical context when interpreting biblical passages, with a particular focus on Matthew 5:21-26. The chapter emphasizes that isolated readings of Bible verses can lead to misinterpretations and advocates for a holistic understanding of the Bible's interconnected verses and chapters. Furthermore, it underscores the shift from the Old Testament to the New Testament and the importance of recognizing the historical and cultural shifts that influenced biblical composition. In essence, understanding the context is seen as essential for a more comprehensive and accurate interpretation of the Bible.

## **CHAPTER 5: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ANGER**

### **5.1.0 Introduction:**

This section analyses the psychological views on anger as advanced by other scholars in the field of psychology. What happens to one's psychic when confronted with feelings of annoyance? And how psychologists perceive anger entails the chapter. For instance, Ones' behaviours are greatly influenced by the state of their mind.

### **5.1.1 Psychological views on anger**

Psychology deals with the human mental processes and its functions, especially those causing people to behave in a given manner. According to Eysenck (2004), the focus and emphasis of psychology is human conduct and other underlying processes and how they affect one's response to stimuli. It includes the study of intentional and unintentional phenomena as well as feelings and thoughts. Psychologists attempt to explore individual's social behaviour in relation to their reasoning and also exploring the physiological and biological process that underlie cognitive function and behaviour. The way people react to given situations depends on the state of their mind. Frijda et al (2005) observes that there is a positive relationship between our thoughts and our feelings.

We always react to situations depending on how we feel at that particular moment. Calm mind leads to proper decision making while troubled mind leads to improper actions that may result into psychological and sociological problems. Anger is an emotion, it is a feeling and it exerts strong influence on behavioural dispositions of an individual. Anger is part of creation especially class-Animalia. Both humans and animals become angry Berkowitz& Jones (2003). All humans experience it, some more often than we like to admit. It is natural to feel annoyed however it's

unnatural to inappropriately express angry feelings. Cosgrave (2007) argues that experiencing anger varies from person to person and not everyone handles anger in the same way. There are individuals who anger very easily and then there are those who rarely display anger. Some people are conscious of their anger and know how to control it. Conversely, there are others who fail to recognize the signs of anger and find themselves in an uncomfortable and often unpleasant situation (Hendricks et al. 2013). Anger is generally a phenomenon problem which social psychologists have to content with at different levels of analysis.

Anger is a normal emotion (Kassinove & Tafrate 2010). It's a reaction towards unpleasant stimuli. It communicates any form of unfairness towards one's offender. Psychologists observe that anger is a completely positive response to threat, it is a primordial part of our shield mechanism that allowed us to live, acclimatize and defend, making it vital instinct for ones' survival. Like Kassinove and Tafrate, Sahi (2019) argues that anger is not inherently revengeful, and that feeling and venting this emotion is one of the ways through which one can communicate any form of injustice in one's environment. Its expression is aimed at protecting humanity from aggressive people whose acts may endanger the lives of those who remain silent about it. This makes the disclosure of anger relevant to the affected person and society since it enables people to behave in a fair way towards others. without which Anger is capable of producing psychological resources and increase determination towards correction of wrong behaviours, promotion of social justice, communication of negative sentiment, redress of grievances and it can also facilitate patience. It is therefore a natural and normal feeling to have.

### 5.1.2 Psychological impacts of anger

However, angry people may behave in destructive manner, when they don't find appropriate outlets in expression. This is because, anger impairs one's abilities to have cognitive controls and may behave inappropriately. An angry person may lose their objectivity, empathy, prudence or thoughtfulness and may cause harm to themselves or others. In addition, inappropriate anger response is often the cause of altercations, domestic violence, disease and other less favourable outcomes. To date, there are countless stories of people losing relationships, careers, and even their lives because of the way they handle their anger.

Numerous studies have been conducted on how anger impacts us psychologically and physiologically (Cheralus, 2022; Garfinkel, et al, 2016; Karmin, 2016). These studies have all revealed that before anger affects any part of our body it has to affect our brain first. The brain is our internal alarm system. It signals to the rest of our body when we are happy, sad, angry, and in pain. This alarm system within our brain triggers the release of adrenaline which causes us to heighten our awareness and responsiveness. This causes glucose to gush through our blood stream and muscles giving us the ability to respond faster, run faster and make quicker decisions (<https://www.studymode.com/essays/Anger-Affect-Brain-And-Body-70155370.html>).

The brain processes all emotional stress when the brain senses threat or harm, millions of nerve fibres within our brain release chemicals throughout the body to every organ. Then the body releases hormones epinephrine (adrenaline) and norepinephrine (noradrenaline) that tense the muscles as if the body is preparing for battle. These hormones evolved so that we could deal rapidly with impending danger (<https://www.universalclass.com/articles/psychology/anger->

management/understanding-the-behavior-of-anger.htm). They prepare our bodies for action by improving the blood supply to skeletal muscles and mobilizing energy stores.

If stress hormones are too low, muscles have insufficient fuel and oxygen to respond quickly, however, excessive secretion of stress hormones can disturb the balance between fat and carbohydrate metabolism and damage physical performance with inflammation. You will see people who are angry stand up straighter and more squarely. It is an instinctual preparation for attack and defence.

All these physical actions make you feel more invulnerable. Your body physically responds to all of your emotions, when you are sad, your shoulders drop, your heart rate slows, your face frowns, you cry. When you are happy, your body produces surges of Serotonin, you smile, your energy levels increase, and you feel more confident. When you are angry, your body experiences a surge of hormones like those you experience when scared or threatened adrenaline and noradrenaline. These hormones are produced as part of the fight or flight response to danger (<https://www.universalclass.com/articles/psychology/anger-management/understanding-the-behavior-of-anger.htm>).

The brain serves as the control centre for our body. Addotta (2006) observes that, anger comes from the reptilian part of our body known as the Amygdala. The amygdala is an almond shaped structure located just above the hypothalamus gland of the brain. We have two amygdala situated just a few inches from each other. Consisting of several nerves that connect to various parts of the brain such as the neocortex and the visual cortex, the amygdale forms an important part of our nervous system. Anger affects the brain by compromising the neurons in the hypothalamus, the

brain's command centre for stress responses (Emerson, 2022). "Normally these neurons receive different chemical signals that prompt them to switch on or off.

Stress and anger compromise these functions and jeopardize the brain's ability to slow down" (Hendricks, 2013). Devika (2022), a clinical psychologist has revealed that progression of anger to rage can be stopped before getting out of control. When the amygdala initiates the emotion of anger, the prefrontal cortex can result in violent behaviour. One of the ways of checking the progression of anger, is what Emerson (2022) has called forgiveness. Interpersonal forgiveness, to Emerson is a beta antidote to excess of anger impact. The forgiveness does not help only the anger target but also the anger bearer. Similarly, Enright & Fitzgibbons (2000) reveals the power of forgiveness in healing clients with anger issues and restores hope among them.

Unmanaged anger is a psychological problem and can result into health issues among those who continuously feel the emotion. Anger is known to be responsible for heart related sicknesses due to build-up of stress responses in life (Kam, 2009); when we become angry or stressed, our body releases chemicals that clot the blood. These blood clots can create serious health problems. The clots can travel up to the blood vessels to the brain or heart causing a stroke or heart attack, both of which can be fatal (Boerma, 2007). People who are angry and hostile tend to alienate family and friends. They either withdraw from the family and friends or their harsh behaviour negatively affects their social surroundings so much that they are avoided.

People who have serious anger problem frequently exhibit aggressive behaviour and hostile behaviour and attitudes towards others. These individuals have been described as having "Type A" personalities (Mills, 2005). This can result into further escalation of cognitive or mental breakdown of the angry person. Such people need urgent psychiatric attention if they are to



normalise. Studies show that repressed anger can be harmful to our body and to our mind. Holding back anger can lead to mental illness, including depression. One way of looking at depression is as anger turned inward. An emotion such as anger will not go away if ignored. It will only get stronger and can cause severe problems. Anger is an emotion that men consider acceptable to display. As young boys, they are taught that certain emotions are not acceptable like crying. Studies have found that men will often display anger when in fact they are experiencing depression or fear. Research has found that boys who are wounded as youth will often grow up to be wounded men. They are likely to pass on the anger they are experiencing to those closest to them (Johnson, 1998).

Unlike animals, human being has capabilities to avert anger. Humans differentiate themselves from the rest of the animal kingdom by their cognitive functions, their higher thought processes concerning their instinctual responses. It is these cognitive responses that keep psychologists and psychiatrists in business, particularly when it comes to the more complicated emotions like anger, love and jealousy. People can have both conscious and unconscious cognitive responses to anger. There are three main cognitive responses to anger, which are the thinking choices behind how we respond to anger: expressing your anger, suppressing your anger, and calming your anger.

According to Mills (2005), anger is not in-born but rather an emotion that is learned. We learn the emotion in different ways. For example, children learn the emotion by associating with the people who possess this emotion. As shall see later, this learning is through socialisation process from the environment in which people are brought up. Among the adults, anger is a form of defence mechanism. Angry manifestations signal danger and can stave off the advances of the aggressor. Anger can also be displaced. Many people express anger not directly to the annoying situation or person, but to those whom they feel are less threatening to their emotions. Children in most cases

suffer from displaced anger from parents, if parents get misunderstandings and cannot attack the target of their anger, they always express their anger to children in form of yelling, beating or insulting them. In the contemporary settings, society is awash with information where anger is displaced. Police in Kamuli arrested a woman aged 30, accusing her for murdering her step daughter aged 2 years old. The deceased was identified as Becca Nairuba, a child to Agnes Biiri, Kyaiswa (2011).

The incident happened on Saturday morning according to investigations made by police. The deceased's mother went to her former husband's home in Buluuya Parish in Kamuli district, finding the cowife and the husband was not around. Biiri said she was given a good welcome and felt at peace. She said that her child was sick and had gone to seek medical treatment from the father to the late Nairuba. Biiri decided to take a walk around the trading centre as she waited for the return of the man. On returning to the cowife's home where she had left the little girl, the lady found her 2 year old daughter Nairuba butchered lying in a pool of blood. The lady shouted for help as she couldn't believe that her daughter was no more.

Musa Nabende, the Kamuli police commander said that, the girl was stabbed and killed by her step mother. The welcome given to Biiri was a fake one and out of pretence, this blinded her and she left her sick daughter with the step mother who later executed her. Although the cause of her act is not stated, it is evident that Nairuba's murderer was overpowered by anger that is associated with jealousy women. But the fact that she displaced her anger on the innocent Nairuba than appropriating it on the actual persons twisted the matter from the crime of passion to actual murder. Out of rage the crowd that gathered near the scene of the crime wanted to harm the suspect for the alleged murder of the 2-year-old girl. She was immediately rescued by police to deter the public

from committing mob justice. The accused was arrested by police in Kamuli district as the principal suspect. She was to be summoned before court to answer charges of murder.

Anger emotions can be strengthened by feelings of pain or threat towards attainment of one's goals. Whenever there is an obstacle to one's achievement, therefore, is an aggressive urge to deal with the obstacle in order to achieve the intended objective. The media information on numerous cases of murder can serve to exemplify this aspect. There was a land dispute which involved Julius Irumba, a chairperson LC1 of Musaijamukuru village, Buhimba sub-county, in Kikuube district which resulted into his assassination, (The independent October, 29th 2022). According to the media report, the day before Irumba was killed; he had led a group of people from Musaijamukuru village to the RDC's office protesting the emergence of a fraudulently acquired title in their village. Irumba with his colleagues wanted the intervention of the RDC to investigate how some individuals acquired titles on their ancestral land. As the RDC's office was investigating the matter to ensure that the culprits are apprehended for justice to prevail, Irumba is murdered.

Irumba was hired by unknown persons to transport sand to Masindi, prior to his death. As they approached Kinyaya, sugar plantation, unknown persons emerged from the sugar plantation and intercepted him. The gang was equipped with pangas, knives, and hammers which they used to stab him to death. The deceased's body was found in a vehicle registration number UBE 514W Tipper lorry. Irumba succumbed to over bleeding that resulted from the injuries inflicted on him by the assailants as revealed by the post-mortem report. New vision by Yiga (2022), man lost his life over land this happened at, after the duo engaged in a fierce fight over land leading to the death of a man 22 years old. A similar incident took place in Lukojjo village in Nama sub-county, Mukono district in 2022. A male identified as Innocent Musinga was murdered.

The murderer was identified as Ssozi Musisi. Musinga and Musisi have been in a land wrangle, and that the case was already at Mukono High Court. Upon sensing that the case was going against him, Ssozi took the law into his hands and murdered Musinga. Police in Mukono led by the division CID, ASP Musa Zziwa, arrested Ssozi Musisi and detained him at Mukono police station on charges of murder. New vision (March 23rd, 2023) observes that a man was arrested for allegedly killing mother over land dispute. Police in Naggalama arrested a man over the alleged murder of his mother over a land dispute. In a separate case, Mubarak Gowa, a resident from Kalagala village, Kyampisi Sub County in Mukono district, developed a quarrel overland with his mother identified as Jalia Nalongo Nabukera, 70 years old. Gowa, out of anger picked a hammer and hit his mother on the head, which killed her instantly. Gowa was arrested and

Kyampisi sub-county speaker, Saidah, Nanonzi, revealed that Gowa wanted to acquire more land from his mother, yet he had earlier on been given his share, which he sold off and wasted the money. On demanding for new portion of land, his mother refused to give him more land which instigated the quarrel leading to her death. Nanonzi added that land wrangles are prevalent in Kyampisi district and blamed the issue on stakeholders not doing enough to resolve them. For instance she put blame on the LC.111 land court where anyone with land dispute for assistance must first surrender part of the land he wants to be helped. She said that there is a growing spirit of laziness among children whereby most of them want to inherit property rather than working to make their own and called upon parents to install religious values among their children so as to reduce on death resulting from misbehaviour.

Averill (2012) portrays emotions anger inclusive as being intentional. One cannot speak of anger that has no target, we are always angry towards others. Lazarus (1991) agrees with Averill that

anger is always generated towards someone whom might have hindered the other from achieving the set goals. Virginia & Smith (2006) asserts that, emotions are aimed at the world than the self. When people demonstrate feelings of annoyance, the target of their anger is always the external rather than the internal. This implies that anger expression is basically meant for others than the self. Anger may affect the self but this is unintentional, when one express feelings of annoyance they are trying to alarm others that what you have done is unfair

Anger has causes, which Kashdan et al (2016) and Berkowitz & Jones (2004) have called anger triggers or elicitors. Such causes may include failures in life to attain set goals, frustrations and any other physical and social circumstances that makes one to feel uncomfortable, interrupted from a pleasant emotional state or even a feel of sadness, jealousy or hopelessness. Anger is therefore a feeling which has a cause. It is a response to a situation that triggers angry feelings, which in ordinary terms may be called provocation. It occurs when personal ego or pride is challenged or vexed by others. These causes may be real or imaginary. According to Emereonye (2015), a person who is angry tends to place more blame on another person for their misery. This can create feedback, as this extra blame can make the angry person angrier still, so they in turn place yet more blame on the other person. Noteworthy, the blamed person may also react in anger, which may further fuels or escalates the angry situation. Excesses of anger often result from arguments and counter arguments.

This scenario can be illustrated in the incident that took place on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2016, in which Kenneth Akena was shot by Matthew Kanyamunyu together with his Burundian girlfriend Cynthia Munwangari. The tragedy happened somewhere along Kampala-Jinja highway near Uganda manufacturers association in Nakawa division, Observer (2020 November, 12th). It is believed

that the two were involved in a car accident in which Akena crushed Kanyamunyu's car as he was trying to reverse his car in the parking lot. The incident annoyed Kanyamunyu who responded by shooting Akena in the chest as he tried to come into contact with the offended to apologize for the mistake, Monitor (2016, November, 15th). Immediately after the shot Kanyamunyu realized the heaviness of the act and rushed the victim to Nakasero Hospital where the victim received first aid and later transferred to Norvik hospital along Bombo Road for further medical attention. Akena died a day after the incident on the 13th November 2016 due to the gun shot that had caused serious injuries in his body (The independent, November 28th 2016).

Kanyamunyu and his girlfriend denied having participated in the shooting of Akena, they said that they were simply good Samaritans who came across a man shot by strangers, rushed him to the hospital to save his life the Observer (2020, February, 4th). But the brother to the deceased John Nyeko said that before the demise of Akena he had uttered that he was shot by the very people who carried him to the hospital. Kanyamunyu together with his girlfriend were arrested on the 12th November 2016 as prime suspects in the murder of Akena. Later police arrested two of Kanyamunyu's brothers identified as Joseph Kanyamunyu and Moses Kanyamunyu to help with further investigations. Their houses were searched to find out whether the murder weapon would be recovered, since it went missing after the shooting, as mentioned in the news at Live at 9 NBS (15th November 2016).

The court organized a series of court hearings to ensure that justice is achieved by both parties. Kanyamunyu's family said their son was not guilty as he had earlier claimed. The suspects were detained at the police custody for further investigations. Kanyamunyu sought reconciliation with Akena's family. The Gulu Archbishop, Dr. John Baptist Odama with Rwot David Onena Acana

II, the chief of Acholi persuaded Akena's family for negotiations, their first meeting was held in Gulu with a council of six elders who interviewed Kanyamunyu and asked him to give a narration on what happened on November 12, 2016 between him and Akena. The negotiations went on successfully and later resulted into a reconciliation practice known as Mato-Oput, This is an Acholi term meaning to drink portion made from the leaves of Oput tree. Kanyamunyu said to the elders;

“To be honest I would be lying to you if I told you that I have fully comprehended the tragedy of that day to date. The stupidity, the foolishness, the evil that I exhibited on that day is not something I knew was in”. After the confession before the elders, Kanyamunyu's apology was accepted by the family of the Late Akena. He was asked to pay 10 cows and three goats to facilitate the traditional process of justice and he accepted to pay. The Observer (2020, September, 12th). He further promised that he will make similar confession before the high court in Kampala. Observer further revealed that, Matthew Kanyamunyu admitted that he had shot the social worker and agreed to pay reparation for the crime. This happened as Kanyamunyu sought for a reconciliation agreement with Akena's family.

In 2020, Kanyamunyu accepted the case he had earlier on denied, his lawyer Peter Kabatsi confirmed. The director of public prosecutions (DPP) after a plea bargaining session held at the high court, Wesaka (2020) revealed that, Kanyamunyu was imprisoned for killing Akena, now serving a five-year jail term in Luzira prison. Kanyamunyu's girlfriend, Cynthia Munwangari acquitted after the court ruling. Justice Stephen Mubiru stated that since Kanyamunyu is a first time –offender and also realized his mistake and tried to save the deceased by taking him to the hospital, he is not to be charged over life imprisonment which is the maximum sentence for his

crime but instead he is to serve six years in prison. Mubiru further said that his sentence was reduced by 11 months by the court, so he is to serve 5 years and his girlfriend was set free.

### **Conclusion:**

This section delves into the psychological views on anger as advanced by scholars in the field of psychology. It highlights that human behavior is intricately connected to the state of one's mind, with a strong relationship between thoughts and feelings. Anger, as a natural emotion, influences an individual's behavioral dispositions, and its expression varies from person to person. Some individuals are adept at controlling their anger, while others struggle to recognize and manage it effectively. In the case of Kanyamunyu and the tragic death of Akena, a complex narrative unfolded within the realms of justice and reconciliation. Initially denying involvement, Kanyamunyu and his girlfriend claimed to be Good Samaritans aiding a victim of a shooting. However, discrepancies emerged through the victim's final words, leading to their arrest as prime suspects alongside additional family members for investigation.



## **CHAPTER 6: THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ANGER**

### **6.1.0 Introduction:**

In this chapter, the focus is on the sociological approach of anger. Anger is a social emotion directed towards the perceived threat or any hindrance towards attainment of a set goal. It's important to discuss the sociology of anger so as to be able to find out how anger is perceived sociologically and how it is manifested in the contemporary Ugandan situation.

Sociology deals with society and how it influences human behaviour. It looks into the social causes and consequences of human behaviour and the factors that prompt these behaviours. Society greatly influences human behaviour both positively and negatively. People behave according to the way they were brought up, within a given environment and culture. Therefore, society plays a big role in influencing people's behaviour. We suppress emotions because we were told to do so or we saw others doing the same. We acquire values about certain emotional dispositions from the society in which we are brought up. For instance, in most African societies, it is unsocial for a woman to show love feelings publicly or even make sexual advances to a man.

### **6.1.1 Sociological understandings on Anger**

This section of the study deal with sociological perspectives of anger. Anger is an emotion, and social phenomenon. It is a product of society, as much as it affects society. An angry person directs his or her emotions to something or somebody in society; and it is society that can suffer or mitigate anger and its consequences. Sociologists such as Schieman (2010), consent the view that anger is a highly social emotion. It can hurt both the offended and those next to him or her that is why anger in most cases is referred to as a double-edged sword.

Averill (1982, 1983) reveals that anger is one of the emotions that are usually felt and expressed by people. All-over the world people report cases of anger on a daily basis and no one confirms the absence of angry feelings. People of all races, gender, age, economic status and marital status, reveal angry feelings without any form of discrimination. Anger can be triggered by anything, which may include this very work. I admit that there may be so many unpleasant things written that can annoy the readers. This truly affirms anger as one of the most experienced emotion. Although this emotion is believed to be a secondary emotion due to its arousal by other primary emotions like fear and hostility its upshots are far harming than beneficial to the offended and the society. Taylor (2004) reports that in the sociology of emotions anger is classified as a negative emotion together with sadness, unhappiness and depression. It is a form of distress with more harm than good. Anger has the ability to distort the life of the antagonised person, neighbours and the entire society, in congruity Kemper (1978, 1987, and 2011) indicates that emotions experienced greatly have numerous impacts on social relations.

Sociology intends to analyse human societies, their interactions and factors that influence them. It deals with the social units such as institutions, communities and how they influence human behaviour. The frequency and the intensity of anger experienced by different individuals depend on a number of factors such as age, levels of education, economic status and gender (Faris 1948). Emotions experienced by human beings are significant in all aspect of social life. Lindebaum, et al (2016) writes that; expression of anger is often used indistinguishable with hostile dispositions such as aggression, abuse, antisocial behaviour or violence. In harmony, Averill (2012) certified that there is a narrow gap between anger and aggression. Aggressive people reveal hostility, offensive, quarrelsome, violent and bellicose behaviours which are similar to those manifested by

angered people. Anger compromises and damage social relationships. It is rooted in the psychic frameworks, which in turn cause behavioural and social disorder.

As a result sociological perspectives on anger encompass integral analyses of affective structures and emotional dynamics of people in society. Schieman (2010) writes that, the sociological study of anger is relevant in determining how anger affects the society. When people are confronted with anger provoking situations they tend to overcome the situation, using various methodologies and approaches such as remain silent about it, talk to people who angered them, divert the situation by doing something else or talk about the incident with friends or even reporting to authorities. Likewise, when handling interpersonal problems different techniques are employed across the life cycle (Birditt, 2005). Whereas it is important to understand how people of different ages, gender, economic and social status respond to conflict and the factors that influence the variation in strategies employed; it is beyond the scope of this work to examine that at length.

A detailed analysis of social categorisations is well articulated by various sociologists like Gordon (1990), Ross & Van willigen (1996, 1997); Schieman, (1999, 2000) Smith-Lovin, (1995); Thoits, (1989), Mayr & Nesselroade, (2000) to mention but a few. Nevertheless, anger manifests different to different age groups, with the adult age brackets demonstrating lower levels of anger as compared to the youths and adolescents (Gottman, Coan, Carrerre & Swanson, 1998, Rusbult, Schieman, 2000; Bissonnette, Arriaga & Cox, 1998; Schieman (2010) Simon & Nath, 2004). As people mature, they develop psycho- social tools needed to deal with others with lesser conflicts (Mirowsky & Ross, 1992). The ability to deal with others in a peaceful way helps one to lower the feelings of annoyance compared to the situation where one conflicts with others, this is more likely to evoke feelings of displeasure leading to irritation. Birditt and Fingerman (2005) assert that older

adults tend to be better at regulating their behavioural responses to interpersonal conflicts than young peers. Elderly people have abilities to handle matters with a sense of humour, which they developed with age. This enables them to demonstrate lower feelings of annoyance than the young peers. Older people maybe more likely to respond to interpersonal problems with profitable strategies that improve relationships and are less likely to use destructive strategies that could harm relationships -Birditt (2005). Conversely, Bergstorm & Nussbaum (1996) suggest that young adults are less likely to be appeasing and more aggressive in response to interpersonal problems compared to older adults. The Elderly are careful while handling every issue that rise in a family or society. They apply wisdom in all matters that arise in society and are slow to anger unlike the young peers.

The socio - emotional selectivity theory suggests that as people age, they withdraw from relationships that are bothersome, have fewer contracts with irritating social partners, and are better able to regulate negative emotion (Carstensen, Isaacowitz & Charles, 1999). On the other hand a Young adult is a time of serious commitment to a number of issues such as romantic relationships with the view of establishing a family, work involving the desire to secure a stable career, raising children among others which create numerous occasions for anger. This is not the case with older adults who are less likely to be in these intimate relationships hence lowering the cases of anger feelings. This therefore reveals that anger and its expression is highly dependent on one's emotional maturity.

Angry emotions can be displayed in a number of ways such as through words, facial expressions, vocal tones, actions and physiological changes. These angry manifestations promote fear as confirmed by Bericat (2015) and Dimberg & Ohman (1996). They convey verbalised and non-

verbal communications about the unpleasant situation. Some of these manifestations are acquired through a socialisation process of society. Miler and Sperry (1987) have underscored the influence of language in socialisation of anger and aggression. The dual centre language as an important variable acquired from the social environment, and how it informs the manifestations of social emotions. That language, acquired offers communicative resources by which people express anger and aggression. They demonstrate that children tend to grow with the emotional language of the environment in which they were raised. Admittedly, it is not surprising to come across words like *nyoko, musilu gwe! tumbavu!* Commonly associated with people who grew up in an environment where such language use is prevalent. It is not uncommon to hear words like *fuck-you, bitch* etc. for people who are brought up from the Western communities like the USA and Europe. To this Schieman (2012), adds that language acts as an important variable, together with other contextual factors, in determining whether a particular emotional experience is “anger.” In this case, certain words used by peer groups may sound angry words, but the context may tell otherwise. We recall how Mwesigwa Rukutana eulogy of Keith Muhakanizi, the Permanent Secretary in which they used a foul language of “you fool” when addressing each other (Rukutana, 2023).

It is worth noting that language further helps in the dissemination of anger. It is a means by which people communicate angry messages which fuel and inflame further occurrences of anger. This may be by conveying factual information about an annoying incident or taking a propagandist approach with the objective of creating misinformation and reaction which are aggressive in nature. This is so common in the contemporary era of social media. Ssentongo (2020), using the context of Uganda has opined that “Uganda’s social media presence is most generally defined by rage, rudeness, anger, insults and bullying.” It is by social media that angry and aggressive language use is popularised, and often information disarticulated with the objective of angering

society. Information is presented with exaggerations about a situation for instance; information on police brutality, socio-economic hardships, election rigging, problems of corruption, tribalism among others. This serves to illuminate that anger is transferrable. There are people who get angry just because others are angry.

### **Conclusion:**

This chapter focuses on the sociological approach to anger, considering anger as a social emotion directed at perceived threat or an hindrance to achieving specific goal. The discussion delves into the sociology of anger to understand how it is perceived within a societal context and how it manifests in contemporary Uganda. The chapter illustrates several instances where familial disputes escalated into murders, reflecting how anger and revenge can tragically affect innocent lives, a case in point is Mable Tumukuzire who killed her grandchildren in Uganda. Overall, the chapter underscores how anger, when unchecked, distorts judgment, impairs decision-making abilities, and contributes to tragic outcomes, emphasizing the need for timely recognition and management of anger to mitigate its adverse effects on individuals and society as a whole.

## CHAPTER 7: MATTHEW 5:21-26: A PSYCHO-SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

### 7.1.0 Introduction:

From the preceding chapters, we read that the context of Jesus' teaching on anger was murder. Jesus evoked the old law when he asserts to his audience that "you have heard from the old that you should not murder." He used this as the baseline for his sermon on anger. Apparently, Jesus infers that the root cause of murder is anger. He advises that to avoid murder, one has to deal with the problem of anger. Jesus pragmatically demonstrates that the cause of murder is anger. Anger is a day-to-day event as demonstrated in the previous chapters. It has also been demonstrated that anger is real in contemporary Ugandan and so often, it has resulted into murder.

Jesus seems to agree with psychological and sociological analysts that anger is phenomenon and part of human society. Jesus seems to agree further that extremes of anger is destructive. It polarizes human relationships and it also affects man's relationship with God. That anger can result in punishments that are accorded to law breakers and offenders. This is because, as noted earlier, anger impairs one's cognitive capabilities to behave appropriately in society. Angry people end up breaking the law, and hence get punished. For example, to reiterate the case of Ahimbisibwe who killed his wife and 3 children out of anger, he was sentenced to jail for 40 years. Susan Kaitesi was sentenced to jail by the Nabweru court for killing her cousin sister and boyfriend due to anger.

Jesus situated his teaching to a close family context "anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca' is answerable to the court." Whereas the words "brother and sister" may be used to refer to the general Jewish relationship, in this study it shall be treated as reference to close family. As noted earlier, anger is most prevalent in close family relationships. At a micro level, people of the same family turn

against each other in anger. At a national level, people turn against each other in anger due to tribal differences or differences in political affiliations. We noted earlier the social polarization due to political anger in USA and contemporary Uganda. Suffice to mention the antecedents that informed the Rwanda Genocide of 1994, in which the Hutus and Tutsi's turned aggressive anger against each other.

Jesus' teaching informs our understanding of anger as partly caused by misuse of words. Language plays a significant role in fueling anger. "...anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca'...And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger" cast premium on the use of words in order to avoid excesses of anger. As noted earlier, language offers communicative resources by which people express anger. This language can be verbal or digital (thanks to the social media facilities) where people freely express their feelings without anyone holding them back. Through language use, people exchange verbal and written insults that may culminate in aggressive attacks and murders. We should remember that language can be verbal or just expressive. An angry person is easy to notice by physiological features like facial expressions and behavior disorder. From several cases of murder, the problem often begins or involve exchange of words, which hurt emotional feelings.

A simple internet search for murders caused by simple quarrels brought to the fore almost 55 million results. Of interest is the incident that took place in 2020, a Kenyan man near the Uganda border who killed a brother for telling him to cook. Accordingly, the deceased request the brother to cook, but the brother replied that he is not his wife to cook food. The exchange escalated resulting into one killing the other. The murderer, it can be argued read his brothers request from the Luyah cultural perspective where men are not supposed to cook, and asking a fellow man to cook is demeaning and disrespectful. As the result, the murderer was charged and imprisoned for



life (<https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/man-kills-brother-after-quarrel-over-who-should-prepare-meal-1843960>).

Matthew 5:23 seems to underscore the impact of anger on an individual. Psychologically, Anger affects the brain by compromising the neurons in the hypothalamus, the brain's command center for stress responses (Emerson, 2022). "Normally these neurons receive different chemical signals that prompt them to switch on or off. Stress and anger compromise these functions and jeopardize the brain's ability to slow down" (Hendricks, 2013). In such a situation an angry individual may lack concentration and focus on other important tasks. Anger also impairs cognitive and physical capabilities to perform certain tasks optimally. In Matthew 5:23, Jesus taught that an angry person should leave any religious ritual like offering sacrifices at the altar and make peace with his or her brother before continuing with the practice. This though sounds a religious call; it has significant psycho-social implications for the angry person. By making peace with the adversary, the angry person synchronizes and harmonizes the chemical components of his well-being to concentrate on the religious ritual. Moreover, from a sociological spectrum, making peace with an adversary calls for negotiation and forgiveness.

Forgiveness has been emphasized by some social psychologists like Emmerson (2022) as an antidote to anger related problems. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), forgiveness is deliberate putting aside feelings of resentment towards someone who has wronged you or hurt your feelings. Other than merely accepting what happened or ceasing to be angry, forgiveness, "involves a voluntary transformation of your feelings, attitudes, and behavior, so that you are no longer dominated by resentment and can express compassion, generosity, or the like toward the person who wronged you." Forgiveness is acclaimed to be of greater emotional healing

impact in psychotherapy (see. Menahem & Love, 2013). Reading Matthew in this perspective enhances an understanding and nuances the importance of interpersonal forgiveness. It is not surprising to note that elsewhere Jesus (Matthew 18:21-23) demands for continued forgiveness our adversaries. It is also enshrined in the prayer he taught to his disciples (Matthew 6:9-13), that is “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us”.

Furthermore, humanity is depicted in Christianity (and many world religions) as constantly sinning and saved by the grace of God. God is constantly forgiving the human sinner. Humanity has the divine duty to also forgive. Forgiveness therefore becomes a godly virtue. It is from this perspective that Matthew 5:23-24 urges readers to first forgive their adversaries before they present their petitions and sacrifices at the altar of God. Matthew 5:25 appeals to timely actions and negotiations in situations of anger. To “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer and you may be thrown into prison,” echoes the consequences of keeping anger for long. From the face value of this verse, Jesus presumed the social cause and impact of anger. As we noted earlier, anger is directed against somebody in society. This could be a family member or a friend.

Timely management of anger may bring quantum benefits which are psychological and sociological in nature. Sociologically, it is already noted from the works of Adam and Brett (2018), early anger management mitigates its intensity. When managed early meaning concession are realized between the angry parties. Psychologically, anger affects human brains. The brain is our internal alarm system, which triggers the release of adrenaline which causes us to heighten our awareness and responsiveness (<https://www.studymode.com/essays/Anger-Affect-Brain-And->

[Body-70155370.html](#)). When a person is angry, the brain releases a chemicals throughout the body to every organ. Then the body releases hormones epinephrine (adrenaline) and norepinephrine (noradrenaline) that tense the muscles as if the body is preparing for battle. Furthermore, anger makes people manifest aggressive behavior and hostile behavior and attitudes towards others (Mills, 2005). This can result into further escalation of cognitive or mental breakdown of the angry person. The aggressive and hostile behaviors may culminate into crime and the consequent imprisonment according to the existing law of the land.

The pericope further seems to call for actions of penitence. It is not right to assume that the audience of the text is the angry person, but also the anger elicitor. Timely repentance and seeking for forgiveness may be an antidote to various problems of anger. The power of “apology” has been underscored by many social psychologists like Beverly Engel (2002) and Harriet Lerner (2018). Lerner in particular opines on the dual effect of an apology: it earns us self-respect, as it is demonstrating a degree of maturity to evaluate ourselves in relation to others; as well as healing a broken social relationship. It has to be noted that, so often, people find it difficult to say I am sorry. This is due to pride. Pride may lead to anger and its manifestations, which may result into sociological problems like crime, enmity, hostility, revenge etc. Pride, like anger impairs one’s abilities to evaluate our actions and behaviors and deal with bad emotions in a social relationship, until it is sometimes too late. The case of Kanyamunyu, who killed Akena in 2016 as mentioned above clearly illuminates the point: Kanyamunyu who had vehemently denied killing Akena despite the compelling evidence finally bowed to natural justice when he sought to make peace with the family of the late Akena and the Acholi community in Maput-Oput social justice system. Unfortunately, for Kanyamunyu, the case was already in the hands of the State. Arguably, the

Mato-Oput may have influenced the decision of the court to give Kanyamunyu a lean sentence than life imprisonment as seen in other cases of murder.

In Matthew 5:21-26 acknowledges the legal consequences of anger related crimes. That “anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment” forewarns against the dangers of anger. Anger may lead to crimes like violence, rape, murder, homicide, assault etc. (Tonnaer et al. 2017; Kempen, 2020), which in effect leads to imprisonment (Wydo, 2003; Kelly, et al 2019). It has to be noted that the courts of law are put in place to pacify society. The aggrieved person reports his or her matter to people in authority, whose operation constitutes a court for adjudication of matters. Courts and judges are to protect the weak and vulnerable from the aggressors. Cases in courts of law are judged as per their intensity and magnitude. A crime that is committed due to anger is a crime that is assessed objectively in relation to the law. There is no law which protects and upholds anger.

Jesus in Matthew 5:21-26 accentuates the problem of anger in the context of murder. Jesus, using the socio-cultural and religious contexts of ancient Judah and Roman Empire, approached the problem of murder from a seemingly an unfamiliar perspective of anger. Jesus posits that anger is very costly and it is the root cause of murder. There are several accounts of murder, which are connected to anger, some of which are already discussed in previous chapters. For further illustrations and analyses, a case of murder was recorded in Nabweru, Kawempe Division (Kampala), in which one Susan Kaitesi murdered Patricia Arinda and Ivan Lukonge. According to the media reports, Kaitesi was angry with Arinda because she suspected her to be in a love affair with Lukonge her (Kaitesi’s) boyfriend. Kaitesi arranged for the murder of the two, when she locked them in a house and set it on fire. Kaitesi was arrayed before court and was judged for

double accounts of murder in February 2023. The Kiruhura incident in which one Mable Tumukuzire murdered her two grandchildren was because one of her sons had annoyed her by marrying a woman, she did not approve him to marry. Other accounts of murder related to land are various especially in central Ugandan districts of Mukono and Kayunga. In one incident, Mubarak Gowa killed his mother Jalia Nalongo Nabukera, 70 years old Kalagala village, Kyampisi Sub County in Mukono district because the mother did not allow him to sell the family land. In anger Gowa killed the mother because she had become an obstacle to his goals. Unfortunately for Gowa, his actions of anger earned him a jail sentence.

It is costly to society as well as to individuals. People with aggravated anger can be a threat to society as well as themselves. There are cases where anger has resulted into self-harm. This should bring in memory the recent case where the bodyguard (Wilson Sabiiti) killed himself, after performing a violent act of murdering the minister (Charles Okello Engola). In September 2022, news of a security guard who shot himself after a domestic issue was heard. Another security guard identified as David Ogole a 27-year-old resident in Lira also shot himself following a misunderstanding with his wife in 2023. Peter Mukama, 25-year-old killed himself with an SMG rifle after developing a quarrel with his wife. Though details about the circumstances are not known, we can surmise that Mukama was angry due to actions of words directed at him by his wife. It has to be noted that, Mukama's action was not meant against himself, but psychologically inflict pain on his family members who had angered him.

Matthew's view spiritualizes psychological and sociological perspectives of anger. It is not a misdirected view that anger is a spiritual problem. The bible text presents anger from the context of a sermon. Apparently, anger can affect human interpersonal relationship and relationship with

God that is why Jesus demands that an angry person should make peace with his /her adversary before engaging in a religious activity. In many contemporary spiritualities especially related to African Pentecostalism, anger is demonized, and dealt with spiritually. In other circles, especially related to African traditional practices, healing and deliverance from anger takes a detailed religious ritual dimension (see. Ilomo 2021; Nolte-Schamm, 2006). The psychological impact of religion on the emotional welfare (Vishkin et al, 2014) of an individual is in most cases conceptualized as healing and deliverance from the demonic spirits of anger and its associated emotional disorders.

As Victor Igreja (2011) would argue, majority of Africans south of the Sahara believe that the murder of an individual is a taboo and an offence that calls for immediate redress through atonement rituals. If wrongdoing is not acknowledged, the spirit of the murdered person will return to the realm of the living to struggle for justice. In most cases, the spirit of the dead may inhabit or possess people through whom they would speak, or just cause misfortunes in society.

The reparation modes on costs of anger are different in different contexts and legal systems. Different cultures have different ways of dealing with ways of repaying anger costs. In Jesus's setting, he warns his audience that maintaining anger may be costly as per the legal system of his context "truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny." Depending on the magnitude of anger, people are charged under either the statutory or customary law or both. For instance, in the account of Kanyamunyu murder of Akena, under the Mato-Oput, Kanyamunyu was charged 10 cows and 3 goats, at the same time served a jail sentence of six years. In the

Rwandan Gacaca courts, which employed Kinyarwanda traditional legal system perpetrators of the 1994 genocide were charged, fined and some imprisoned (Geraghty 2020).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discusses Jesus' teachings on anger, particularly in the context of murder. Jesus references the old law, stating, "You have heard from the old that you should not murder," using this as the foundation for his sermon on anger. The chapter highlights that anger is a common occurrence in daily life, as demonstrated in previous chapters, and it is a real issue in contemporary Ugandan society, often leading to instances of murder.

## CHAPTER 8: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Examining Matthew 5:21-26 in relation to the contemporary psycho-social understandings of anger reveal that Jesus had a deeper sense of the psychological and sociological factors that underpin the problem of murder. Murder is prohibited in the Old Testament law (Exodus and Deuteronomy), but there was no appropriate teaching or command that elucidate why people murder others. The pragmatic and more realistic elucidation which Jesus gives in the context of murder, inevitably makes him a character of great wisdom and skills. It is part of the continued revelations that manifest Jesus as a great teacher and interpreter of the Jewish religious laws over the Pharisees and scribes of the time (see. Luke 2:41-52,). Jesus taught with authority (Mark 1:22), as reckoned with in some Pharisaic circles (John 3:3).

Readers and interpreters of Matthew 5 especially Christian leaders need to perceive the problem of anger and murder from an informed and broader perspective in order to address the challenge. Social Science disciplines like anthropology, sociology and psychological offer good frameworks for understanding people's behavioral dispositions in order to apportion appropriate approaches to deal with anger manifestations. The propriety of Jesus' interpretation of the Old Testament Law should be understood in the context of the prevailing circumstances of his audience. Jews of the second Temple period were inevitably angry people. There are several accounts in the New Testament and intertestamental period that attest to this reality, due to the reality of foreign domination like Roman rule with its repressive and oppressive taxation system, overly delayed coming of the political messiah to realize the nostalgic Davidic Kingdom, socio-economic pressures associated with trade and scarcities in ancient Mediterranean trade, religio-cultural defilement of foreign elements like the Greeks, zealous religious leaders who enforced strict and oppressive religious and legal regulation, to mention but a few. In this environment, it was not hard



to find social crimes like robbery (see. Luke 10:25-37) and political revolts with associated crimes like the Maccabean revolt (165-63 BC) against Syrian rule. There were other rival political groups like the Herodians and Zealots. The period that followed Jesus' public ministry was characterized by a series of revolts. One of the watersheds of these revolts was the destruction of the Second Temple, which constituted a significant attack on the religious and cultural life of the People of Judea (see. Bloom, 2010). From these, it is right to assay that Jesus' audience lived in a turbulent environment with angering factors. These factors inevitably influenced the psychological and sociological expectations, and dispositions which may have included aggressive behaviors like murder.

Anger is an emotion, possessed by all human beings. This emotion is both psychological and sociological. It is generated from the environment where one grows, so it is common to identify this emotion with people whose antecedents are characterized by anger, either through use of words and brutality or environments where to be angry is permitted as a way of living. For the later, there are cultures where fierceness is understood as part of masculinity traits. In such environments, anger is socialized and children learn to be angry from others members of society, and as they grow the emotion becomes firmer and more developed. For instance, it is known in history that Sentinelese an Indian tribe is the most angry, aggressive and hostile tribe on Earth (Davis, 2022). Information in my Uganda (2020) (<https://www.myuganda.co.ug/most-friendly-and-feared-tribes-in-uganda/>) entails tribes which are categorized as friendly and feared. With specific reference to Bakiga, they are described as people with “aggressive lifestyle and nonsense approach to matters,” while Karamajongs as hostile to anyone they consider a threat to both their animals and grazing land. In this case, understanding of the culture of the people and how they are socialized may offer an appropriate approach that may avoid anger manifestations.

Social scientific perspectives on Matthew 5:21-26, reveal that anger is costly to both the offended and the society at large. Such costs, besides murder, may include self-harm, which may involve committing suicide, obtaining injuries and development of health complications like mental illnesses, blood pressure constant headaches among others. An angered person loses self-control and this may result into criminality acts arising from the victim's inability to calm down when fueled by feelings of annoyance. A good example is the recent incident in which Private Wilson Sabiiti, murdered Charles Engola, the minister for Labor out of anger, and then committed suicide (Naturinda, 2023).

The study also unfold the view that murder is caused by mismanaged anger. This can be illustrated by anger elicitors like insults, domestic violence, land wrangles among others. Angry feelings may as well result from fear or perceived threat which may block one from attaining their goals. When one's goals have been destructed this antagonizes the person socially and psychologically making him or her feel stressed, physically aroused and ready to attack the cause of their anger and those next to him or her. This may culminate into chaos in the society symbolized by acts of murder from unmanaged anger. It is therefore right to argue that anger is a reality and a serious psycho-social problem which must be dealt with. Both children and adults should be taught how to deal with this problem by equipping them with values such as honesty, kindness and prudence so as to be able to overcome the costs of unmanaged anger.

The study disclosed that Jesus does not stop people from being angry however cautions them on what should be done when one is faced with a situation which provokes them to be angry. From the biblical perspectives on Matthew 5:21-26 Jesus clearly demonstrates that anger is a human emotion and further reveals that whoever is confronted with angry emotions should seek

reconciliation towards one's adversary. Failure to reconcile instantly may lead the offended to face judgment which affects him or her both psychologically and sociologically. Jesus accordingly tries to deal with the problem of anger which is the underlying cause of murder and its related consequences. For people to have peace and harmony in families, communities and the nation at large there is need to employ proper anger management tools identified by Jesus in Matthew 5:21-26.

The study revealed that anger is a social problem. When one is annoyed their anger is always consumed by society. On numerous occasions angered people display their feelings through attacking those whom they assume are the cause of their anger whereas others displace their anger to those who are next to them or inferior to them. As earlier noted that the degree of anger expression depend on social factors such as age, levels of education, economic status, gender among others. Therefore as people age they tend to develop proper strategies to deal with anger compared to the young ones due to societal challenges which seems to have been mastered by the adults compared to the young. It is from this basis that Jesus deeply thought that anger is the primary cause of most of evils in the society. To overcome murder one has to first deal with the problem of anger. There are numerous murder cases in Uganda resulting from societal problems and once angry feelings are expressed inappropriately, it affects the society dualistically. It can affect the offended and those next to him or her. So to deal with the negative impacts of anger one has to acquire appropriate anger management skills in order to avoid excesses associated with anger.

Psychologically, before anger affects any part of the body it has to first affect the brain. The brain is the command center and interprets emotions. As laid in African wisdom, the decomposition of

a fish begins from the head, behavioral responses to anger begin from the head. If the expressed emotion is negative the brain prepares the release of hormones such as adrenaline which makes the angered person ready to respond to the given cause of our anger immediately. This state empowers the angered person physically and makes him or her feel ready to attack those whom they feel are the source of their anger. Anger compromises one's ability to reason and this makes the angered person vulnerable to acts which may be later regrettable. The state makes ones' body change rapidly which may result into psychological problems like mental illnesses or breakdown. Psycho-social understanding of anger creates an awareness that in the incidence of anger, one has to first appreciate that this emotion and actions may be far harming than beneficial to all humans in society.

The emotion of anger defile one's relationship with the offended. This does not deal with only one's relationship with another but also with God. On a number of occasions people find it easy to apologies before God while ignoring those whom they have offended. In this study it is revealed that one should make peace with fellow human beings (to those they have offended) then God will be happy with them. This is emphasized by the Anglican Church which encourages reconciliation towards the offended during repentance. Following Jesus's teaching in Matthew 5 the idea of apologizing doesn't only look up to the offended but both parties are free to reconcile to each other for peace to prevail in the society. When we apologize then we forego the outcomes of anger which may include murder. Social science disciplines like sociology seem to appreciate the power of forgiveness as being key in relaxing the mind of an antagonized person leading to mental wellness and harmonious living in societies.

To sum it up, anger therefore becomes a spiritual problem in as far as it causes humans to sin, hence affects human relationship with God. Acts of murder, revenge, hate and unforgiveness constitute theological problems in human society. In African spirituality, anger is spiritualized. As common in African Pentecostal churches, Africans deal on with reality of demons of anger; while in African traditional religious sensitivities, Africans often make attempts to appease angry spirits.

Conclusively, the relevance of Jesus's teaching in Matthew 5 to the contemporary society cannot be understood in isolation. Creative approaches like social science disciplines can offer more realistic insights that can foster deeper understandings and appropriation of the Bible texts. The study therefore becomes an important manual for approaching anger related problems by people who offer counselling and pastoral services like counsellor, religious leaders, teachers and social workers.

There is great need to deliberately include anger management knowledge values and skills in the Educational curricular at all levels. Teachers of all value-oriented disciples should put great emphasis on forgiveness, reconciliation, obedience to the law. Mass sensitization should be made on anger management. Proper ways of anger management should be emphasized to all children right from homes. Parents and caretakers of these children should take the center role as good examples. They should avoid abusing words and excessive brutality which may socialize children with poor anger management skills. Religious sermons should be organized with themes addressing anger issues, radio and Tele-vision programs, talk shows, magazines, newspapers and the different social media platforms be familiarized with proper anger management skills and be made aware of anger as a sociological and psychological problem which is a danger to society.

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