

## **Hekima University College Farewell to Rev. Fr. Laurenti Magesa (retiring from teaching)**



Laurenti Magesa, the professor of African theology, scholar of African spirituality, mentor and friend to many, formator of priests and bishops, an unassuming and humble man, yet a pillar against whom younger generations of Africans will continue leaning will be retiring from teaching at the end of this academic year 2020-2021. But can a man like Magesa who has become an icon and fountain of wisdom in Africa really retire? Hekima University College (Nairobi) is nonetheless organizing a moment of gratitude and thanksgiving to bid farewell to a tireless professor, priest, mentor, elder brother, and role model to many African theologians.

Retirement, however, feels like a language unknown to us Africans. It seems to reflect the western model of selling one's vigor for labor while for us, in the African Ubuntu spirituality, with its values, purposes, meaning, wisdom accrues with the decline of physical strength. In our African context, a "mwalimu," who also happens to be a priest can never retire!

He is constantly consulted by leaders and by the community. He closes the line to make sure no one is left behind. He listens with care to advise young people when they discuss on where to take this life. He opens to all the spirituality of Ubuntu for all pilgrims

thirsting for hope and community. He is the custodian of cultural values that make this life worthwhile and meaningful. As early as 1975, Magesa was already distilling the wisdom about a liberating leadership. As he noted that “diaconal, liberating ecclesiastical leadership is perhaps the greatest need for the Church in Africa today.”

What would retirement then mean for a man whose understanding of theology is an endless quest and unending task of engaging the divine in our human cultures and histories. Indeed, although pulling out from classroom work, Magesa, the scholar, can never stop searching, learning, discovering, and talking about the newness of this life with God.

This “man of God” is a priest. And priests never retire! The urge for preaching the Good News of Christ is not something like an overcoat that can be removed. It is rather woven in the very body and soul of the bearer of the Word of life, showing the Way of salvation and pointing the people in the direction of God’s love, truth, solidarity, justice and peace. A priest lives to reconcile the sacred and “what’s not sacred”, God and humanity, this life with the next, earth and heaven. A priest remains a witness of the intrinsic communion with what remains invisible. A priest is a mystic who can question, “what is Not sacred”? For “all reality is spiritual because for Africans, as he wrote. It is linked together by spiritual power and is connected to mystery.”

Magesa, the Elder Brother, is simply stepping down to make room for others, since he has already seen for himself the mystery “at the heart of everything that exists.” And as such, a witness can never retire! He is a living memory and the link between present and past, between past and future. He may no longer teach in auditoriums like the many years he’s spent with the Jesuits at Hekima University College. However, Magesa’s way of life is in itself a greatest an auditorium and a lesson. We shall still go back to Baba Magesa for a question, an advice, a walk, a laughter. For he has always time for anyone knocking at this door. This good listener and prolific writer is simply getting more space and more time to listen on our behalf to what the spirit is whispering to our time.

Lesson One; the first act of theology is life lived with life.

Lesson Two: Models and mentors are indispensable to imagine and actualize the horizons of one's life.

Lesson Three: Laboring for a good purpose cannot be in vain.

Lesson Four: Hope does not disappoint...

Fr. Emmanuel Bueya, S.I., PhD.