

From Sacristy to Lockup

Editorial

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No one knows the varieties of limbo being wandered these days by the hundreds of rogue priests the Catholic Church had to drop from service once its pedophilia scandal fully surfaced. Some became convicted criminals when prosecutors forced an end to diocesan cover-ups. Others who were accused, either too old to be defrocked or safely beyond statutes of limitations, are still financially supported by the church while denied priestly labor. The laity may well wonder what has become of these men.

The New York Archdiocese has begun forcing a choice upon some of its fallen priests: agree to tight, indefinite therapy and housing containment or quit the priesthood and the diocesan payroll. Cardinal Edward Egan was wise to try this exercise in protection and repair — particularly since he was accused by the church's laity panel of earlier mismanagement of the pedophilia scourge. It's not encouraging that five of the first seven facing the choice quit the priesthood. But we hope the archdiocese does not see its responsibility ending there.

For all the post-scandal display of reform by the American bishops, they still lack the machinery to force their foot-dragging peers to face up to tougher measures to regain public trust. The vague device called "fraternal correction" — a kind of buddy system that's supposed to correct blossoming scandal — remains a toothless nonthreat. Collective mandates are needed, especially as the church is haunted by its ghostly legion of fallen priests.