

# RELIGION

## People, Values

SFChronicle OCT 11 1975  
**Mrs. Ford and  
Sex Morality**

By Andrew Greeley

**T**HE TWO worst things to happen to Gerald Ford since he became president were the Nixon pardon and his wife's vague comments on sexual morality.

For the former he can blame only himself; but for the latter he can blame everyone in sight. The questions should never have been asked; having been asked, they should never have been answered; having been answered the answers should have been ignored. And the whole sorry mess is a sad commentary on the continuation of the Imperial Presidency after it was supposed to end.

To begin with, why should anyone care what Mrs. Ford thinks about sex—any more than anyone cares about what any American mother of four thinks about the subject?

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**M**RS. FORD'S TV appearance and magazine interview are a result of an implicit conspiracy entered into by the media and the public to keep alive the splendors of the Imperial Presidency. We don't have a royal family here, thank heavens, so we have a first family instead. It is a bad thing for the Republic and a bad thing for the family involved.

If Mrs. Ford had done serious research on the subject of sexual morality and was an acknowledged expert in the field, then she would be worth listening to; but the accident of history that made her the wife of a president doesn't give her the obligation or the right to pontificate in public about such matters.

She should not have been asked to go on television; she should not have accepted the invitation; she should not have been asked her opinion about sexual morality; she should have refused to answer the question.

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**I** CARE much less about the substance of the answer than

the fact of the question. I care even more that the answer should make any difference to anyone. Doubtless the presidency is heavily invested with symbolic importance, but the role of symbolic leadership for the members of his family is unconstitutional, un-American and unfair.

Presidents have to absorb a lot of hatred; they become inkblots like those used in psychological tests into which people can project their frustrations and hatred. Now it would seem that presidents' families are to be subjected to the same treatment; and the media, understanding the public's obsession with its symbolic leaders, feeds this hunger for new inkblots to both love and hate.

It is far more obscene than Mrs. Ford's opinions on personal morality. Are we so hard up that we give a hoot what kind of bed the chief executive of our land uses?

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**O**NE HOPES that the next president will announce that the people are paying him and not his family, that his family is not the first family but just an ordinary family and that the media should leave them the hell alone because they aren't going to have anything to say about anything as long as he's president.

The pious phonies of the liberal media have praised Mrs. Ford's candor. Well, perhaps. But I don't think candor is the sort of virtue by which the wife of a president should be known. I would much prefer intelligence.

The kind of intelligence that would lead you to say that, not having been elected by anyone to anything, you are not going to pontificate on anything for anybody.

Forever and ever. Amen.