



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF PAUL VI
TO THE FIRST AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF DAHOMEY
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 10 December 1971

Mr Ambassador,

We warmly thank Your Excellency for the delicate wishes you have just formulated for us and for the Catholic Church.

We gladly take the opportunity of this official meeting with the first Ambassador of the Republic of Dahomey to the Holy See to express to this noble country and its leaders the feelings of esteem and benevolence that animate us, and the fervent wishes we form for them in prayer.

Talents of quality lie hidden among the population of Dahomey, as is testified by a whole intellectual élite whose reputation has spread beyond your frontiers. Your fellow-countrymen have succeeded in assimilating the riches of the civilizations that have contributed to forging their original destiny. We rejoice at this and wish to see in it the pledge of the honourable place your people is due in the family of nations, and particularly in this region of Africa that is dear to us.

In the Catholic Church herself, the Christian communities of Dahomey, with their pastors, also manifest a beneficial vitality that does your country credit. Your Excellency was so kind as to recall the deserving work of the first missionaries, the rapidity with which the faith took root, and its remarkable fruitfulness, in particular the flowering of native vocation. And when we endowed our Congregation for the evangelization of peoples with an African collaborator as Assistant Secretary, our choice fell on a son of Dahomey, in the person of our beloved Brother, Archbishop Bernardin Gantin.

This tells you the sincere wishes inspired in us by our affection for the people you now represent

at this Apostolic See. How could we fail to wish in the first place that the Catholic community of Dahomey will continue to develop, in brotherly relations with the whole of the population? It asks only for the faculty and the means of putting its specific collaboration in the service of all, particularly in its schools, with preferential attention for the weak and the poor, pursuit of peace, concern with justice, the spirit of charity, the sense of spiritual values that find in Christian faith a deep *raison d'être* and an efficient stimulus. We all know, in fact, that without these spiritual values, familiar to the African soul, a civilization would be built on sand and would hold only disappointment in store.

Your country, therefore, faces an immense and exciting programme; economic, cultural, social and religious promotion at all levels of society, in an atmosphere of freedom and peace. We pray to the Lord to allow your people and its leaders to carry it through successfully, with the collaboration of all of goodwill. Many, we were saying, are the sons of Dahomey who, by their studies and their ability, have already acquired solid competency. May they, moved by concern for the common good and love of their country, unite their efforts to put them at the service of all men of their country. There will be added at the same theme – we hope – the loyal assistance of those who, all over the world, have realized the necessity of universal solidarity in this development, which is the new name of peace (cfr *Populorum Progressio*, n 76).

In these sentiments we express our best wishes for the high mission Your Excellency inaugurates today by presenting your Letters of Credence to us. Beyond your person, we address our respectful greetings of those responsible for the common good of your noble country, and in the first place to His Excellency President Hubert Maga and to those who collaborate with him in the Government of the Republic. On them, and on all the populations of Dahomey, and on yourself in the first place, Mr. Ambassador, we willingly implore the abundant Blessing of the Almighty.

*ORa n.51 p.2.