

Pastor is blasted after Bill Clinton visits California church

A fund-raiser with Bill Clinton at Jubilee Christian Center has put the heat on pastor Dick Bernal

Former President Bill Clinton is a good-hearted man who has been unfairly vilified by Christians, and his repentance for the scandals that darkened his presidency is good before God—and should be honored by the church—according to Dick Bernal, pastor of Jubilee Christian Center in San Jose, Calif.

Bernal shared these opinions with Charisma after he suffered a brutal backlash from church members and other Christians who were angered after he allowed Clinton to speak at his church on March 2 as part of an independent fund-raising event for earthquake victims in India.

Jubilee is a nondenominational church of 12,000 located in the northern part of the lucrative Silicon Valley, which has a large Indo-American population. The magnitude 7.7 earthquake on Jan. 26 killed more than 20,000 people in Bhuj, India. Damage estimates topped \$5 billion.

Bernal agreed to let a Santa Clara, Calif., business group known as The IndUS Entrepreneurs (TIE) host a charitable, nonreligious event in his sanctuary to help with the massive rebuilding effort. TIE president Kailash Joshi is a friend of Clinton's.

Rapper M.C. Hammer, a Christian, made a last-minute appeal to Bernal to allow Clinton to join the event's lineup that included rap music and a talk from New Age spiritual writer Deepak Chopra, Bernal said. Media reports stating that Clinton would headline the event to help raise \$2 million by selling 2,500 seats for \$50 to \$10,000 each resulted in a tidal wave of complaints upon Jubilee.

"They wanted to know if he was bringing Monica Lewinsky with him," Bernal said, shaking his head as he remembered the letters that he threw away. "They wanted to know if Clinton was going to come here and violate women in the church."

Bernal said most who called were nonchurch members or pastors of other churches.

"I think the misconception was that I had invited him to preach. The opinion was, 'How could you let this anti-Christ, evil man come to your church?'"

Some of the 600 hate letters Bernal received predicted that he and his family would be killed for allowing Clinton to speak. Others insisted that Jubilee would be "blown up" when God passed judgment on Bernal for "polluting" the house of God. Five families quit the church, but complaints have dwindled.

"People like that—who are hyper-judgmental—usually have something to hide themselves. I call them Cops for Christ," Bernal said. "If King David were alive today, these people would have had him stoned."

Bernal, who founded Jubilee some 21 years ago, did not perceive such a severe backlash would occur. A week later he

took out a large, paid advertisement of apology in the San Jose Mercury News.

Joshi also received criticism for holding a humanitarian event in a church. He received 300 to 400 e-mails complaining about Bernal's actions. He said TIE used Jubilee only as a last resort because no hotels were available and added that Bernal's "evangelistic" efforts during the event and his public apology for Clinton's visit offended the Indo-American community.

"Some of the most sophisticated people in the Silicon Valley were there that night," said Joshi, who maintained he would not use Jubilee's facility again. "Although there is no anger here, I think the apology he put in the newspaper was an insult to [Clinton]."

Bernal, who said he has voted Republican most of his life, disagrees. "The Bible tells us to apologize to those we offend." He further believes Clinton has repented for his extramarital affairs, even though he said he may not appear to have publicly.

"That's just a politician politicking," said Bernal of Clinton's unrepentant attitude. "It's shark eat shark in the political world. I know for a fact he's saved, and I believe he's repentant. But that is none of my business."

"First of all, we repent to God. [King] David said, 'Against You, Lord, and You only have I sinned.'"

Clinton, who declined Charisma's request for comment on the situation, does have several religious connections. He

frequently golfs with Anthony Mangun, pastor of The Pentecostals of Alexandria, a Oneness Pentecostal church in Alexandria, La., and reportedly has prayed with Mangun several times. The former president also has submitted to spiritual counseling from Chicago pastor Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church and Christian author and educator Tony Campolo, both of whom ministered forgiveness to him.

"Bill Clinton has opened himself up to clergy," Bernal said. "He's asked for prayer, counseling. If the guy was unrepentant, a preacher would be the last person he'd want to talk to—and the Bible would be the last book he would want to read. The man is searching for redemption and help."

Bernal is adamant that God has great plans for Clinton. He said a well-known televangelist has a word of prophecy for Clinton, but he's never had the opportunity to give it to him.

"The word was, God's hand is on him for a higher purpose than even being president. And God will never remove His hand from him."

Bernal's wife, Carla, said Clinton seemed sad the night of the event, and Bernal added that the world leader "doesn't get invited to a lot of churches."

"I think he was really shocked at the warm reception he got at our church," Bernal said.

Both Bernal and Clinton had their defenders as well. "I admire Dick Bernal for what he did," said pastor Steve Munsey of Family Christian Center in Munsey, Ind. Munsey is slated to speak at Bernal's church and has worked closely with several

pastors who have counseled Clinton. Munsey said Clinton is repentant for the Lewinsky scandal.

“I think Clinton loves God. I do not believe he wants to go to hell. And there is no doubt in my mind that he has an anointing of leadership to influence people,” Munsey said, adding that if Clinton would “yield to that calling” there’s no telling what he could do for God.

Trinity Broadcasting Network founder Paul Crouch is sympathetic with Bernal for his decision to host Clinton in his church. “Bernal has a meaningful and sincere faith in Jesus Christ, and his church will have the resilience to work through whatever controversy former President Clinton’s appearance may have caused,” Crouch said.

-Carol Shepard in San Jose, Calif.