

Corruption

One of the more interesting political figures of the 20th Century was Horatio Bottomley, once Conservative MP for Hackney South. Overcoming an orphanage upbringing, he quickly made a name for himself in various fields (notably publishing and the stock market). He founded the Financial Times and a magazine called "John Bull". The latter encapsulated all that is best in rabid Jingoism – even calling for the leaders of the fledgling Labour Party to be tried for high treason...for being less than enthusiastic about the first world war.

Bottomley made huge amounts of money, though very little of it honestly. He sold shares in his legendary Australian diamond mines ('legendary', in the sense that there were no diamonds). He sold Victory Bonds at the end of the war – sometimes bringing in as much as £100,000 per day – but few people actually received the bonds. Just one day's takings would be a fortune in today's money, but Bottomley was a man of immense appetites...and had the expenses to match. Alcoholic, glutton and gambling addict, he kept a string of racehorses (not to be confused with what he called his "string of fillies" – a harem scattered around various London locations).

Eventually, he was brought before a court on a variety of fraud charges. In one exchange with the prosecutor, he was asked to account for £5,000 – which had disappeared on a particular day. Bottomley refused to dignify the question with a straight answer, merely replying, "You can't expect me to remember such trifling sums as *that*."

Bottomley's last employment was as a sub-contractor for the General Post Office, assembling mail-bags in Wandsworth. One time, the prison chaplain approached as he was working and enquired, "Sewing, Bottomley?"...to which the ex-MP replied, "No, chaplain – *reaping!*"

In more recent times, Bottomley has had his imitators. The last Conservative administration was plagued by corruption. Cash for questions and dodgy Quango appointments vied with every kind of sexual misdemeanour for front page in the tabloids. In an era when a politician caught in "normal" heterosexual adultery was like a breath of fresh air, the stock of Westminster plummeted. Not that corruption is an exclusively Tory interest, nor yet that any of them came close to repeating the scale of Bottomley's endeavours. Even the worst were just enthusiastic amateurs by comparison.

There is an old adage, which tells us that "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". This oft repeated saying suffers from the small but significant defect of being entirely untrue. Power doesn't corrupt at all – *it merely facilitates the expression of pre-existent corruption!* Moreover, the only one who could legitimately claim *absolute* power is Christ....and he remains forever wholly incorruptible.

The problem is not power, but rather the corruption inherent in the human condition – what the bible refers to as "the sinful nature". We actually spend a large part of our incomes addressing the problems caused by the sinful nature...most obviously through the police and the armed forces. But it's also the reason for bank accounts, door-locks....even the panic when our kids aren't home on time.

When it comes to protecting ourselves from the sinful nature of others, the bible has nothing to offer by way of advice. It only tells us what to do about *our own* sinful nature. That nature may not have led us down the same path travelled by Bottomley, but that isn't the issue – it's not a question of scale. The hallmark of the sinful nature is *not* the degree of sin, it is a life lived for oneself rather than for God.