



The Holy See

***LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL BERNARDIN GANTIN
ON THE 50th ANNIVERSARY
OF HIS ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD***

*To my Venerable Brother Cardinal Bernardin Gantin
Dean of the College of Cardinals*

Since I once had regular contact with you and an almost unique familiarity, because you served with the greatest prudence as Prefect of the very important Congregation for Bishops, I would like you to know that the same affection and esteem for you still exists and continues, and I wish to express them to you now, Venerable Brother, as you happily complete the 50th year since you entered the priesthood. It is a most pleasant task for me to tell you so publicly in this Letter.

A renowned son of beloved Africa, you grew like an "iron tree", strong in faith and piety, your home providing solid and abundant Christian doctrine. Without doubt you still remember that day when you were willingly and eagerly ordained a sacred minister through the laying on of hands by my Venerable Brother Louis Parisot and became a steward of the heavenly gifts. You later held many posts worthy of mention, as you formed seminarians and did pastoral work.

By the will of John XXIII, my blessed Predecessor, you succeeded the distinguished man who had once ordained you to the priesthood. If, after being appointed a Bishop by Pius XII, of worthy memory, you had already done effective work there, on later becoming Ordinary of Cotonou you redoubled the efforts of your episcopal ministry to the Lord's flock. After the Diocese had been divided, you zealously saw to the establishment of schools, the formation of catechists, the support of sacred ministers and the fostering of native vocations.

Moving on from these earlier events, I want to extol with fitting praise the activity and skill that you displayed in many capacities after you had been called to the Eternal City. At various places here in the Roman dicasteries are found proofs of your energy at the then-Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, as well as at the Commission "Iustitia et Pax" and the Council "Cor Unum". After being named a Cardinal, you most recently served as Prefect of the important Congregation for Bishops, which I know brought great benefit to the Catholic Church and produced abundant fruit. Even now you do excellent work in various tasks for the Church.

I think few words are needed to tell you of my satisfaction and gratitude, which I especially want to confirm, as I did for the celebration of your 25th anniversary of episcopate, when this significant priestly commemoration occurs on 14 January. Lastly, Venerable Brother, I give you my Apostolic Blessing with particular affection, extending it willingly and abundantly to all your loved ones.

From the Vatican, 14 December 2000, the twenty-third year of my Pontificate.