

Repositioning Theological Institutions for Urban Ministry

A Case for the Kampala Evangelical School of Theology

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Abstract

The unprecedented urbanisation trends in Africa have not been matched with the corresponding theological formation and praxis that is consciously oriented towards the urban in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and spirituality. Nevertheless, theological institutions can be active stakeholders in their cities to the extent that they envision those cities theologically. The author used the Kampala Evangelical School of Theology (KEST) as a case study to explore how a theological repositioning that facilitates transformative urban ministry can happen. KEST could reposition itself, appreciating its central urban location and becoming deliberate about embracing an urban ethos, outlook and praxis. A description of a city like Kampala is a starting point and a foil for ministry insertion and theological reflection that informs praxis. The theological portrait of a flourishing city provides biblical/theological motifs that could be helpful in reimagining African cities beyond the existing fractures. A contextualised urban theology must necessarily grapple with the grim realities of many African cities while reflecting on a balanced theological vision for flourishing African cities characterised by shalom, hope, community, and an effective urban ecology. Lastly, the article proposes practical steps that theological institutions such as KEST could take in order to reposition for transformative urban ministry. They include repositioning the urban identity by deliberately making the city the centre of theological reflection and engagement, epistemological and pedagogical repositioning, which involves retrieving knowledge and experience of various stakeholders to inform and guide theological reflection and becoming hubs for urban ministry praxis, which could be a potential egalitarian space where it is safe for those on the margins to engage on equal terms with those in power.

Keywords Flourishing African Cities; Kampala; Urban Africa; Urban Ministry

1. Introduction: A case for repositioning for urban ministry

This article is an outcome of the research project *Urban Africa 2050: Imagining Theological Education/Formation for Flourishing African Cities* (De Beer, 2020). The research was facilitated by the Centre for Contextual Ministry (now Centre for Faith and Community) in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of

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Pretoria. The Kampala Evangelical School of Theology (KEST) was one of the participating institutions. The interlocutors in Kampala included urban planners, ministry practitioners, and leaders of theological institutions. The purpose of the study is to explore why and how theological institutions must prioritise urban ministry in their training endeavours. This section explains why institutions such as KEST need to reposition for urban ministry.

1.1 A growing but fractured city

The research findings revealed that Kampala is both a thriving and struggling city. Like most African cities, Kampala is urbanising at unprecedented rates, but the growth is not matched with appropriate planning. As the Kampala Physical Development Plan (KPDP) puts it:

The City is already overwhelmed by its current population, failing to adequately provide housing, employment, services, utilities and amenity for the bulk of its population and battling to absorb the current rate of in-migration. ... The City has lost its form, attractiveness and identity as the 'Garden City of Africa' (Kampala Capital City Authority [KCCA], 2012:149-150).

Unless the government takes radical measures, the population of the Kampala metropolitan area will grow from three million in 2012 to 20 million people by 2040, thus becoming an unsustainable megacity (KCCA, 2012:149).

1.2 KEST: Located in the city but not consciously oriented toward the city

KEST is located in the heart of Kampala City, adjacent to Makerere University and in close proximity to other institutions, such as Mulago National Referral Hospital, the Gaddafi National Mosque, and Namirembe Cathedral. KEST is also close to urban slums like Kivulu, Katanga and Kikoni. Yet, despite its urban location, KEST has not been consciously oriented towards the urban in its curriculum, pedagogy, and spirituality. Interestingly, the institution's founding documents include "urban" as one of the KEST values. The full statement reads, "We are committed to helping the church keep in step with the changing social and cultural landscape, especially in response to the accelerated rate of urbanization due to globalisation and modernization" (KEST, n.d.:2).

There are several reasons why KEST has not been intentionally engaging the urban. For instance, KEST, like many other African theological institutions, inherited a theological paradigm from the global north that emphasised teaching theological and biblical subjects, but tended to ignore local contexts where the students were serving. Second, there was the sheer urgency and need to train pastors for the basic

needs of the church. Third, there was (is) a generally negative attitude towards the city in the history of the church. Consequently, theological institutions tended to prefer a more rural outlook in their orientation. Lastly, limited human and institutional resources have not allowed KEST to commit to the research and reflection needed for urban orientation.

1.3 Limited theological reflection on the city

While significant scholarly research and publication have been conducted on a range of subjects in Kampala, there is minimal literature from a theological perspective. Not so surprisingly, for many theological institutions in Kampala, the city has not yet become the focus of their training. For many institutions, the mode of delivery is residential and classroom-oriented. Moreover, students are uprooted from their contexts – where life happens – and then released to find their grounding after three years of training. In many instances, students are required to be at the institution for a 17-week long semester before taking one or two months of recess. Other students never go back home for an entire year during their studies. Another drawback to this theological training and formation approach is a heavy emphasis on theory and little or no community engagement. Subsequently, students are prepared for professional congregational ministry in the church but may graduate lacking the necessary skills to engage with communities other than their congregations (cf. Dennis et al., 1997:42).

1.4 The response of the church to urban realities

Findings from the Urban Africa 2050 research on the City of Kampala revealed that several churches were responding to the urban realities at different levels. Wandawa (2019:8-9) points out three different levels of responses from the faith practitioners: meeting basic needs, skilling beneficiaries for self-reliance, and advocacy geared towards challenging and transforming the causes of marginality. Research findings revealed that responses by most churches were in the first two categories. Very few individuals or organisations were engaged in advocacy and justice against factors and actors that perpetuate marginality. Therefore, a robust urban theology is needed to empower urban ministry practitioners to respond effectively.

The sections that follow focus on a selective description of Kampala, explore a theological portrait of a flourishing city, and delineate steps KEST and others could take to reposition for urban ministry.

2. A description of Kampala

This section focuses on a selective description of the City of Kampala, highlighting some outstanding city characteristics. These, among others, can hopefully inform

and motivate responses from the different stakeholders, especially theological institutions.

2.1 A religious city

Kampala's modern religious history goes back to the 19th century when the first Muslim Arabs and Western Christian missionaries came to Buganda (in the area that is present-day Kampala). Three of what formerly used to be called the seven hills of Kampala are headquarters of the three mainline religions. The Kibuli Hill is home to (one of the two main sects of) Islam, Namirembe for the Anglican Church of Uganda, and Lubaga Hill for the Roman Catholic Church. The Grand Muammar Gaddafi mosque is also located on Old Kampala Hill. Over the last 30 years, there has been a proliferation of churches, especially the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions. Most of these are independent and indigenous churches. Unlike the mainline denominations, these churches did not have big budgets when they started, and therefore, most of them set up (and is still the practice) make-shift church buildings with no approved plans. Churches with varying sizes of congregations and buildings gather in school halls, bars, or stadiums. Some have become megachurches with cathedrals seated on multiple acres of land.

Historically, faith organisations were significant players in the education and health sectors in the city. Many faith-organisation-founded hospitals and schools are still the best in the city and the country. There is an ongoing debate on the nature of the impact churches have made on the city, especially in light of the "prosperity gospel" among the Pentecostal and charismatic churches. One of the questions people of faith have to grapple with is whether religion contributes to social cohesion and development or facilitates division and retrogression (De Beer et al., 2017). The religious nature of Kampala citizens is an opportunity that faith-based urban actors could harness to engage with urban realities. Therefore, the role of theological educators would be to develop a theological framework that enables practitioners to engage with the city effectively.

2.2 A cultural city

Kampala is a city rich in culture, serving as the seat of the Kabaka (king) of Buganda. For the Baganda people, the Kabaka serves as the unequivocal symbol of the spiritual, political, and social state of the Buganda nation. The *Kabaka's* headquarters (*Kibuga*) and Parliament (*Lukiiko*) are on Mengo Hill. There are various cultural monuments in Kampala which serve as tourist attractions. The Kasubi tombs, the burial sites of Buganda's kings and other royal family members, are located five kilometres from the city centre. The site also has valuable royal artefacts and helpful information about the kingdom. Perhaps the most significant influence of Bu-

ganda culture on city life is the use of *Luganda*, which is Uganda's *lingua franca*. Since Kampala is metropolitan, Buganda's cultural impact extends to other regions.

2.3 A vibrant and beautiful city

Kampala is a city full of life. Its people are hospitable and fun-loving. On several occasions, Kampala has been voted more liveable than other East African cities (cf. Oluka & Butagira 2016). This could be attributed to the social life and hospitality of the people and its beautiful physical features. It is a city with beautiful undulating hills, where it derives the name "a city on seven hills." Over time, the city has extended beyond the seven hills. It is a waterfront city with Lake Victoria on the Eastern border. It also has a significant area covered by wetlands which are important in the city's ecosystem. However, these wetlands have been encroached on and are not serving their purpose. Kampala is also a city that never sleeps. One can easily walk in some city suburbs as late as two o'clock in the morning to get a haircut.

2.4 A contested city

Kampala is a contested city in many ways. For instance, the city faces the challenge of a lack of organised open green spaces and parks (KCCA, 2012:325). Some of the few green areas have been taken over by private businesses or closed off from the public for political reasons. For instance, Centenary Park on Jinja Road was converted into shopping malls and bars, Sheraton Hotel took over Jubilee Park, and the Constitutional Square is practically closed off to the public because it had become a converging place for groups that wanted to demonstrate against the government.

There is also a challenge of public sanitation facilities. An interviewee working with the KCCA reported that there were only 10 public toilets, with an average usage of 3000 people per toilet per day. The debate about the implications of a lack of access to public toilets in the city came to the fore when a photo of a Member of Parliament urinating by the roadside on one of the city streets went viral on social media platforms. He was later summoned to court, charged and fined 40,000 shillings (approximately 12 USD). In his defence, he claimed that he had diabetes and that there were no nearby toilets to ease himself.

The other aspect of contestation is between the city authorities in their bid to ensure urban order and the plight of the people on the margins, such as the vendors, motorcycle (*boda-boda*) cyclists, and slum dwellers. There have been cases of forceful and sometimes violent and fatal evictions. In one incident in 2017, a woman vendor selling handkerchiefs drowned in a city waste channel as she fled from the City authority's law enforcers (Mukhaye, 2017). The Daily Monitor newspaper (2020) reported another story of a student who, on her way to school, was

shot in the mouth by a police officer as the officers dispersed street vendors. Her mother, who was escorting her to school, was also shot in the arm.

The City Hall, the official seat of the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), is perhaps a microcosm of political contestations in the country in general. There have been running battles between the Executive Director (ED) and the Lord Mayor. The ED is appointed by the President and has executive powers, whereas the Lord Mayor is elected through adult suffrage, but his roles are largely ceremonial. The standoff between the Lord Mayor and the ED culminated in the impeachment of the Lord Mayor by the City Authority Councillors in November 2013. The High Court later overturned the decision, which led to the ED announcing a shutdown of KCCA. The Prime Minister of Uganda ordered its reopening the following day. As expected, these differences and hostilities between the two urban authority principals gravely affect service delivery within the city (Doherty, 2019:24-46). A number of respondents at the KCCA cited political interference, especially from the government, as one of the challenges they find in executing their duties.

Political contestation is not only limited to City Hall, but also in other spheres of the city. For instance, there have been cases where politicians (ab)used their influence to violate building codes (Halima, 2006; Mafabi, 2017). Goodfellow (2017:1568-1583) uses the term “double capture” to describe how various interest groups, such as Uganda’s transport sector, relate to the government. On the one hand, powerful government players – and sometimes opposition politicians – who have vested interests in the sector use the group’s leaders to achieve their goals. However, on the other hand, leaders of the interest groups eventually become powerful and use the state to achieve their interests. Ultimately, these interest groups become too powerful for the state to regulate them effectively.

2.5 Informal city

Kampala’s informality is characterised *inter alia* by informal settlements, street vendors, *boda-boda* (motorcycle taxis), *matatus* (14-seater minivan taxis), and urban sprawl. Some people have described Kampala as “one huge slum” (Goodfellow, 2010; Young, 2017; Richmond et al., 2018). Much of the growth of Kampala has not been planned. It is in many ways symptomatic of African urbanism, characterised by overcrowding, informal housing, insecure tenure, and lack of access to water and sanitation (Pieterse, 2011:1; Richmond et al., 2018). It is estimated that 23% of Kampala is urbanised, 60% semi-urbanised, and 17% rural settlements (KCCA, 2014:1). There are slums in every one of the administrative divisions of the KCCA. Official government figures indicate that Kampala has a formally constituted list of 62 informal settlements with an estimated population of 560,000 families. Over 60% of the total urban population live in slums, and 70 % of the slum dwell-

ers live in temporary buildings (KCCA, 2014:23). Over 60% of the houses in Kampala are one-roomed tenements (*mizigo*), many of which are not fit for human habitation. Various sources have highlighted multiple causes for this acute housing problem, ranging from a complex land tenure system, lack of an effective housing policy, lack of positive models, overwhelming rural-urban migration, poverty, and absence of mortgage financing (KCCA, 2012:109-110; Nnaggenda-Musana, 2008). As already discussed, Kampala's current informal conundrum is exacerbated by the political contestations for the city.

Nnaggenda-Musana and Vestbro (2013:27-72) extensively discuss how Uganda's colonial and subsequent turbulent political history has contributed to Kampala's informality. The colonialists planned for a socially segregated city prioritising Europeans over Africans (Ugandans). The Asians fell in between the spectra of segregation. The planning of respective neighbourhoods reflected segregation. For instance, Nakasero, which was home to the Europeans, is better planned than Naguru, where the African working class was housed. The sentiments of the colonial urban planners are better captured in how they planned for the African labourers:

[They built] "temporary lodgings for the indigenes because they believed that they would always be temporary sojourners to the city and would return to their villages where their families and relatives were based. After the colonization the indigenes returned to the city and occupied the free area" (Nnaggenda-Musana & Vestbro, 2013:47).

The post-independence physical plan for the city was never implemented due to the political strife that ensued (Nnaggenda-Musana & Vestbro, 2013:27-72). There have been attempts to respond to challenges of informality through initiatives such as the slum upgrading programme, but the initial project did not meet its expected objectives. The intended beneficiaries failed to occupy the newly constructed housing units because the units did not suit existing lifestyles and economic situations. They instead moved to a nearby neighbourhood and formed another slum. As Nnaggenda-Musana and Vestbro (2013:27-72) aptly put it, "Several housing projects termed as 'low-cost' for low-income households have been overseen by government; however most have been occupied by higher income groups since the houses are usually smaller prototypes of higher income houses."

The failure of such low-cost housing projects highlights the failure of urban planners to develop contextualised housing models that suit the needs of the intended beneficiaries because they do not consult stakeholders who live in these slums (Dimanin, 2012; KCCA, 2012; Nnaggenda-Musana & Vestbro, 2013:29). Young (2017:733) is right when he avers that:

The KCCA in its present form is not designed and does not function in a way that prioritizes responsiveness to popular input. Street vendors [and other actors in the informal sector] require inclusive decision-making processes in order to thrive in urban environments; anything less leaves them vulnerable to the often-unforgiving vagaries of state power and developmental ambitions.

As it has been often argued by experts on African urban growth, Kampala City planners and implementers ought to consider the unique challenges of the city, and develop contextualised, actor-centred approaches to planning and implementation (Förster & Ammann, 2018; De Beer, 2014; Pieterse & Parnell, 2014).

These contextual realities of cities like Kampala provide a foil for theological institutions to further reflect and work out a plan of action to effectively train faith leaders who will be catalysts of urban flourishing. However, this can only happen if there is such a vision of a flourishing city and an understanding of what such a city could look like.

3. A theological portrait of a flourishing city

This section aims to lay out a theological portrait of a flourishing city in light of the urban realities described in the previous section. The section will focus on four themes of shalom, hope, community and urban ecosystem, which are responsive to the afore-mentioned urban realities. Although these themes are not an exhaustive portrait of a flourishing city, they can be a starting point in a conversation about a theological vision of a city. Theological institutions can be active stakeholders in their cities to the extent that they envision those cities theologically. While a theological vision of a flourishing city is grounded in the realities, it goes further to paint a hopeful, prophetic, and daring picture of what a city like Kampala could be.

3.1 Shalom

Shalom is evocative of well-being, inclusion and belonging. The word “shalom” is rather rich in meaning with nuances of peace, justice, prosperity, abundance and well-being (cf. Brueggemann 2001; Van Eymeren, 2018, Mashau, 2019; Haluza-DeLay, 2020). Urban shalom is about a city that works for and with all – especially the vulnerable and people on the socio-economic and political margins. It should be a city where everyone’s voice is listened to, and their contributions to the well-being of the city are acknowledged. This would imply that everyone, regardless of socio-economic status, is involved and engaged in their cities’ political and other decision-making processes. It would also impact other aspects of urban life, such as housing, transportation, security, and social spaces. Walter Brueggemann (2001:5) posits that the notion of shalom “can be a resource against both despair and an

overly eager settlement for an unfinished system.” The Prophet Zechariah speaks of a time when future Israel will have “. . . City streets...filled with boys and girls playing there” (Zechariah 8:5). Although, the image of the city as a “playground” free of contestations, violence and chaos (Rocke & Van Dyke, 2012) is a not familiar one, especially in many African cities, it can be a helpful concept in imagining our cities. Shalom cities are spaces that are safe for the young and where the poor can find decent housing. Ordinary citizens should have access to affordable and convenient public transportation and healthcare (Micah Global, 2019). They are spaces where the less endowed can make a living in dignified ways.

Shalom also evokes feelings of a city as home. Everyone should be able to feel at home in the different urban spaces. Interestingly, some of the people interviewed did not consider the city to be home. This is despite some living and working in the city for almost all their adult lives. They considered the city disruptive, a necessary evil at the very least. Jeremiah exhorted the people of Israel to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile” (Jeremiah 29:7). This vision for well-being transcends Israel. It is a human vision and longing. Drawing from Jeremiah’s exhortation, people of faith are to love and promote the well-being of their cities. Although some Christians, like the exiled people of Israel, may not necessarily consider the city home, they can still work towards urban shalom.

Shalom is not merely an idealistic theological concept, but calls for concrete action by faith communities on individual, communal, and institutional levels. Believers can reach out and act individually, motivated by their Christian ethos. Maddock and Maddock (2014:40-41) have made practical suggestions on how people of faith can “sow seeds of shalom” in their neighbourhoods. In Kampala, seeds of shalom can be seen in some of the unexpected spaces. For instance, *Yala Street* (not the official street name) is perhaps the deadliest place in Kalerwe, one of the slums in Kampala. Both the police and local leaders have effectively given up to the drug lords who control the area. These drug lords commit crimes, including raping underage girls, unabated. Not far away from the street is a garbage dump where some mothers throw “unwanted” babies. One interlocutor took us to meet a woman who lives with over seven children in a one-room tenement (*muzigo*). Each one of these children had been rescued from a mother who would have otherwise abandoned the child in a garbage dump or thrown the child in a drainage channel. This woman demonstrates signs of shalom in a broken neighbourhood.

Faith communities can serve as a catalyst in fostering urban shalom by amplifying the voices of the people on the margins (De Beer, 2014) and engaging the city’s decision-makers to ensure the city is planned in a way that does not marginalise those who are already vulnerable. Mashau (2019:243) speaks of how the immigrant faith communities in the City of Tshwane have a collective responsibility

of fostering shalom by becoming “transforming agents who seek to impact their own contexts and those of their neighbours.” Shalom involves discerning God’s presence in the city, whereby God is healing, mending and making all things new. Effective urban ministry equips people of faith, shaped by their Christian ethos, to animate the shalom kind of life in the city.

3.2 Hope

Hope is an alternative view of current realities in a way that transfigures what one sees because there is an awareness of what is possible. It is the capacity to envision what is possible beyond precarious circumstances. Biblical hope is active and is characterised by confident expectation. Without hope, people become apathetic. In his book, *Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa*, Emmanuel Katongole (2017) expresses surprise that there is no “sustained conversation about hope” on the African continent. He introduces a theological notion of ‘lament’ as a basis for hope (Katongole, 2017:xvi). According to Katongole (2017), lament is “turning to God” amidst hopelessness and brokenness. He argues that:

[I]n the midst of suffering, hope takes the form of arguing and wrestling with God. If we understand it as lament, such arguing and wrestling is not merely a sentiment, not merely a cry of pain. It is a way of mourning, of protesting to, appealing to, and engaging God – and a way of acting in the midst of ruins. Lament is what sustains and carries forth Christian agency in the midst of suffering (Katongole, 2017:xvi).

While genuine hope is always grounded in the present realities, it is also confident in the anticipated future. One biblical character that perhaps vividly animates hope is Nehemiah. His story is characterised by weeping for the broken city, a vision for a new city, resistance, social action, and religious renewal. Nehemiah’s life and work animated the kind of hope grounded in the realities of the community. Rakoczy (2008:139-145) argues that “hope is not abstract but is incarnated in the lives of real people.” Hope can be expressed in different ways. Perhaps the most visible ones are through arts such as poems, paintings, music and drama, and even graffiti. Other expressions of hope in urban contexts could be through people’s resilience or even resistance. This is what motivates people to better cities.

Individuals and communities must believe that change and transformation is possible. They must have the capacity to envision their cities beyond the existing fractures, poverty, or congestion, and believe there are ways to work towards the well-being and flourishing of the city. Without hope founded in our faith in God, our vision for the city will be curtailed by the grim realities around us. Yet, if one ob-

serves, signs of hope are not hard to find in our cities, even in the least likely places in Kampala. One such case is a small private primary school in Kalerwe that was established in 1965 under a tree. The school director, now in his seventies, started the school with the aim of helping vulnerable children within the community. Even by slum standards, the school is basic. It has simple buildings and accepts children from the community despite their limitations in paying school fees.

Although signs of hope are not necessarily restricted to faith-based initiatives, churches stand a better chance of being catalysts of hope in their cities – whether they are a Christian University in the war-torn province of Congo (Katongole, 2017), homeless shelters and social housing for the poor and the vulnerable in inner-city Pretoria (De Beer, 2014), or a lone voice advocating for the rights of a five-year-old rape victim in the slums of Kalerwe, Kampala. Flourishing cities should be hope-saturated. The role of theological institutions and churches is to animate hope by training people of faith to lament, resist, imagine, and prophetically engage their communities and cities for change and transformation.

3.3 Community

The idea of community is not as antithetical to urban life as it may appear. Although cities are typically associated with diversity, individualism, anonymity and isolation, relationality and webs of support build resilience in some of the toughest urban slums. This is so because humans were made for community. Community has its roots in the divine community of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This healthy appreciation of unity and diversity becomes a foundation for functional communities. Van Schalkwyk (2014) is right when she says that a city “can be a place of rich and deep humanity which may bring together different communities of people.” McKnight and Block (2010) advocate for an “Abundant Community” where citizens collectively contribute to the well-being of the community. They point out seven community necessities, including safety and security, health, the well-being of children, the environment and the land, an enterprising economy, food, and care (McKnight & Block, 2010:18-25). This community happens when individual strengths and contributions are recognised and celebrated. “A competent community is the place where I can be myself by sharing my unique gifts and revealing my unique sorrows. It is where one fully emerges as one of a kind...” (McKnight & Block, 2010:69).

Churches can be a microcosm of community by providing mutual support, neighbourliness, and safety and security to their members and others. If city churches are to emulate this kind of community, they must reimagine their vision and mission, programmes, and how they use their spaces to welcome strangers who need shelter or refugees who need a sense of belonging.

3.4 Urban ecosystem

The setting for Genesis 2:8 is in the garden and not the city, but it can still be helpful in imagining a flourishing city. The garden connotes the ingredients that make life possible. God provided an enabling ecosystem for human habitation and well-being. It included the flora and fauna, the water bodies, and minerals. On the other hand, the city represents an environment augmented by humankind to mould it in ways that make it more beautiful, liveable, and able to meet human needs and well-being. Cities are a manifestation of human self-realisation as co-creators with God. This image starkly contrasts many African cities, typically characterised by congested and unlit streets, open sewers, and water channels clogged with used plastics.

An effective urban ecosystem should ensure a healthy interconnectedness of the city, the hinterland, the built environment, and other aspects such as wetlands and green spaces. Cornford (2018:29-30) opines that cities “are complex systems and structures that shape human relations with each other and the earth, and they can do so in highly destructive ways.” Urban ecology can lead to shalom or fuel vulnerability and brokenness. Nnaggenda-Musana and Vestbro (2013:27-72) have extensively researched how building processes contribute to urban sprawl in Kampala. Consequently, urban sprawl has led to encroachment on wetlands and transportation challenges since the urban poor must access the city centre, where most jobs are concentrated. This, in turn, raises issues of traffic congestion and air pollution, among other problems. Our research findings revealed that the top five crises in Kampala include flooding, human epidemics such as cholera, human-made fire outbreaks, air pollution, and crime. All of these are ecologically interconnected. A case in point is the recent reports of the rising water levels of Lake Victoria. As a result, some of the villages near the waterfront have been submerged, putting more than 6000 lives at risk in just one area around Ggaba (Buule, 2020). Most of the affected are the urban poor.

Therefore, it can be argued that urbanisation has, in many ways, been a process of desecration of what God has created, leading to dysfunctional and unsustainable cities. Ecofeminist theologian, Annalet van Schalkwyk (2014), has written about how human habitation and industries affect or dismantle urban ecology. She proposes what urban ministry practitioners can do in re-sacralising urban spaces:

The (re)-sacralisation of urban space, in my mind, should also be a sacred liturgical space of (natural) beauty, worship and meditation. In the case of Jesus, it was a place of natural beauty and significance, the Mount of Olives. From such a place, urban practitioners can literally and metaphorically go on a pilgrimage to specific urban spaces to (re-)establish the presence of God through their activism, prophecy and care, and in a way that contributes to the restoration of human community and natural ecology in the city (Van Schalkwyk, 2014:12).

A contextualised urban theology must necessarily grapple with the grim realities of our cities while reflecting on a balanced theological vision for a city characterised by shalom, hope, community, and an effective urban ecology. This tension can hopefully inspire all stakeholders in the urban space to aspire for a better city. Interestingly, the official tagline for KCCA is “for a better city” (KCCA, 2014:i). This is indeed an aspiration for all, especially those on the margins. The next section highlights three areas of action that could be undertaken by KEST, and others, in an attempt to reposition for a transformative urban ministry.

4. Repositioning for urban ministry

KEST was established in late 1989 to respond to theological training deficits in the country. Initially, the greatest need was for pastors and Christian leaders, especially in the indigenous Charismatic and Pentecostal traditions, who lacked theological training. The existing theological institutions at that time belonged to the mainline churches and would not readily accept this category of pastors for training. Most pastors would have hesitated to join these seminaries and colleges. KEST adopted a broadly evangelical, non-denominational theological position in order to reach out to a broad spectrum of churches and Christian leaders. Around 2012, KEST initiated Community Engagement Centres (CECs) to mitigate the systemic obstacles that make theological training inaccessible to most pastors through the conventional seminary training model. Some of the characteristics of this training model included a philosophy that prioritises and builds upon the vocational experience of pastors. Second, a relevant curriculum that addresses life issues and realities that pastors routinely face in the African (Ugandan) context. Third, the partnership approach that makes church communities stakeholders in the training process. In addition, training is delivered in English and the main local language where the CEC is located. Although this responsive approach to theological education and formation was not previously conceptualised for urban ministry, it is a strength that can be harnessed in the process of repositioning.

During the Urban Africa 2050 research process, three areas of engagement were identified, which KEST could implement in order to position itself for urban ministry. These include repositioning the urban identity, epistemological and pedagogical repositioning, and becoming a hub for urban ministry.

4.1 Repositioning the urban identity

KEST is located in the city, but has not deliberately made the city the centre of its theological reflection and engagement. Therefore, the institution needs to reposition itself, appreciating its central urban location and becoming deliberate about embracing an urban ethos, outlook and praxis. This can be done by first acknowl-

edging that there has been an oversight in engaging the city. Repositioning the institution's urban identity would entail taking bold and non-traditional measures.

There is a need for repositioning that prioritises the urban as a place for theological reflection and praxis. This also requires leaders of theological institutions to embrace and affirm the city by celebrating what is beautiful about it while lamenting what is broken. De Beer (2012:260) makes an important remark about the significance of location in theological reflection, "Our theologies are shaped by where we locate ourselves, and can never be ahistorical or acontextual. If we immerse ourselves in urban contexts of vulnerability, it will shape our theological praxis differently." Theological institutions must move away from the elitist, withdrawal, and ivory-tower mentality that insulates them from the suffering and pain of the people in the urban margins (cf. Dennis et al., 1997:45).

This kind of repositioning will necessitate a shift from asking safe and predictable theological questions to engaging the broken and contested urban spaces prophetically. This can be accomplished by actively engaging other players towards the healing and restoration of the city. Theological institutions should move beyond teaching prescribed doctrines and moralities to training pastors in social justice and activism areas. Churches and theological institutions must have a compelling vision for the urban if the proposed repositioning is to happen.

4.2 Epistemological and pedagogical repositioning

The second aspect of repositioning concerns epistemological and pedagogical dimensions. First, it involves bringing the city into the classroom by retrieving the knowledge and experience of different stakeholders to inform and guide our theological reflection. Second, there is a need to take the classroom into the city by inserting both the faculty and students into contexts of marginality and vulnerability. The question we ought to ask is: Whose knowledge shapes our theological praxis (cf. De Beer, 2014:218-230)? Much of the training in theological institutions tend to ignore ministry contexts where students come from, yet these contexts are critical in shaping our theologies.

Headley (2018:3) advocates for a praxis-based approach to theological education with epistemologies and pedagogies responsive to the realities of especially those on the margins of our cities. Both the faculty and students would be equipped with tools to discern what urban fractures are and where they are located. They should be trained to lament over the brokenness of the city, but like prophets of old, they should also be able to paint a picture of God's healing and restoration in the new city. De Beer (2012:264) highlights the need for this prophetic praxis when he says, "Cities call for a prophetic-pastoral praxis that is at once caring, serving and hospitable, but also critical, resistant and even confrontational."

Many KEST students are already inserted in the urban contexts where they engage with urban issues as pastors and leaders of Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs). These students bring experiences and knowledge about the city that must be engaged with. They also need to be equipped with knowledge about how the city functions and tools and skills that enable them to engage their urban contexts effectively. Theological institutions must grapple with issues such as informality, urban poverty, unemployment and under-employment, politics and theology, housing and homelessness, domestic violence, drug abuse, and children's ministry, among many others. Likewise, pastors must be trained to discern the presence of God in the garbage heaps in the city centre, the deadly streets of Kalerwe, and the messy and crowded roads in downtown Kampala. Since urban ministry falls under a broader category of public theology and therefore involves serving Christ in multiple contexts (Meylahn, 2017), students need knowledge and skills that will enable them to apply the gospel for the common good. This necessitates applying pedagogies appropriate for public theology and urban ministry in particular.

From a pedagogical standpoint, theological institutions must select sites that can serve as spaces where both students and faculty can learn about the city. In addition, this approach will likely foster healthy collaborations with other stakeholders in urban ministry. For instance, De Beer (2014:219-225) outlines different sites in the City of Pretoria that represent "local struggles and hope of diverse communities in different ways." The stories of each of these sites illustrate how a community-based urban praxis (De Beer, 2014) can tap into theological reflection and local assets to achieve social and community transformation.

Theological institutions are responsible for implementing frameworks that facilitate meaningful immersion experiences for both faculty and students. Here they can share first-hand lived experiences of the urban dwellers. One of the roles immersion experiences can play is to help participants to have a high view of the city as a place of God's dwelling and that their place as Christians is not in the four walls of the church building or lecture halls in theological institutions, but rather as citizens engaged in the life of their cities. This also calls for theological institutions to recruit and deploy faculty who are passionate about the city. There should be an institutional framework that facilitates the professional development of the faculty, particularly in the area of urban ministry. This will enable the faculty to be influential mentors and coaches to the students training for urban ministry.

The epistemological and pedagogical repositioning will also necessitate theological institutions to adopt a transdisciplinary approach to theological education and research. This approach taps into the vast knowledge and experience of various stakeholders, such as urban planners, architects, academicians, missiologists, urban poets, and activists leading to a "collaborative generation and sharing of

knowledge” (cf. De Beer et al., 2017; Headley, 2018). When a transdisciplinary approach is used, research methods in the social sciences can be used in theological research. That is why the proposed KEST hub for urban ministry can be a meaningful space for transdisciplinary research and dialogue among different stakeholders in the city.

4.3 A hub for urban ministry praxis

The idea of a hub for urban ministry praxis is consistent with KEST’s (n.d.) stated mission, “To prepare and equip men and women for effective ministry and service in Church and in Society.” KEST’s location in the heart of Kampala City makes it ideal for this initiative. The concept of a hub is also a logical outcome of the previous two interventions of repositioning our urban identity and repositioning epistemologically and pedagogically. A hub is not necessarily the source of information or ideas, but a space where creative ideas can be shared. A hub for urban ministry praxis could be an egalitarian space where it is safe for those on the margins to engage on equal terms with those in power. Therefore, KEST could become a meeting point for the various people working in the urban spaces.

KEST could also become a research, collaboration, and advocacy resource centre. De Beer (2014:228-230) gives an example of how the Centre for Contextual Ministry worked with organisations such as the Tshwane Leadership Foundation to highlight some inner-city issues in Pretoria. A hub for urban ministry, situated at an evangelical theological institution, can go a long way in facilitating churches and Christian ministries to engage for the common good, linking the academy to the communities. Theological institutions could serve as amplifiers of the voices of the marginalised people who are usually excluded in the city-making process. The church also needs to learn to appreciate people on the margins as equal partners rather than victims in need of liberation (De Beer, 2012). Christians need to shift from the problem-solver mentality to one of being fellow sojourners and part of the conversation with the marginalised (Dennis et al., 1997:47).

Meaningful conversations by different stakeholders could save the implementers from repeating the costly mistakes of the past. People from the margins help to understand the city from below, while academics – the central – bring city perspectives from above. Christian practitioners can bring perspectives that could facilitate imagining the city from the centre. This balance is necessary because the technocrats from above plan, make, and enforce laws for the city. We cannot simply wish them away. They must be engaged. Mashau (2014:6-7) proposes a theological method that engages both the hills (places of power) and the valleys (places of vulnerability) as a way to foster urban shalom. Hankela (2014:8) also advocates for a “liberationist discourse to make the faith community a conscious centre of debate

and praxis, in order for the discourse to become tangible in society.” She views the city as a place for dialogue and asking questions that challenge the status quo. Such questions are meant to help both the people with power and those on the margins to “recognise their embeddedness in the oppressive structures but also to allow each individual a personal choice” (Hankela, 2014:6). She proposes that the theology of liberation must go beyond the academy and intersect (through intentional collaborations) with faith communities. She suggests a notion of “radical friendship and proximity” (Hankela, 2014:7-8) as one of the ways to make faith communities centres of liberationist debates. Radical friendship implies that both those with power and those on the margins are important. Not only are the poor invited to the spaces of the rich, but also the rich are asked to come to the poor.

Another engagement area is providing a forum for innovation, creative imagination, and collaboration among various stakeholders. During the Urban Africa 2050 research, some interlocutors share creative (and prophetic) ideas on how to respond to some of the challenges in Kampala. For instance, one church planned to build low-cost houses for some vulnerable women living in slums. The challenge was getting an appropriate piece of land in the city where such a project could be done. In another incident, a city official advised a group of people in one community on how to form a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to consolidate their small plots of land into one planned property of about two acres. This would enable them to use their property well by attracting development partners. We also discovered that the mainline churches are some of the largest landowners in Kampala. A hub for urban ministry praxis could be a space that would bring these kinds of stakeholders into conversations, potentially yielding workable and creative options for the urban poor.

5. Conclusion

This article described Kampala, drawing from the results of the research project, Urban Africa 2050: Imagining Theological Education/Formation for Flourishing African Cities. A sketch of a theological portrait of a flourishing city is a counter-narrative and prophetic response to a fractured city such as Kampala. The current and the envisaged realities of Kampala and the theological portrait of the flourishing city could serve as starting points for theological institutions in their attempts to enter conversations with the city as active participants in its transformation. The last section lays out some concrete steps that KEST, and others, could take to reposition for urban ministry. My involvement with the Urban Africa 2050 research project gave me opportunities to study, experience, and appreciate Kampala in ways I had not done before. We intend to build on the experiences gained and the relationships built to work toward a robust urban ministry programme at KEST.

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