

## Decline

I feel rather sorry for Gordon Brown. Well, somebody should, shouldn't they? After catching Tony's bouquet in the nineties, he spent years at number 11 preparing himself for his own big day... while whispering softly in the ear of the electorate. "Fiscal prudence", he would murmur, as he gently massaged the figures.

But when his day arrived, there were no wedding bells, and precious little ceremony. There were no other suitors, and nobody asked if there was any reason why the marriage should not take place...though many people could think of several. Brown became the head of the household almost by default - and if there were any misgivings on the front bench, *political* prudence prevented them from being aired.

There was no honeymoon period. Since that day, we've had Northern Rock and the economic downturn... followed by stagnation... followed by recession. Gordon's sweet nothings about prudence have been revealed to be just that - we have the worst budget deficit since the second world war. And people are worried. Not just about the economy, but also by the state of the nation. They are worried about things like knife-crime, immigration and terrorism. They want to fill up the car without mortgaging the house, they want to see the dentist *this* year... and they want to be able to go to hospital with at least a sporting chance of not picking up some exotic infection.

If this isn't bad enough, Gordon is blessed with all the charisma of a Reliant Robin. If *he* leads Labour into the next election, he will undoubtedly be saying "we failed to get our message across", on the following morning. He may even be saying it from the steps of his local Benefits Office. But I do have some sympathy for the guy. After all, he (and his predecessor) tried to give us what we wanted. We wanted a better standard of living, so they ran up the national debt; we wanted cheap labour, so we got continued immigration. We wanted low-key policing...and we got knife crime. We wanted a cheap NHS, and we got bugs. We essentially wanted a free lunch, but now we find we are paying with interest.

Of course, it is the politicians' duty to offer free lunches - just as it is ours to pay for them afterwards. They make bold promises, which they can only deliver by breaking others. But the truth is, only God can produce something out of nothing...and the only *genuinely* free lunch in history was Jesus feeding the five thousand.

Britain's decline has not just been economic, nor just a recent phenomena. In many areas we seem to be getting worse, whether that's things like crime or parenting...morality or addiction. It's been going on for many years, and has been exactly mirrored by an increasing rejection of both God and his standards. Could the two things be related? Or are they entirely coincidental - like, say, global warming and melting ice-caps, smoking and lung-cancer ...or even unrestrained borrowing and national debt? The price of oil may have something to do with the economic downturn, but the desire to live for ourselves (and beyond our means) has more. Even more clearly, the steady disintegration of society is rooted in a refusal to live in the way God intended. Gordon's eventual replacement might be able to do a little about that first problem, but the solution to the second remains firmly in our hands.