

NORMAN LEAR JEERS REAGAN'S RELIGION

Television producer and writer Norman Lear has launched a campaign challenging President Reagan's use of the presidency to promote Christian ethics and values.

Lear has budgeted more than \$1 million to target what he calls fundamentalists' attempts to "Christianize America" with governmental support.

Lear, best known for his popular television series "All in the Family" and "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," is the founder of People for the American Way, an umbrella group that oversees nearly 600 non-profit organizations. They claim between 90,000 and 100,000 members.

People for the American Way was organized because Lear fears that an anti-democratic and divisive climate is being created by groups that seek to use religion and religious symbols for political purposes.

Lear initially contacted the White House in an open letter addressed to President Reagan. He emphasized his feelings against Reagan's public acknowledgement of his personal faith and asked him to declare that he would "not use the office of the president to favor a particular religious dogma."

What followed was a correspondence battle between Lear and Reagan, principally over the issue of school prayer but also on what Lear termed "Reagan's position as evangelist-in-chief."

These letters have since been reprinted in full in *Harper's* magazine.

Late last year, Lear continued his campaign against Reagan's public addresses and use of the presidency to promote the Christian faith in a mass mailing to thousands of households. He solicited funds for his lobby against the "evangelist-in-chief" and People for the American Way's work against the administration's "good vs. evil" foreign policy.

A spokesperson for the Reagan administration said there have been many letters sent to Lear from people all over America, with copies to the president, thanking Lear for helping explain the president's position. "It encourages people to continue praying for the work the president is doing," the spokesperson said. "There are many more negative responses to Lear's letter than there are positive ones."

Reported by Bruce Buckingham

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