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SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 007**LENGTH:** 572 words**HEADLINE:** THOU SHALT NOT ... Choose the bottom line over commandments of a higher power**BYLINE:** By Peter Gelzinis**BODY:**

The big problem with the Catholic Church today is not bad priests. That was yesterday's problem, the one the church tried to lock away in a closet with hush money and transfers.

Today, the problem of bad priests has been eclipsed - or should I say exacerbated - by my church's obsession with the Bottom Line.

Just as the greater crime in Watergate was the cover-up, the greater tragedy facing the Archdiocese of Boston right now is the graceless and arrogant way it's tried to compensate for the sins of its fallen clergy.

Simply put, the archdiocese has compounded its original sin by trying to act more like Gillette or Bank of America than the church.

You want proof? Look at the insurrections waged by a half-dozen parishes who refuse to be ``reconfigured'' out of existence.

But let's focus on the evolving fiasco at Our Lady of the **Presentation School** in Brighton.

Now, my pagan colleague across the page, Mr. Macero, argues the only way Archbishop O'Malley can choose between his obligations to victims of abuse and an impassioned group of Presentation families is to be heartless and show no emotion.

Well, O'Malley's done just that. He's locked little children out of their school. And what's happened? A stupid, heartless decision triggers a tsunami of emotion and leaves a whole city to wonder: ``What the hell was the church thinking?'' O'Malley has no answer. Certainly none that makes any sense, either from a bottom-line ORa spiritual point of view.

The archdiocese claims it needs the **Presentation school** building to try fallen priests, and it makes matters worse by claiming this is atonement for all those priests who once molested children in Brighton.

Meanwhile, a devoted community of **Presentation School** parents and parishioners submits a 200-page proposal - along with a \$2.5 million fair market offer - for the property. Bishop Richard Lennon rejects the package in a two-paragraph letter.

That's not just bad business. It's bad faith.

And faith, Cosmo, is why the corporate model is bound to doom the Catholic church to ever more failure and disillusionment. Faith is not a Mach 3 razor, or a low-interest mortgage. And, no, faith is not Big Prayer. Sure, you can sell off property for a handsome profit, but not faith.

While the church may need bucks to pay off more claims and replenish the raided pension funds of its faithful priests, what good is piling up the dough if you run off the laity? For in the end, the most important asset the church has is its people - shareholders, if you will.

It's all there, in Article 1256 of canon law: ``Property legitimately acquired by a parish - which by law is a juridic person - is owned by a parish."''

Bishop Lennon slyly hinted in a meeting with the **Presentation School** foundation that the archdiocese might be able to field an offer for twice as much money. Yes, they could grab \$4.5 million from a developer . . . and rip open a much larger and deeper wound in Brighton. One that would never close.

But if the church chose to remain true to its avowed ``social mission," the intangible at the heart of all its dealings, then \$2.5 million could buy back some much needed good faith. To say nothing of closing old wounds.

Faith will always gum up the idea that the Catholic church is just another big corporation. You can't buy and sell faith. Without it, Archbishop O'Malley might as well ditch his sandals and friar's habit for a pair of wingtips and a Brooks Brothers suit.

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