

Preparatory Service at the Church of the Great Commission
Camp Springs, Maryland, February 1999
Bishop Perrin's Response to the Apologies

I want to say to Nancy and to the president that we as a people have heard your hearts.

When I was a little boy, growing up in Cleveland, Ohio, I did not understand why we all hated each other, why whites hated blacks, why Hispanics hated blacks, and blacks hated whites. The older I became, I learned about the slave trade. I learned about the devilish practices, I learned about the greed of my African brothers, and then, president Kérékou, I was taught to hate you, and many of them were taught to hate you.

Not only were they taught to hate you, they were taught to hate themselves. They did not want to be African, nor to come from an African background, nor an African ancestry. So we bleached our bodies, we pressed our hair. We were ashamed of our languages. We preferred people who seemed white; we promoted light-skinnedness. And the worst thing a little black boy could be was dark-skinned. So today, we have come to say we want to be released from this curse.

[Applause]

But also, Nancy, it caused us to hate white people. While we loved them, we yet hated them. It caused us to develop a schizophrenic soul. We have gone through all kinds of weird changes to live next to you, to send our children to your schools. We have honored your Harvard and your Yale above our own institutions because we hated ourselves. And we deceived you, and caused you to have a false sense of superiority, and you'd begun to take on god-like qualities, when you were nothing but a man or woman like us. [Applause]

So for this idolatry, we ask God to forgive us. For this idolatry, this preference, this hatred, we ask God to forgive us.

We release forgiveness, we release forgiveness. [Applause; Nancy on her knees, president kneeling beside her]

I have been to Africa many times. When I have gone to Africa, I have stood on the shores of Nigeria where the slave boats left. I have went in the huts where my forefathers were sold for shells.

When I stood there, no one ever said, "I am sorry." No one ever said to me, "I am sorry for Martin Luther King, that he had to die to right something that I wronged. I am sorry for all your people who died on the passage coming over. I am sorry for every whipping, I am sorry for every rape, I am sorry for every dog that was sicced on your people. When I was a little boy, my grandmother told me how she was mated with dogs, how white people made her to have sex with dogs. But no one from Africa or America has ever come to me and said, "I'm sorry."

Today, but today, but *today*, BUT TODAY—the president, the *president*, the PRESIDENT OF AN AFRICAN COUNTRY has come and kneeled down; the daughter of a slave owner has come and kneeled down.

And today I kneel down with them [kneels, takes Kérékou's hand], and I say, "God, whatever there is to forgive, we forgive. *Whatever there is to forgive, we forgive!* **WHATEVER THERE IS TO FORGIVE**, we forgive."