

LCRD Day One (December 2, 1999)
Sen. James Inhofe's Apology

Thank you. That's very powerful, Bishop Perrin. [Personal comments omitted.]

I first met President Kérékou a few years ago. I have spent hours with him in his home. I have talked with him, I've prayed with him, I've talked about Jesus with him. He's a wonderful man. I wish there were more in this world; we'd be far better off. I'd like to also say to Bishop Perrin that I may be a United States Senator—you know there are a hundred of us floating around out there in the United States and elsewhere—but I'm not a politician, and I pride myself in not being a politician. But I pride myself more in being what I am, and that is a follower of Jesus. [Applause]

Let me say something about why I am here today. I'm here today because I started—for some reason I never will understand—some kind of a—what somebody might call, Mr. Ambassador—a mission. I'm not sure that's exactly what it is. But I've had the opportunity over the last couple or three years of traveling all over West Africa and meeting with presidents and meeting with members of Parliament, meeting with ministers of state, meeting with businessmen and women, leaders throughout West Africa—West Africa, which is probably the area of a continent that is less known than any other area in the world to people in my country—and what I do there, to give you a proper perspective (incidentally, this is good news and bad news, or bad news and good news: the bad news is, I have a lot to say, but the good news is I can say it in a very short period of time)—but as I go around and talk to these people, I'm reminiscent of, and I tell them about, Acts 2 verse 42, where it says that people who do four things together in small groups, they will love one another. That is: they eat together, and they pray together, and they fellowship together, and they talk about the precepts of Jesus together.

Now why is this important? It's important in this country because most of you in this room, most of those with whom I've had an association are either Muslims or Christians. And a lot of denominations within each religion fight among themselves. There are 92 prominent denominations of Christianity, and a lot of them don't like each other. A lot of them don't believe the same thing. And there are Muslims who don't agree with each other. But if you stop and think of what do we all have in common, it surprises a lot of my friends when I read out of the Koran what the Koran says about Jesus. And it says—it goes into curing the lepers and curing the blind, and raising the dead, and the virgin birth. Wait a minute, is that the gospels or is that the Koran? It's the Koran, *and* it's the gospels.

And what I'm saying is, there is one common denominator throughout the world in all religions, and that is the person of Jesus. So when we are together—and we don't talk about differences, we talk about those things we have in common. And I have been to virtually all of the countries in this great part of this great continent. I've been to Burkina-Faso, Nigeria, Togo, Gabon, Benin, Côte-d'Ivoire, and all over, and what I've found is a great deal of love, love that we had in the person of Jesus.

Now, three years ago, something happened to us. I discovered something that not many white Americans understand. And that is, having grown up in America and having felt this guilt of

slavery, that none of us really understand, I had felt that there is one guilty party until I became very well acquainted in talking with my friends in West Africa, only to find that there is guilt there, too. And it was simply explained to me once: you know, in order to have a buyer, there has to be a seller. Someone has to be willing to sell first before someone can buy. And that made perfectly good sense to me.

And so, in talking with President Kérékou and with a number of other individuals, that we've become very close to, I have come to the conclusion that this is what we need right here. There has to be a *final* forgiveness. Yes, Bishop Perrin, there can be repeats of apologies, we can say "I'm sorry" a million times, but there is one great *forgiveness*. And that's what I want to see, and I want to see coming out of this. I was talking with Romain Zannou about who was the most offended by slavery, and the people today: was it the black Americans, the black Africans, or who it is, and he suggests that God was most offended by that whole institutions [sic] of slavery.

So we're together now and talking about forgiveness. I've heard a lot of intellectual discussions recently. A lot of them say that, "Well, it doesn't do any good for black Africans to forgive black Americans [sic] because, in most cases, the blacks Americans are better off financially than the black Africans." But you know, you can complicate this issue, and fortunately, I have a very simple mind, so it is easy for me. I think forgiveness can come from two broad segments. First of all, what kind of forgiveness? Not the forgiveness that comes from us, but the forgiveness that comes from God. That's divine forgiveness. One of the things that I had a hard time understanding when I gave my life to Jesus was total forgiveness. And that when God forgives us for something, he also what? he forgets, and so it's all gone.

And so I'm here today—and it's an honor to be here to ask for that total forgiveness—and I would do so on behalf of the ancestors of white America and white Europe, those individuals that Bishop Perrin was talking about, that were responsible in the trade. I'll let someone else ask forgiveness on behalf of the black Africans and others, but as far as the ancestors of white America and white Europe, I ask on their behalf *to* the ancestors of black America—being grieved—the total and divine forgiveness which I ask of today, once and for all.