

The spirit of empowerment: A study of Acts 3:1-10

Alexander Salakpi

Lecturer

Department for the Study of Religions

University of Ghana, Legon

Email: asalakpi@ug.edu.gh

Submitted: July 6, 2020 / Accepted: April 20, 2021 / Published: August 27, 2021

Abstract

The words of Peter and the stretch of his right hand empowered the cripple to become like “the others.” Within a society are people who need a little push to be themselves. There are also people in the society who can empower others but either they are not conscious of it or just do not want to help. A piece of advice, a smile, a touch, an amount of money, education, and food, in a selfless effort or in a sacrifice, are some of the numerous ways of empowering people to do what they think is impossible. Exegetical analysis of Acts 3:1-10 demonstrated how Peter and John healed the cripple, restored his human dignity, and empowered him from begging. This paper contributes to the discussion on cultural attitudes towards empowerment.

Keywords: Empowerment, Integrity, Responsibility, Cripple at the Beautiful Gate, Acts 3:1-10.

Introduction

There are many people who have potentials and are capable of rendering good services, but are either prevented from using their capabilities or they do not know that they can put them to use. This attitude has rendered many into classes that society terms the needy, the underprivileged, the less powerful, the poor, and the like. In these classes are both abled and

disabled bodies. This calls for empowerment. Empowerment is to give power, to authorize, to permit, to give ability, or to enable someone to do something. What a person is empowered to do could either not have been done within his or her own power, or that the person is not aware that what he or she is empowered to do is doable but has now been made aware of its possibility. The action is therefore done in the spirit of the one who empowered.

The text under discussion has a cripple in focus. There are religious and medical reasons why a person may become a cripple.¹ Similarly, there are many excuses why society will want a cripple to remain in that state and as a consequence suffer inhuman treatment.² Peter and John became heroes in Acts 3:1-10, because while the law prevented the cripple from entering and offering gifts in the Temple (Lev 21:16-24); for them, there should be other means of helping such a person to be like the others without transgressing the law. In addition, the cripple became a beggar because he is crippled, and begging is considered humiliating. Peter and John empowered the cripple; he will never beg again and now, has a right to enter the Temple to worship God. He has become like “the others.”

The attitude of Peter and John in empowering the cripple questions human integrity and human responsibility. The empowerment lies in two things: first, the command, “Jesus Christ” and second Peter stretching his hands to raise the cripple

¹ Among Africans, it is believed that disability has a religious undertone. See Ahoror (2016, pp. 104-113). Medically, disability is an ill-health. It is also said that such a deformity may arise due to Poliomyelitis.

² In the Book of Leviticus (Lev 21:16-24), disability is an abomination to the Lord. However, in the same Bible in Genesis (Gen 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-25), God created human beings in his image and likeness. These statements seem to contradict each other. Today, many of us understand what can cause disability. Yet many people are afraid to get close to disabled persons else they also become inflicted with their “misfortune.” See Salakpi, (2010). Due to shame or how society treats the disabled some people hide them in their homes. Some think they are a nuisance in public. Out of sympathy for them, some people will not want them to go to school, to go out, or to work because that will be too much of a burden for them, especially those who are physically challenged.

up.³ A help given to a needy must liberate the person and make that person independent. There are many people who are capable of putting smiles on the lips of others but are unable to do so. They have the money, they have the advice, and they have the influence and the capability, but will just not do it (Umorem, 2015, pp. 126-128). Some out of selfishness, pride and power would always want the needy to come and bow to them. Some of those who want to help will do it partially so that the person can still depend on them. There are also some who are not aware that they can be of help to others. They need the awakening. Peter and John, accordingly, found their own way of empowering the cripple. Giving him money will still make him a beggar, but now that he is on his legs, he can work for himself.

The empowerment also entails becoming more conscious of the self-worth (Shultziner and Rabinovici, 2011, p. 47) of the person in need as a human being that demands dignity. The person may remain a cripple but the attitude towards that cripple will make the cripple feel humanly welcomed, respected, and accepted. Most of the disrespect meted against such people depends on the cultural heritage of the society. The society's understanding of its values, beliefs, habits, ideas, and concepts on human life will either enable a cripple to be dignified and empowered or ridiculed and abandoned. Peter and John understood what human dignity is, and became responsible in their vocation and emerged heroes. Using exegetical analysis of Acts 3:1-10, this paper has three main objectives: (i) to correct those cultural concepts, ideas, beliefs, and values that disrespect human life and (ii) to create the awareness that to empower the needy, the poor, and the lowly can be done in many different ways without violating societal norms and rules, (iii) to motivate

³ This echoed the Book of James (Jas 2:14-17), which enjoins on provision for the needy. One who is cold should be provided with a blanket and not just to say go and be warmed without a blanket and one who is hungry should be provided with food and not just say go in peace and be satisfied. What is noteworthy is that he did not only say the words "Jesus Christ" but he stretched his hand to lift him up. Empowerment must be total and not partial.

those who are capable of empowering and dignifying human life to do so.

The article is divided into two main parts: the first part is the exegetical analysis of the text to highlight the spirit of empowerment and the second part dwells on how Peter and John became heroes and symbols of emulation to address negative cultural norms, to empower the needy, and to motivate others to empower.

Analysis of the text: Acts 3:1-10

The miracle in question (Acts 3:1-10) is the first miracle recorded in the Book of Acts and it gives way to two speeches (Acts 3:12-26 and 4:8-12) in defense of Jesus Christ and his ministry by those who have been empowered by the Pentecostal Spirit (Fitzmyer, 1998, p. 276). Both Johnson (1992, p.71) and Fitzmyer (1998, p. 276) agreed that the text has the components of a miracle story in the structure of the Synoptic tradition, that is: (a) a situation is described (3:2-3, 5); (b) a word of command (3:4, 6); (c) a restorative action (3:7a); (d) cure is effected (3:7b-8) and; (e) reaction from witnesses (3:10-11). In this section, Acts 3:1-10 is analyzed exegetically to unravel its theological tenets of empowerment of human values and potentials.

The background (v. 1)

The adversative particle, *de* “now” serves as a link between the healing of the beggar and the Pentecost story (Johnson, pp. 71-72) with special reference to the apostles’ attitude of frequenting the Temple, praying and praising God (Acts 2:46-47). The verb *anabainein* “go up” depicts the position of the Temple and the movement of Peter and John.⁴ The evening prayer (ninth hour prayer) was a traditional time for prayer and a call to sacrifice (*Tamid*), which involved a continual offering of supplication made in demonstration of the worshipper’s devotion to God (Wall, 1994, p. 77). It was attended by a large number

⁴ The Temple is situated on a hill, cf. Isa 37:1; 38:22 (LXX); Luke 18:10.

of devout Jews. The ritual lasted until dusk and was the second sacrifice for the day (Casciaro, 1989, p. 55). This practice dated back to Exod 29:38-42; Num 28:1-8; Ezek 46:13-15; Dan 6:10; 9:21. The Ezekiel text featured *Tamid* as part of the sacrificial practice of the eschatological Temple (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 14:66). The time of the encounter between the apostles and the cripple is also very unique, 3.00pm; it is the hour of deliverance, the hour of mercy when Christ died on the cross.⁵

The pairing of John and Peter is also seen in Luke 5:10; 22:8; Acts 4:13, 19; 8:14 and is of great importance to fulfill the requirement of two witnesses to an event. The two therefore served to ascertain the need for two witnesses to make a message credible (Num 35:30; Deut 19:15; Matt 18:16) and as leaders of the Christian faith that will give more weight to Christian readership (Bruce, 1988, p. 135).

The encounter (vv. 2-5)

The beggar is addressed as a “man,” but unnamed (Kamba, p. 270) and *chōlo* “lame” from the mother’s *koilia* “womb”. *Koilia*, here is rendered as “womb” and not “belly” which is equivalent to the Hebrew *beten*,⁶ which implied that the man was lame from birth. The beggar is “daily carried by people” to go and beg for a living; the sole source of his livelihood.⁷ His presence there was to beg. He could not enter the Temple because, according to Lev 21:16-24, a cripple is an outcast, who could not approach the altar to offer sacrifice to God and as such, is excluded from the priesthood. Just the same way that a lame lamb could not be offered because of its

⁵ Acts 10:3-30; Acts 14:8-10; John 9:1. See also Kamba, (2016, p. 272).

⁶ See the LXX of Deut 28:4, 11; Job 1:21; 38:8; Isa 49:1; Jer 1:5; Psa 22:11.

⁷ The story is similar to the story in Luke 5:18-19. In that story, friends brought a paralytic and not finding space to reach Jesus, carried him through the roof of the house and laid him in front of Jesus for healing and in this text a cripple was brought and laid by the gate of the Temple to ask for alms; in both cases healing occurred, and people marveled.

“blemish.”⁸ The situation of the beggar at the gate recalls those beggars in the parables of Luke, especially in Luke 16:19-31.

The position of the “gate” called “the beautiful” is uncertain (Garner, 1983, pp. 28-32 & Johnson, pp. 71-72). According to Fitzmyer (p. 278), the lack of accurate description of the gate may be due to Luke’s defective knowledge of Judean geography. Three gates were proposed (Fitzmyer, p. 277; Parsons, 2005, pp. 295-312, & Hamm, 1986, pp. 309-310): (i) Shushan Gate in the east wall of the Temple, which gave access from the outside to the court of the Gentiles. (ii) Nicanor Gate also called the Corinthian or Bronze Gate which gave access on the east from the court of Gentiles to the court of women, a good place to beg (O’Connor, 1980, pp. 65-66). (iii) “Nicanor” Gate (misnamed) gave access from the court of women to the court of Israel, ‘men.’⁹ The cripple is brought out to beg for alms. In Judaism, *eleēmosynē* “almsgiving” expresses a righteous (*sedekā* [Heb] and *dikaiosynē* [Gk]) act (Hamm, p. 316).¹⁰ Almsgiving has an important place in the teachings of the rabbis. To make it impossible for people to practice, the rabbis made it “an institutional sharing of possession” (Johnson, p. 65). Luke similarly shared the same idea and placed greater emphasis on almsgiving.¹¹

⁸ Cf. Deut 15:21; Mal 1:8, 13. Similar exclusion is seen in the writings of Qumran 1Qsa 2:5-6.

⁹ Josephus also mentioned a “Bronze Gate” on the east of the Temple (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2:411), he made it the greatest of all the gates of the Temple and stressed its value. According to him, it was made with Corinthian Bronze (Josephus, *Jewish War* 5:2001); however, he never mentioned “Beautiful Gate.” There were other gates plated with silver and gold; the Midrash mentioned “Nicanor Gate” made out of bronze rather than overlaid with gold on the eastern side of the Temple (*Mid.* 2:3-5). The Mishnah also retained a tradition of a miracle connected with “Nicanor Gate” mentioned in Midrash but not the one recorded by Luke (*Tosephta Sotah* 2:4).

¹⁰ See Tob 1:3, 16; 2:14; 4:7-11; 12:8-9. The word for alms, *eleēmosynē* is used three times in the text, vv. 2, 3, which reinforces the sharp contrast between what the beggar is seeking “silver and gold” and what he gets “healing” in a remarkable way connoting the word “mercy” rather than “alms.” He will receive “God’s blessings” as the word is used in some places in the LXX (e.g. Isa 1:2; 8:2).

¹¹ See Luke 11:41; 12:33; Acts 9:36; 10:2, 4, 31; 24:17.

The eye contact presupposed that the beggar wanted something from them, as expressed in v. 4, Peter and John “looked at him intently.” The eye contact communication gave Peter the consent to invoke divine mercy (*eleēmosynē*) upon him. According to Wall (p. 78), divine mercy is always a personal concern. Such an invocation, Walaskay (1981, p. 174) noted, depended on personal commitment in faith. Peter and John have a faith they believed in. The beggar’s faith must resonate with the faith of Peter and John in order for him to receive what he wanted (Fitzmyer, p. 276). Help comes to the needy through cooperation with the one who is giving. The participle *prosdokōn* “expecting” (v. 5) evoked the beggar’s attention and his readiness to cooperate. Thus, Luke created a moment of suspense by this passing reference to the beggar’s expectation (Johnson p. 65). This paved way for the supposed “disappointing words” at the beginning of v. 6 before the unexpected empowerment, “the restoration” of his humanity; a man who never walked in life will walk like other human beings.

The restoration (vv. 6-11)

It is difficult to say what “silver and gold” (v. 6) mean in this context because the currency in circulation was neither silver nor gold, but the highest probability is money. The surpassing value of Christian possession is the healing power of Jesus and faith is needed to execute it (Fitzmyer, p. 276; Johnson, 1977, pp. 190-191; & Wall, p. 78). In all certainty, if it is pecuniary then there is a narrative sense to Peter’s assertion, because they lived a community spirit (2:44) and the apostles were not in charge of money (4:32 – 5:11). In contrast, “silver and gold” could mean an inward quality of virtue (Luke 16:10-13) as found in Hellenistic moral teaching (Johnson, 1992, p. 65). What is at stake is not human currency but divine power that will restore human dignity and evoke amazement (cf. Acts 8:18-24).

The *onoma*, “name”¹² (Kamba, p. 271 & Fitzmyer, p. 277) of a person goes with its authority (Martindale, 1958, p. 19 & Kamba, p. 271), power, and identity (Johnson, 1992, p. 66). The identity is supplied by *Nazōraios*. In fulfilment of the divine prophecy that he will be called a Nazarene; Nazareth, the place where he grew up.¹³ Already, the phrase “in the name of Jesus Christ” has an authorization for apostolic activity (Matt 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-49; John 14:10-14).¹⁴ With that followed the command, *egeire kai peripatei* “rise and walk” (v. 6), which echoed Luke 5:23, of Jesus healing the paralytic. Peter stretched his right hand to raise him up. God’s right hand is used several times in the Bible as a source of strength (Pss 60; 137).

The inchoative sense of the imperfect, *periepatei* “began to walk” (v. 8) and the adverb *parachrēma* “immediately” (v. 7) are typical Lukan style of signs and wonders, which showed that the miracle happened immediately.¹⁵ To buttress his emphasis on signs and wonders, he listed seven verbs in a roll: jump up, stand, walk, enters, walk, leaps, and praise. The command was the transforming action that restored his dignity (Kamba, p. 272). The use of the cognate *exallomenos* (v. 8) or *allomenos* for “leaping” recalls the Septuagint use of *allesthai* in Judg 14:6, 19; 15:14; 1 Sam 10:10, where the verb describes the “Spirit of leaping” as a charisma on the leader of the people and in Isaiah as proclamation of the restoration of Zion (Isa 35:6), hence the restoration of the cripple.

The cripple has passed from paralysis to joyous activity, from begging into praising God within the Temple (Fitzmyer, p. 279). The word *aineō* “praise” (v. 9) here echoes the description of the community in 2:47, which states that, the goal of healing is

¹² Invocation of a name is to draw the attention of the person to the cause of invocation and in this case, Peter drew the attention of Jesus Christ to the cripple. A person invoking must have faith in the name being invoked and Peter had faith in Jesus Christ.

¹³ Cf. Luke 1:26; 2:4, 39, 51; 4:16; 18:37; Acts 2:22; 4:10; 6:14; 10:28; 22:8; 26:9.

¹⁴ See also Acts 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 12, 17, 18, 30; 5:28, 40-41; 8:12; 9:16, 21, 27, 28; 15:26; 16:18; 19:13, 17; 21:13; 22:16; 26:9.

¹⁵ See Luke 1:64; 4:39; 5: 6, 25; 8:44, 47, 55; 13:13; 18:43; Acts 5:10; 12:23; 13:11.

a restoration to a people that praise God (Johnson, 1992, p. 66). The apostles were noted for praying and praising God (Wall, pp. 78-79) and so have the capability of performing wonders and the wonders resulted in “amazement” or “astonishment” *thambos* (v. 10) to the people (see also Luke 4:36; 5:9); and it is again picked up in v. 11 as *ekthambos*.¹⁶ The healing drew the attention of the bystanders to Peter, John, and the cripple and they have to explain the source of this liberation and empowerment.

The empowerment: Peter and John, heroes of emulation

The attitude of Peter and John calls to mind human integrity and responsibility, in which are expressed compassion and selflessness, which are blessings from God (Johnson, 1992, p. 71). According to de Lange (2013, p. 13), good life form part of human destiny of which are human contentment and freedom. Peter and John, moved with compassion for the beggar, restored his human dignity (a liberation from begging) in the name of Jesus Christ. According to the rules safeguarding the holiness of the temple, people with disabilities were separated and placed apart because they were impure and hence forbidden to enter (Lev 21:16-24; 2 Sam 5:8 Lev 19:14, Deut 28:28; Exod 4:10–11, Job 29: 12-16). A cripple is an “outcast” and among the community of the Jews, it is dehumanizing to be an outcast (Wall, p. 77). This physical status “cripple” made him a “beggar”. A beggar is ignored, scorned, looked down upon and turned down by people. Some do receive gifts, but even that goes with a score and humiliation (Shultziner & Rabinovici, pp. 11-15).

Physical impediment does not make one less human. Physical impediment has rendered many into begging on the street, churches, mosques, synagogues, markets, offices, and other public places. It is not a crime to be physically impaired, but unfortunately, some of those who are not physically challenged have rendered those in that category less human. All human

¹⁶ Alternatively, *ekstasis* or *exhistēmi* are also found in several texts; cf. Luke 2:47; 5:26; 8:56; 24:22; Acts 8:9, 11, 13; 9:21; 10:45; 12:16.

beings are created in the image and likeness of God and each human being demands that respect, freedom and dignity because human beings are the crown of God's creation. Human freedom is inseparable from moral responsibilities; and personal rights are inextricably bound up with obligations that made human beings accountable for their actions (Slavcheva, 2011, p.122). Instead of empowering the needy, sometimes other human beings tend to deprive and take the little the needy have from them. This is obvious from the evil and the suffering that the needy are subjected to by their fellow human beings. There should be no distinction in human nature, but the violent distinction stemming from greed, selfishness and power drunkenness have made human dignity fragile (Claassens & Spronk, 2013, pp. 1-2).

Here is the kernel of this paper. Peter and John believed and accepted the laws and regulations of their culture but changed the situation around the beggar. The argument then is that there could be laws or situations that one cannot change around the poor, the needy, the widow, the orphan, and the disabled, but one is obliged to make sure that those within those categories have a fulfilled life. One may not have the miraculous powers to heal a cripple, but one has the power to change the mindset and to put a smile on the face of a destitute. In this regard, both the rich and the poor can contribute to building a healthy environment for the pursuit of integrity of life.

Transforming negative cultural norms

According to Ahortor, it is unfortunate that some societies have structures that prevent people with disability from using their talents to do things for themselves and the society. Such barriers, according to him, should be removed (Ahortor, 2016, p. 105). While some societies have made tremendous effort towards empowering the less privileged especially the disabled

persons in the community others try to discriminate.¹⁷ To empower the disabled necessitates a legislature and the enforcement of the implementation of the legislature in order to address their issues. In that regard, the government of Ghana, through the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare, in June 2000 published a *National Disability Policy Document*. This was followed by the passing of the *Bill of the Persons with Disability Act (Act 715)* on 23rd June 2006 and the Republic assent to it on 9th August 2006. To make implementation effective both the policy and the Act recommended the formation of a National Council, which was to include persons with disability, which was duly established in April 2009. Unfortunately, today, there is still expressions of discontent from people with disability. The implementation of the policies should go with follow-up supervision to see how those who have been helped are progressing. Social workers and members of the society within their environment should exercise their integrity and as a duty of responsibility to make follow ups on them and help them to achieve the desired goal.¹⁸

In Ghana, an example of what is supposed to be abominable happened when the Ex-President, John Dramani Mahama, in January 2013 nominated Dr. Seidu Danaa, a visually impaired lawyer as minister designate for Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs. He was strongly opposed by some chiefs because of his disability. He was however, vetted and approved by Parliament. This is the empowerment that needs to be done. The chiefs who opposed his nomination and claimed

¹⁷ There are individuals, groups, NGOs, religious bodies who try to alleviate the plight of the needy, and they do not discriminate. However, in most cases many do not follow up on their initial big impact and eventually their effort comes to nothing.

¹⁸ The Metropolitan Assembly of Adentan, in Accra, Ghana donated items, which include laptops, sewing machines and equipment that will help generate income to some persons with disability within the assembly. They were told not to go and sell them to people, but to use them to generate income for themselves. The good part was that they were told that there will be a follow up to see how they used the machines to enhance their lives. This is the most important part because most of the time there is neither supervision nor follow ups and a good project ends nowhere. This was broadcast on GH-ONE TV during the 6.30pm news on Saturday 25 July 2020.

his deformity will pollute their sacred position were strongly condemned by civil society.¹⁹ Dr. Danaa became the minister and the chiefs worked with him and they were never desecrated.

It is always astonishment and puzzlement when the unimaginable is done. The miracle of Peter and John provoked astonishment and puzzlement among those who knew the cripple, as a beggar at the gate and who considered Peter and John earlier as drunkards (Acts 2:12-13). So, instead of the crowd to do their usual mocking as they did before (Acts 2:12-13) and to scorn the beggar, they rather rushed to hear about the mighty work done (Wall, p. 78). Astonishment and amazement are the outcomes when what people think is impossible becomes possible.²⁰ This scenario of astonishment and amazement recalls the story of the man born blind in John 9:8-12, 20 as was the case in ex-President John Dramani Mahama's choice of appointment.

Empowerment of the needy

Good health comes from good human relationships. Every human being has something unique that others do not have and that makes human beings to lack and to be dependable. Each person's insufficiency can only be satisfied in social interconnectedness conceived within a relational good (de Lange, p. 14). Unfortunately, some human beings feel self-sufficient and so, do not associate with others. Others also think those who suffer, suffer because of fate, and would not want to help (Salakpi, 2019, pp. 125-133). Human beings become real persons only by and through their relationships. Good relationship breeds good health. One's personality is possible only when others also exist and so long as they share the world together personal identity is assured (Slavcheva, p.120). One's worth can only be known through interactions with others and this interaction encourages and strengthens personal and social

¹⁹ 5th February 2013 www.myjoyonline.com, accessed 1st July 2020. 6th February 2013 www.gheadlines.com, accessed 1st July 2020. There was unanimous condemnation of the chiefs involved in their objection to the selection of the disabled by civil society.

²⁰ See Luke 4:36; 5:26; 7:16; 8:37, 56; 11; 14; 13:17; 18:43.

security. But this security is only achieved through integrity within personal intellectual responsibility (Hughes, 2011, pp. 9-10).

Some people are kept perpetually poor and needy because 'their captors' are selfish and greedy. The salary and wages that some people received are unimaginable (Ammah, 2007, p. 5 & Umorem, p. 124). They are not paid for what they worked for. Some 'philanthropists' who voluntarily offer to help, do it partially so that the needy person can still depend on them. In other cases, the terms and conditions for receiving such help, for example, a loan, are ridiculous. Sometimes, the interest on a loan is so high that the person cannot pay and hence remains in perpetual poverty (F. Rahman, 1964, pp. 37-39; A. Rahman, 1976 & Mufti, 1975, p. 1). Often, people with large businesses force those with small businesses to fold up. This is the plan: those with large businesses reduce the prices of their goods in the name of capitalism, thereby forcing those who are in the same business with them to reduce their prices, but since their business is on a smaller scale, they incur losses and are forced out of business.

Greed is an attitude that starts from childhood when a child begins to grab, unwilling to share with his or her siblings. Such attitude must be checked. The greedy and the power drunk do not care even if, they have to step on others to achieve what they want. Some people house beggars like the lame, the blind, the deaf in their homes, provide food, clothes, and shelter for them and use them to make money.²¹ They put them at vantage points each morning and pick them up in the evening and collect the money they make from them. Meanwhile, some of them can be provided for or helped to acquire skills to work. Girls are deceived for good paid jobs in foreign countries only to be made into prostitutes in those countries. War lords enforce child

²¹ Begging has become work for people to do to earn money, it is no longer charity. See Begging as Work: a study of people with mobility difficulties, Kassah, 2005 at www.tandfonline.com accessed 1st July 2020; see also www.emerald.com accessed 1st July 2020.

labor; use these children to work for them and enrich themselves on their toil.²² The children end up not educated and as such are a potential future threat to society. They are given drugs to motivate them to work more without getting tired. There are also parents who send their children to go and beg for money and whatever they get, the parents collect from them. There are some foreigners who do not want to work and so, they sit under trees and send their children to go and beg for money.²³ The children in these situations are not enrolled in school and would grow to become a liability for the society. This calls for social responsibility.

On a positive note, there are physically challenged persons who are doing well. Some are in responsible positions.²⁴ Even some of those who are not able to go to school still try to fend for themselves. A more specific example is the case of a cripple at Zongo junction, Medina (Accra) who sells detergent on the road among the vehicles that stop for the traffic lights to change. Although, it is dangerous, this person has demonstrated the willingness to work. There is also the case of an unemployed trained nurse, who rather than beg, decided to become a *kayayei*²⁵ because she needed to eat, have cloths on, and have a shelter. Therefore, some deprived or disadvantaged people are making efforts, and with some empowerment, in guidance and support, they will become self-supporting and independent.

²² See Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2018): Democratic Republic of Congo in focus. *Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports*, www.dol.gov, accessed 1st July 2020.

²³ They are common in Accra; one will see them mostly on Medina – Accra Road; their parents sit under trees and send their children to beg for money from motorists and passers-by.

²⁴ The President of Ghana, Akufo-Addo appoints physically challenged man, Joseph Makubu as Oti Regional Minister 22/01/2021. For more information see <https://www.modernghana.com>

²⁵ GTV News 7.00pm, 28th August 2018. Kayayei is a person who help to carry the goods or wares bought by someone from the market to his or her place of destination for a fee. The destination could be a place where the buyer wants the goods to be deposited. It could be a bus stop or shop within the market area. Kayayei, therefore carry goods within and around the market. See Ammah (2002, pp. 74-80).

Motivating others to empower

Human beings are creative and capable of empowerment. According to Slavcheva (p. 118), human intelligence and moral responsibility are perfect and complete because human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. In the words of Alter (1997, p. 5), human beings are gifted with a mind, senses, free will in which God's perfect image dwells. Therefore, human beings are to be creative to perpetuate the earth. They have the task to strive with the help of God's image within them to reach creative perfection by shaping themselves, with the different virtues to develop and promote their spiritual strength and power like Peter and John. Human beings can only receive God's image from God and this will reflect in their own nature and likeness as human beings. Although human beings are physically different in appearance, they have a common goal, which is to fulfil the will of the creator. Accordingly, the purpose of human life is to be more like the creator (Slavcheva, p.118). Peter and John were able to pursue this virtue and in that union with their creator, recreate the world of the cripple.

In Genesis, the responsibility of human beings was more of a filial responsibility to perpetuate the created universe. The phrases "be fruitful and multiply," "take the land and subdue it," and "have dominion over all creatures" defines human responsibility, which was exercised by Peter and John by recreating the world of the beggar. Peter did not only say the words, but stretched out his hand to touch the lame man and lifted him up. It is not only by words or by prayer. It was backed with action.²⁶ Peter and John demonstrated a sign of true apostleship (2 Cor 12:12; Matt 10:8). Society is called to true demonstration of empowerment. A cripple, who is supposed to learn how to weave a mat must be helped through the learning process and be supported until he or she can weave a mat. He or

²⁶ The beggar was stationed at the beautiful gate that something beautiful might happen in his life, and indeed something beautiful happened in his life through the goodness of Peter and John. The trust in one's integrity of what one is made of, and in this case their trust in Jesus Christ and prayer life enabled them to liberate the cripple. See also Pervo (2009, p.100).

she has to be supported with tools and materials and a place to start his or her work. God gave manna to the Israelites on their way to Canaan and in Canaan; and until they harvested their first fruit, manna was still their food. Help must be given until the person is able to be on his or her own. Sometimes, due to selfishness, envy, power, and greed human beings are reluctant to help others.

Human beings live in a community of people and are governed by rules and regulations. For instance, prayers and almsgiving characterized Jewish piety and today, it is the piety of Christians, Jews, and Muslims (Wall, p. 77 & Umorem, pp. 122-123). Christians, Jews and Muslims are called to the task of alleviating the plight of the needy. Beggars were brought to the Temple area with the hope that those going into the Temple for pious activity would give them alms. Today, we have them all around us. The cripple became a beggar because he was crippled and there was no one to provide for his daily needs. He, however, had benevolent people who carried him daily: morning and evening, to beg for money at the entrance of the Temple gate. At least, some people were charitable enough to carry him to and fro. Johnson linked the carrying of the lame man to the Temple gate to two other healing stories: Luke 5:17-26, a paralytic carried by friends to Jesus and that of Paul in Lystra; and a lame man from birth (Acts 14:8-18). According to Johnson (1992, pp. 71-72), it is Luke's theology of how others contributed to enable people in need to receive God's mercy, that is the empowerment. Since they do not have the money to look after him, they did what they could to the point that others can continue (Kamba, pp. 270-271). The lesson drawn is for everyone to exercise his or her empowerment according to his or her ability and since every human being has something to offer, where one ends another should continue.

Nemo dat quod non habet (In Latin, meaning, no one gives what they do not have; or in other words, one can only give what they have) is what is displayed by Peter and John.

They have the power of the risen Christ. While Jesus was with them, he said to them whatever you asked for in my name, I will do (John 14:13-14). They believed him; and his name is worth more than silver and gold. Instead of money, Peter gave the cripple what will make him live as a human being, free from begging. It is good to teach people how to fish rather than give them fish.²⁷ This is empowerment.

Conclusion

The text, Acts 3:1-10, unraveled the spirit of empowerment. The joy in the empowerment of the cripple is not only his physical restoration, but more importantly that he will no longer beg again. As a cripple, he has no access to the Temple and for the healing to be the means that broke that barrier between him and the Temple was self-relieving. With his restoration, he has become a member of the worshipping community: a human among “others,” to live and participate in all human activity. All these called for great joy and that was demonstrated by his limping and jumping (Acts 3:8). A situation that brought social healing to both the cripple and members of his society; he can mingle with others without reproach (Kamba, p. 272).

The spirit of empowerment is something that must be embraced and implemented by all who are prophetic successors of Jesus Christ (Johnson, 1992, p. 71). Today, we see children without disability also begging. These children should be picked up, and their parents interrogated. If the parents are not available, then these children should be taken to homeless shelters for upkeep and education. There are also adults who go about begging. Granted that our society can never be free from beggars, much effort should be made to overcome poverty and

²⁷ In 1986, an article on body works in “Yoga Journal” ascribed the saying to Lao-Tzu: “if you give a hungry man a fish, you feed him for a day, but if you teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.” However, the origin of the proverb is highly contested as some claim the adage is Native American, Chinese, Italian, Indian, or Biblical (John 6:24-37), see www.quoteinvestigator.com (August 28, 2015).

that will lessen the number of beggars in our public arena (Ammah, 2007, pp. 7-9).

Making humans beggars, trafficking them, and abusing them are comparable to some primitive ideologies of creation that placed no value on human life. Perpetrators of these acts should be brought to justice. As remarked by Ahortor (2016, p. 112), disability is not a curse and must not be dreaded. Today, our concepts, beliefs, and ideas should empower and promote unity, peace, development, dignity and respect (de Lange, p. 12) and must not allow the evil, which possessed the heart of humans in Gen 6:5 to do evil, to produce within us, a chaotic and unhealthy society. Every human being has something to contribute to life and therefore needs that empowerment to realize this goal in life.

Going up into the Temple for prayer was a habit, an attitude; it was a life the apostles had embraced, and they lived it. The story demonstrated what the apostles possessed. They had no money but they had a name, “Jesus Christ”, and his miracle-working power. The power through which the disciples healed and cast demons (Matt 7:22; Mark 9:38; Acts 19:13) is bestowed on all those who believe in Jesus Christ. This power is to be used in recreating the world (Ammah, 2007, pp. 6-7).

In most cases, our inhuman actions lack deliberative conscience.²⁸ When human beings cannot use their mind, wisdom, speech, and love to recreate the world then humanity becomes a failure. A person’s personality, mind, conscience,

²⁸ Just as in John 9:1-40, Jesus told the Jews that they were blind and they laughed at him because they had their physical eyesight, so also are there people who are spiritually challenged because their thinking and actions are not human. Some of these people have a dead conscience and need help. Unfortunately, sometimes people who are aware of this situation keep quiet. People condone these evil acts for a variety of personal reasons (i.e., the person is my boss, the provider for my life, my spouse, my only child, my family member, or my friend). The consequence is that evil triumphs. People with a dead conscience need to be confronted with the evil they perpetuate. Of course, it is possible that there are people who do not even know that their behavior is inappropriate. For example, St. Paul (Acts 9:1-22) thought he was doing something good until his encounter. Nonetheless, there are also those who are very much aware of their evil deed(s) and still persist in doing it/them; they need to be challenged to stop. God created human beings in his own image and likeness; respect of a human being is respect to God because creation belongs to him.

ways of knowing, obedience and communication depict his or her relationship with God. There should be a desire for moral perfection and holiness, in one's creative work, with one's immortal soul and free will because God has endowed every human being with a high value and inviolability (Ammah, 2007, p. 8). A human being that is shaped into God's likeness perceives divine truth and examines with rapture the good and the beautiful. The traditional belief that disability is spiritual anomaly, and it is ill-health has to be disabused (Ahortor, 2016, pp. 106-107). A blind man from Gidikpui in the Central Tongu District of Ghana recounted how he was confined indoors until an uncle came and took him away secretly. He was rehabilitated and became a craft instructor in a Basic School. When he was asked to describe his experience in confinement, he said he never realized anything was wrong until he was taken away (Ahortor, 2000, pp. 60-68). As bearers of noble striving, every human being must be determined to achieve supreme ideals. Peter and John achieved that feat and it has become imperative that humanity empower the powerless. In Christian wisdom, the end-point of Jesus' healing of the sick is the restoration into the human family (Johnson, 1992, p. 72) and that is, the empowerment.

References

- Ahortor, Godson (2000). "Traditional Beliefs and Attitudes towards Disability among the People of North Tongu." Unpublished MPhil Thesis presented to the Department for the Study of Religions University of Ghana.
- Ahortor, Godson. (2016). "Exploring the Intersection of Religion, Health and Disability in the Ghanaian Experience." *GJRT* 6. Pp. 102-117.
- Ammah, Rabiātu. (2002). "The Kayayoyization of the Muslim the Muslim Girl Child" in *When Silence is No Longer an Option*. Elizabeth Amoah (ed.). Accra: Sam Woode. Pp. 74-80.
- Ammah, Rabiātu. (2007). "Islam and Poverty Reduction Strategies Attempts at Dealing with Poverty in the Ghanaian Muslim Community." *GJRT* 2. Pp. 3-20.
- Alter, R. (1997). *Genesis. Translation and Commentary*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Bruce, F. F. (1988). *The Acts of the Apostles, NICNT*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Casciaro, Jose Maria. (1989). *Acts of the Apostles. Text and Commentary. The Navarre Bible*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.
- Claassens, Juliana L. & Spronk, Klaas (eds). (2013). *Fragile Dignity. Intercontextual Conversation on Scriptures, Family, and Violence*. Atlanta: SBL. Pp. 1-7.
- de Lange, Frits. (2013). "The Hermeneutics of Dignity" in *Fragile Dignity. Intercontextual Conversation on Scriptures, Family, and Violence*. Claassens, L. Juliana & Spronk, Klaas (eds.), Atlanta: SBL. Pp. 9-27.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. (1998). *The Acts of the Apostle. AB 31*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Garner, G. G. (1983). "Jerusalem: Another Golden Gate!" *Buried History* 19. Pp. 28-32.
- Guralnik B. David. (Ed.), (1988). *Webster's New World Dictionary*. N.Y.: Simon & Schuster Inc.
- Hamm, Dennis (1986). "Acts 3:1-10: the Healing of the Temple Beggar as Lucan Theology," in *Biblica* 67 (3). Pp. 305-319.
- Hughes, Glenn (2011). "The Concept of Dignity in the Universal Declaration of Human Right," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 39 (1). Pp. 1-26.
- Johnson, L. (1977). *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts, SBLDS* 39. Missoula: Scholars Press.
- Johnson, L. T. (1992). *The Acts of the Apostles, SP* 5. Daniel Harrington (ed.). Collegeville: Liturgical Press.
- Kamba, Micheline (2016). "Holistic Healing in Acts 3:1-10: A Transformative Church for All People" in *Review of Mission* 105 (2). Pp. 268-279.

- Martindale, C. C. (1958). *The Acts of the Apostles*. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press.
- Mufti, Shafi Muhammad, (1975). *Distribution of Wealth in Islam*. Karachi: Ashraf Publication.
- O'Connor, Murphy J. (1980). *The Holy Land: An Archaeological Guide from Earliest Time to 1700*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Parsons, Mikael C. (2005). "The Character of the Lame Man in Acts 3-4." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124(2). Pp. 295-312.
- Pervo, L. Richard. (2009). *Acts: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Salakpi, G. K. Alexander (2010). *Social Alienation as a Consequence of Human Suffering in the Book of Job. A Study of Job 19:13-22*. New York, Bloomington: iUniverse.
- Salakpi, G. K. Alexander. (2019). "Do We Still Need This – Cultural Prejudice? A Contemporary Study of John 4:1- 42." *Journal of African Biblical Studies*, 6. Pp. 109-137.
- Rahman, Afzalur. (1976). *Economic Doctrines of Islam*, vol. 3. Lahore: Islamic Publications.
- Rahman, Falur. (1964). "Islam and Interest" *Islamic Studies* 3. Pp. 37-39.
- Shultziner, Doron & Rabinovici, Itai. (2011), "Human Dignity, Self-Worth and Humiliation: A Comparative Legal-Psychological Approach" *HUJ*. Pp. 1-70.
- Slavcheva, Kameliya. (2011). "Human Rights, Dignity and Freedom: An Orthodox Perspective," *Baptistic Theologies* 3. (2). Pp. 115-123.
- Umorem, Anthony. (2015), "Liberating the Poor as Jesus' Evangelisation Approach in Luke 4:18-19: Lessons for the Church in Nigeria," *CABAN* 6. Pp. 109-130.
- Walaskay, Paul, W (1981), "Acts 3:1-10" in *Interpretation* 42 (2). Pp. 171-175.
- Wall, Robert W. (1994). "The Acts of the Apostles" in *NIB* vol. X. Nashville: Abingdon Press.