

MSGR. WOOLSEY DESERVES BETTER

Catholic League president William Donohue commented today on news reports that Monsignor John Woolsey, pastor of St. John the Martyr in Manhattan, allegedly bilked an elderly parishioner out of nearly \$500,000:

“I have known Msgr. Woolsey as a friend for over a decade and consider him to be one of the finest priests I have ever met. That is why I am so disturbed to learn that he is being tried in the court of public opinion over charges that have a strange odor to them. He deserves better than this.

“According to news accounts today, his accuser, Janet Naegele, says that priests ‘should not accept large personal gifts from’ their parishioners. Is this the best she can do? Is there something wrong with priests, pastors, rabbis or imams who take a ‘large personal gift’ from one of their congregants? Her charge is so weak as to make it ludicrous. It is one thing if a clergyman shakes down a member of his flock, quite another if he takes a gift that has been voluntarily given to him.

“It has also been alleged that Msgr. Woolsey would often dine with Rose Cale, the elderly woman who generously gave to his parish. Now how about that? Isn’t that proof positive he’s a hustler? Even worse, he is alleged to having escorted her to her doctor’s office? Is this the kind of behavior we expect from priests? How sly of him to do so! And to top it off, there is evidence that Msgr. Woolsey actually signed letters to her, ‘Love, Msgr. Woolsey.’ The kicker is this—lawyers have evidently concluded that he did not sign all of his letters this way. They’re so right: having personally received letters of thanks from Msgr. Woolsey for occasionally

taking him to dinner, never once did he sign off, 'Love, Msgr. Woolsey.' Enter this as Exhibit A.

"The court of law will deal with the details. But for right now, before anyone hyperventilates over this case, it would be wise to take a deep breath and wait until the whole story is known to the public.

"For the record, I did not clear this news release with Msgr. Woolsey or his attorneys."