

# God and Blair at Yale

The first thing to do when the words “Tony” and “Blair” swim into your head is to pray for the grace to be charitable and to avoid the sin of sarcasm (or “irony,” as we

call it in England). The second thing is to ask yourself: Where does this monkey get off? Can he be serious?

Apparently he can—so serious, in fact, that immediately before beginning his teaching stint at Yale he appeared on “The Daily Show.” Only the most serious (and successful) people are invited to receive Jon Stewart’s imprimatur.

It is true that Blair looked a bit uneasy, but he got on a lot better than Sarah Palin at the hands of Charlie Gibson. Mrs. Palin has not yet taken her county to war. Her only crime so far is to have made a public declaration of her opposition to abortion.

Maybe Blair looked awkward because it is beginning to dawn on him that his position is not altogether tenable. Here is a man, after all, who ran what was arguably the most anti-Christian government in the history of Great Britain, who led his country into an unjust and murderous war, and who, within months of leaving office, was received into the Roman Catholic Church without first making a public statement of regret for having so publicly promoted abortion, embryonic stem-cell research, and gay marriage.

Such are the contradictions in his make-up that it is hard not to suspect that he has some unresolved “issues.” There are very often psychological explanations for bizarre behavior. With George W. Bush it’s drink, I imagine; perhaps he is what alcoholics call a “dry drunk.” With Tony Blair other influences could be at work.

He’s always been a hard guy to figure out. Some of you will perhaps have heard of Mark Steyn, a Canadian polemicist and Bush-booster. He and I used to talk from time to time in the 1990s, when I was comment editor of the *Sunday Telegraph* and he was a contributor. What struck Mark about the early Blair was that he seemed a pretty effeminate sort of guy. Apparently in New Hampshire, where Mark lived, the good ole boys had noticed Blair’s Bambi persona, his ingratiating smile, his curly hair, his English accent, and had concluded that he was “one of those.”

Now it goes without saying that it was not funny to suggest that Blair is gay. Blair is not gay, and even if he were, it would not be something to laugh about.

TONY BLAIR IS CERTAINLY **BAD NEWS**, AND **SAD NEWS**, TOO.

This isn’t the 13th century. All the same, I laughed at the thought and continued to do so until one evening about ten years ago when, with my wife and our 12-year-old boy, I was a guest of the late William F. Buckley Jr., most generous of hosts, and his wife Pat.

It was a glorious late summer’s evening in Stamford, Connecticut. The company—two of Pat’s bridge partners joined us—was pretty darned sophisticated, and, stuck for something to say but wishing to appear sophisticated, I raised the possibility that the prime minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was a fruit.

No doubt I lisped a bit and dilated my

eyes. It was not my finest hour. My dinner companions responded by staring earnestly at their plates. I sensed immediately that this was not the moment for one of my vaudeville routines. Mercifully, someone changed the subject. Dinner continued. Life went on.

On the way back to Manhattan, however, I yielded to fear and self-loathing. How could I have behaved so foolishly? And yet ... had my behavior really been that bad? How to explain the cold response to my joke? I turned to my wife for help.

“Are you kidding?” she said. “Did you look those two guys?”

“Yes,” I said. “Jolly decent coves, I thought.”

“Indeed they were,” she said. “But how did they wear their sweaters? Over their shoulders, right? I mean, really. They were gay!”

“Yeah, Dad,” said my boy with a look of exasperated reproach. “It was obvious.”

So no more gay jokes. But Tony Blair is certainly bad news, and sad news, too. There is something wrong with him, spiritually and psychologically. You sense a deep desire to be loved. He goes out of his way to say that he respects those who disagree with him and seems baffled that very few Englishmen are prepared to respect him in return. He thinks it is enough to say that he thought what he was doing in Iraq was right. Obviously, it is not.

Plus he’s such a square. Asked the classic rock and roll question at Yale the other day—Beatles or Stones?—he replied, “The Beatles.” The correct answer, of course, is Chuck Berry. ■

# Goodbye Gordon Gekko

The Crash of 2008, which is now wiping out trillions of dollars of our people's wealth, is, like the Crash of 1929, likely to mark the end of one era and the onset of another.

The new era will see a more sober and much diminished America. The "Omnipower" and "Indispensable Nation" we heard about in all the hubris and bragadocio following our Cold War victory is history.

Seizing on the crisis, the Left says we are witnessing the failure of market economics, a failure of conservatism.

This is nonsense. What we are witnessing is the collapse of Gordon Gekko "greed is good" capitalism. What we are witnessing is what happens to a prodigal nation that ignores history and abandons the philosophy and principles that made it great.

A true conservative cherishes prudence and believes in fiscal responsibility, balanced budgets, and a self-reliant republic. He believes in saving for retirement and a rainy day, in deferred gratification, in not buying on credit what you cannot afford.

Is that really what got Wall Street and us into this mess—that we followed too religiously the gospel of Robert Taft and Russell Kirk?

"Government must save us!" cries the Left, as ever. Yet who got us into this mess if not the government—the Fed with its easy money, Bush with his profligate spending, and Congress and the SEC by liberating Wall Street and failing to step in and stop the drunken orgy?

For years, we Americans have spent more than we earned. We save nothing. Credit card debt, consumer debt, auto debt, mortgage debt, corporate debt—all are at record levels. And with pensions and savings being wiped out,

much of that debt will never be repaid.

Our standard of living is inevitably going to fall, for foreigners will not forever buy our bonds or lend us more money if they rightly fear that they will be paid back, if at all, in cheaper dollars.

We are going to have to learn to live again within our means. The party's over.

Up through World War II, we followed the Hamiltonian idea that America must remain economically independent of the world in order to remain politically independent.

But this generation decided that was yesterday's bromide and we must march bravely forward into a global economy, where we all depend on one another. American companies morphed into global companies and moved plants and factories to Mexico, Asia, China, and India, and we began buying more cheaply from abroad what we used to make at home: shoes, clothes, bikes, cars, radios, TVs, planes, computers.

As the trade deficits began inexorably to rise to 6 percent of GDP, we began vast borrowing from abroad to continue buying from abroad.

At home, propelled by tax cuts, war in Iraq, and an explosion in social spending, surpluses vanished and deficits reappeared and began to rise. The dollar began to sink, and gold began to soar.

Still the promises of the politicians come. Barack Obama will give us national health insurance and tax cuts for all but that 2 percent of the nation that already carries 50 percent of the federal income tax load.

John McCain is going to cut taxes, expand the military, move NATO into Georgia and Ukraine, confront Russia, force Iran to stop enriching uranium, or "bomb, bomb, bomb," with Joe Lieberman as wartime consigliere.

Who are we kidding? We are witnessing today how empires end. The Last Superpower is unable to defend its borders, protect its currency, win its wars, or balance its budget. Medicare and Social Security are headed for the cliff with unfunded liabilities in the tens of trillions of dollars. This is nothing less than a Katrina-like failure of government, of our political class, and of democracy itself, casting a cloud over the viability and longevity of the system.

Notice who is managing the crisis. Not our elected leaders. Nancy Pelosi says she had nothing to do with it. Congress is paralyzed and heading home. President Bush is nowhere to be seen.

Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson and Ben Bernanke of the Fed chose to bail out Bear Stearns but let Lehman go under. They decided to nationalize Fannie and Freddie at a cost to taxpayers of hundreds of billions, putting the U.S. government behind \$5 trillion in mortgages. They decided to buy AIG with \$85 billion rather than see the insurance giant sink beneath the waves.

An unelected financial elite is now entrusted with the assignment of getting us out of a disaster into which an unelected financial elite plunged the nation. We are just spectators.

What the Greatest Generation handed down to us—the richest, most powerful, most self-sufficient republic in history, with the highest standard of living any nation had ever achieved—the baby boomers, oblivious and self-indulgent to the end, have frittered away. ■