

A LITTLE GOOD NEWS

It is time for some good news.

Bad news is like bad money: it drives the good out. But behind all the terrible developments on the international and domestic scene, perhaps everything is not unravelling.

There is some good news, for example, about how Americans feel about marriage and family life. That is, after all, the basic building block of long-term stability. Americans were just asked whether they preferred marriage -- or preferred just "living with someone," or remaining single. About 92 per cent said they prefer marriage. Only 3 per cent said they prefer "living with someone," without marriage. That does not bespeak a massive breakdown in traditional attitudes towards the nuclear family.

More than that, the younger people show no particular deterioration in those attitudes. About 88 per cent of Americans between the ages of 14 and 24 say they would prefer marriage. Since so many of the older people have an obligatory answer for that question -- already being in a state of marriage -- one cannot say that the youthful statistics are really any softer than those of the older generations.

There *is* a difference between younger and older generations in the *kind* of marriage they want -- and that is probably good news, too. Nationally, 29 per cent want "traditional marriages," with a strong delineation of male and female roles -- rather than "shared-responsibility marriages;" while, among those aged 14 to 24, only 15 per cent want old-type rather than shared-responsibility marriages. That is one good result, most will think, of the "raised consciousness" of recent years.

There is, incidentally, an interesting twist in these current surveys. Asked whether they would want to work full time, if they had enough money so that they would not *have* to work, 51 per cent of the working men of the country and only 17 per cent of the working women of the country said yes. Then Americans were asked about this hypothetical case: "Suppose a wife and a husband, without children, both work at good jobs, but the husband is offered a *very* good job in another city, should the wife quit her job and go along with the

husband?" About 76 per cent of the men said that the wife in that case should quit her job; but about 85 per cent of the women said that the wife in that case should quit her job. The implications are unclear, but intriguing.

However, there is some other unqualified good news. There has been a question, as you know, as to whether Americans are turning sour on America. Asked simply whether they are proud to be Americans, 98 per cent of our countrymen say "yes," and 97 per cent of those 18-24 years old say the same.

The unanimity of young Americans on that score is not routine nationalism. Only 67 to 73 per cent of young Swiss, Swedes, Germans or Frenchmen say that they are proud of their country. And when asked whether the United States is "the best place in the world to live," about 9 out of 10 Americans say "yes," whether they are young or old, rich or poor, white or black. (In exact figures, 94 per cent of white Americans and 86 per cent of black Americans give the same answer.)

The significance lies in the *reason* for their answers. Asked why they are proud of America, and why this is the best place to live, people do *not* answer in terms of the country's strength, beauty, relative prosperity or other material benefits. They overwhelmingly cite this country's "freedom and liberty" as the reason for their affirmative answers.

As long as that value continues to be so cherished, we can endure a lot of problems without falling apart. That's the good news.