

Campolo asks to rebut Falwell charges about Clinton

By David Anderson
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Evangelist Tony Campolo has demanded time on Jerry Falwell's "Old Time Gospel Hour" to rebut accusations about President Clinton's personal and political behavior made in a video Falwell is selling on his religious broadcast.

"You have challenged the president of the United States to respond to the charges and issues raised in the video," Campolo said in a letter. "As his personal friend I am asking you to allow me time on your TV show to respond to these charges."

Campolo, a Philadelphia-based Baptist minister and professor at Eastern College in St. Davids, Pa., wrote to Falwell Jan. 23.

Mark DeMoss, a Falwell spokesman, said Falwell would reject the re-

quest. "Campolo should take issue with the people who made the video, who appear in the video—not with Falwell, who is only one of dozens of people distributing the video," he said.

Campolo, a well-known preacher in evangelical and mainline Protestant circles, is especially popular among youth groups. He developed a leadership program for poor urban teenagers that Clinton praised in his 1994 State of the Union speech.

Falwell, best known as founder of the Moral Majority and preacher on "The Old Time Gospel Hour" television program, is a harsh critic of the president's personal morality and political policies.

"It is Bill Clinton's attempt to dupe the religious public while performing as the most radical left-wing president ever to sit in the Oval Office that really upsets thinking Christians," Fal-

well told the Washington Times.

Falwell has promoted and offered for sale on his program two anti-Clinton videos—"Clinton's Circle of Power" and "The Clinton Chronicles," produced by Citizens for Honest Government.

The videos, which sell for \$40 a set, make a number of unsubstantiated charges about Clinton's personal and political life.

Among the allegations are that Clinton, before gaining the White House, was involved in a series of mysterious deaths in Arkansas, was hooked on cocaine and was part of an international drug-smuggling operation.

Clinton's wife, Hillary, is accused—without proof—of having sexual relations with the late Vincent Foster, a longtime Clinton friend who committed suicide while serving as a White House legal adviser.

Appearing on CNN's "Crossfire" in early May, when the controversy over the videos first erupted, Falwell acknowledged he had no evidence to back up the charges they contained. But he insisted Clinton has a responsibility to answer the charges.

Campolo said in a news release that he challenged Falwell to provide air time for a rebuttal because Falwell's "effective preaching of the gospel gives him a legitimacy that leads people to accept anything he says as unquestioned truth."

Christians "ought not to be spreading rumors if we can't prove they're true," Campolo said. "It becomes essential that we as evangelicals hold each other accountable for what we say and do.

"It is absolutely vital that we separate evangelism from political ideology," he added. "The gospel is neither Republican nor Democratic."

Christians "ought not to be spreading rumors if we can't prove they're true."

Tony Campolo