

Mighty fall: Corporate collapse

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [October 9, 2002](#) issue

The *Wall Street Journal* is now urgent reading for preachers, since its daily stories give evidence that Augustine and Calvin were right. On page one, original sin daily turns into actual sin, so much so that the sins of the wealthy no longer shock us.

But these stories give us good reason to be shocked. The *New York Times* and other papers, for instance, recently listed some extravagant purchases by now-indicted Tyco executives. They were using our retirement funds to pay for, among other things, CEO L. Dennis Kozlowski's and his fellow executives' \$2,200 wastebasket; \$17,100 traveling toilet box; \$15,000 umbrella stand; \$6,300 sewing basket; \$6,000 shower curtain; and a \$2,900 set of coat hangers.

Such uses of shareholders' money hardly draw notice now. But I paid attention on September 17, when the *WSJ* told of a \$2.1 million party Koslowski threw on Sardinia for his second wife's 40th birthday. Tyco shareholders paid for only half of it directly, as a company expense. The other half came indirectly, from personal funds that the indicted Mr. K. had evidently creamed off the company's top.

What drew my notice was a biblical reference. The memo from the party planner describes guests arriving. They "come into the pool area, the band is playing, they are dressed in elegant chic." What do they see? An "ice sculpture [of Michaelangelo's] David, lots of shellfish and caviar at his feet. A waiter is pouring Stolli vodka into the statue's back so it comes out his penis into a crystal glass."

Jews should worry about the linking of their king with shellfish. And using David's penis to dispense iced vodka should inspire a reaction among all Bible-believers. Here the Tyco people invade sacred realms. In *King David: A Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2000), Steven L. McKenzie reminds us that the Bible "devotes more space to David than to any other character." Only Moses and Jesus rival him, and if you add the Psalms, David wins hands down.

McKenzie's chapter headings remind us of the biblical plot: one, "Holy Terrorist," is subtitled "David and His Outlaw Band." Another is "Assassin: David's Reign as King

of Judah.” “Like Father, Like Son: The Bathsheba Affair and Absalom’s Revolt” deals with the uses to which David put his overworked penis, employed whenever he stole other men’s wives or sired rebellious children.

It is hard to be delicate about these indelicate matters. The Bible itself is quite frank about them. It makes clear that in those pre-Viagra days, the royal penis wore out. In I Kings 1:1 David’s servants “find a beautiful young virgin, Abishag, to ‘attend’ him by lying (naked) next to him in order to warm him. The technique is unusual, and indeed, there is more going on here than meets the reader’s eye.” The servants were testing the old king’s virility. He flunked. “The test proved that the king was impotent. This was intolerable. The king was the symbol of his nation, its strength and fertility. . . . The king who had fathered so many children and once allowed his lust to control him now found himself impotent,” McKenzie writes.

Public relations agents went to work and turned David into a revered biblical hero. The final irony of David’s story is that in our time his instrument has become good for nothing more than channeling vodka on Sardinia. How are the mighty fallen! The Bible talks about that, too.