



Episode 782: Another Professor Refuses to Surrender to the Campus Snowflakes

Guest: Anthony Esolen

WOODS: All right, let's talk about what's been going on with you at Providence College. I've long respected you from a distance, and I think – I don't even remember what episode it was. Maybe I was talking to Brad Birzer. It was. I was talking to Brad Birzer, and we were talking about *The Divine Comedy*, and we all said that people should read your translation, and ever since then I thought, I should have this guy on the show. Little did I know it would be under these circumstances. Can you describe what's been going on?

ESOLEN: Oh dear. Well, first of all, thanks to Brad Birzer for that plug. It buys a few pizzas at the Esolen household.

WOODS: (laughing) Right.

ESOLEN: Well, in recent years at Providence College, I think the Catholic faculty have felt themselves increasingly in the minority – that is, the faithful Catholic faculty, for whom the Catholic mission of the college really means a lot. And they've been the subject of some pretty severe attacks from their secular colleagues. I mean attacks that might jeopardize their careers. And I've been growing tired of it and have frankly had enough of it, and so I wrote a couple of articles, one in the spring, one this fall, on basically what it is that we mean by diversity and what that has to do with a classical liberal arts education and of the Catholic character of the college, the Catholic faith.

And the odd thing is that as a Roman Catholic I belong to the most culturally diverse institution in the history of the world, but secular people I think don't understand that. They don't know what's going on or what has gone on in the Catholic faith for 2,000 years, so they view everything in the light of current American politics, and it's hard for us to talk the same language when Catholics try to view everything in the light of the history of salvation and eternity.

So anyway, I wrote these two articles, and I've come under fire for – it's the usual accusations – I'm this, that, and the other that's evil – and have had students protesting. And the fact that the president of the college singled me out in front of the whole student body and the faculty for reproach, and I basically have been called a racist and a sexist and a this-and-thatist. And it's been kind of ugly.

WOODS: Well, it's easy when you're on the sidelines and you're not involved and you see somebody else being accused of these names, and you think, boy, you know, when you're called those names these days, it's almost always a medal on your chest. It just means that you were just doing your job as a scholar. It's easy to say that when you're on the sidelines, but when you're involved in it, and it's an attack on you at an institution where you've poured 20 years of your life, I suppose, it must not be so easy.

ESOLEN: Yeah, 27 years.

WOODS: Wow, 27.

ESOLEN: Yeah, this is my 27th year.

WOODS: Now, have you always had a decent rapport with the other faculty?

ESOLEN: Well, yeah, yeah, I would say until the last maybe two years or so. Now, see, at Providence College we have this two-year-long Development of Western Civilization program that all freshmen and all sophomores have to take. And it's been a little bit watered down for the non-honors students, but basically it covers in four semesters the whole history of the West, a wide variety of cultures. It's taught by teams of professors, so you've got different disciplines: philosophy, theology, history, literature, and art lectures and music lectures when we can smuggle them in.

And this has been under attack at Providence College from the secular left, especially in the social sciences, for 35, 40 years. And I've seen it in my own person for the last quarter-century, a little bit more. And you know, this is just one continuing battle. So if you defend that program vocally, loudly, you will be accused by certain professors in the social sciences. A few very loud professors in the social sciences are going to accuse you of being all those nasty things just because you defend a program in which they say students read dead white males. And that's a language that is foul in my mouth, but they are the ones who talk that language.

So that's part of this fight here. The fight for the Catholic identity of the college is all tangled up with how we value what used to be called liberal arts education, a classical liberal arts education. So the battle lines kind of form along those issues.

WOODS: Why don't we get into the specifics of what you said in the article that caused so much offense? Did you think it would ruffle these feathers? I mean, it could well be that you probably figured a lot of these people don't even read the sorts of websites and publications that you and I would write for.

ESOLEN: Yeah, well, I'm writing for *Crisis* magazine, so I'm writing for an orthodox Catholic audience. I figured that nobody here but maybe two or three Catholic professors is going to read an article like that. So I don't know how the students got hold of it. I don't think really that the students understood what I was getting at —

WOODS: Oh, you think? (laughing) Really?

ESOLEN: Yeah, you know, one of the points that I make in the article is that I'm actually a great believer in cultural diversity. I think I believe in it more ardently than they do, because I believe in the study of a wide variety of cultures, and you're going to get that variety these days not in the current world where everything is being homogenized; you're going to get it from the study of the past. And it's very precious not to let these past cultures be forgotten, but to learn from them, both their successes and their mistakes.

I mean, here's this professor, right? I stumble around in ten languages, but I'm called xenophobic, you know? I spend my summers in a part of the world, French Canada – Well, I'm in a foreign country among people who don't speak English as their first language, but I get called xenophobic. That doesn't make any sense. It's very strange. So you have people on this social science side saying we need cultural diversity, but all they really study is current events from the point of view of a secular Westerner. How is that an experience of diversity? That's one of the questions I'm asking in the article.

Another question is: how can you be talking about diversity when you want this college, this Catholic college, to be like every other college? Isn't it a more, a celebration of diversity to have colleges be distinct? I don't tell other colleges what they have to teach, but why should Providence College be just like them? But they have no answers to this really, because, well, I think if you're a secular your ceiling is actually pretty low.

WOODS: So what you've been focusing on, or one of your points in your article, is that the current-day obsession with bean counting ethnic diversity is like a secular – it interferes with the type of unity that the Catholic world – which of course the word "catholic" means universal –

ESOLEN: Right.

WOODS: – is ultimately striving for. And that unity points toward eternity, whereas the current fake unity is extremely present-oriented and tied up in politics and ephemeral.

ESOLEN: Yes, all that, and I would just add that in the unity of the Catholic Church, there is no homogenization. There's no reduction of everybody to the same sort of global standard. The saints are sharply distinct from one another, and the Catholic Church has been an uplifter and elevator, a purifier, and a preserver of cultures. This is the great missionary problem: how to bring the Catholic faith to a culture that's very different from your own. And the Catholic answer has consistently been to purify the culture, to respect what is good in it and beautiful and to celebrate that, not to make everybody into Englishmen or everybody into Italians, but to make them more themselves than they perhaps ever were. But that's something also that the secular people would not be able to see.

WOODS: So you say that the administration has been unfriendly and there have been protests. What else, if anything, has gone on, and do you feel comfortable on campus? Have they created a hostile work environment for you?

ESOLEN: Yes, I think they have. I think they've intended to. Certainly if you want to make somebody comfortable on campus you don't do what was done to me. The faculty met with the president a week or so ago and had a 60-minute hate fest, and another letter went out from one of the vice presidents of the college that was as damning or even a little bit more damning than the letter that came out from the president was. So basically yeah, I've been singled out; I've had a bulls-eye painted on my back for the crime of, as I believe it, actually believing in diversity in ways that my opponents do not understand.

But you know, the students are caught in the crosshairs here, because I think they are just being used as political players. The students don't have the big picture. They're too young. They don't have experience yet, right? So they're easily led. They're young. They're full of energy. They want to go forth and promote something, and they want to feel that they're part of something big, some cause or other. And they can be used by professors who have political agendas, and unfortunately that has happened here. It's not a pretty sight.

WOODS: But what could be bigger than defending Western civilization, for heaven's sake? At what point are some students going to wake up and say, If I want to belong to something bigger than myself, how about that?

ESOLEN: They've been told that all of Western civilization has been one long, miserable tale of oppression. It's the strangest thing, you know?

WOODS: Have they visited a lot of African countries, these kids?

ESOLEN: No, no, they haven't.

WOODS: Yeah, okay.

ESOLEN: No. And you know, they'd be shocked to find out that a person like me holds out very deep dear hopes that Africa will end up being the salvation of the world. When the whole Western world goes insane, Africa will pull the world back to sanity. They wouldn't get that at all. They wouldn't understand what I was talking about at all. I'm talking mainly about faculty members here and not about students. Faculty don't necessarily have a very broad education in the liberal arts.

WOODS: That's an interesting thing to say. You're talking about faculty who were in other disciplines —

ESOLEN: Yeah.

WOODS: — or faculty within the liberal arts?

ESOLEN: Well, sometimes it's faculty in the liberal arts themselves — less so here than at most places. But the strange thing is that even faculty in the liberal arts at most American colleges right now do not have a particularly broad education. You can't even depend upon it — let's say that you have an English professor teaching at Land-Grant State University, some place in the US. Does that English professor have a broad

and deep knowledge of English literature? And the answer to that question is maybe yes, maybe no. It's a toss up. Maybe it's even worse than a toss up, that it's actually more likely that that professor of English does not have a broad education in English literature. Then forget about it once you leave that department. So education has become increasingly specialized and narrow.

WOODS: What do you think happens next for you now?

ESOLEN: Oh, I don't know. So far I've been denied the chance to write to all of the students directly to make a plea. I've appealed to them through the student newspaper; it's been the only avenue open to me. So we'll see. I plan to give a talk on Christ and the meaning of cultural diversity in coming weeks. I wanted to give it today. I was told that if I tried to give it maybe the students would shut it down. I don't think that that's actually going to happen. I would like to say to them things that they've never heard before, you know, and welcome them into this great education that we have to offer them. And not to have their heads turned by campus politicians who have not had this education, who don't really know, in their own persons don't really know how to value it, because they've never experienced it.

WOODS: You could make a YouTube video that wouldn't, it's true, be emailed to every student. I guarantee you that thing would get around, because at the very least *Crisis* magazine would pick it up –

ESOLEN: Right.

WOODS: – which means CampusReform.org would pick it up, which means the same way they found out about your article they'd find out about the video.

ESOLEN: Now that is a thought. I had not thought about that.

WOODS: That's what I'm here for.

ESOLEN: (laughing) There you go, yeah. I had not thought about that. That might be – Yeah, let me think that one over.

WOODS: Because at the very least it rallies the whole country to your side, even if it accomplishes nothing at Providence College.

ESOLEN: Yeah, which would be very unfortunate as far as Providence College is concerned. You know, we never did lose our Catholic identity, and in many ways it's a really good college. I used to say, until about a year or so ago, I said all the time to anybody who asked me, I said that I thought that I had the best academic job of anybody that I knew in the United States, because I got to teach at a Catholic college that affirmed my freedom. I got to teach Homer, Augustine, Aquinas, Milton, Rembrandt, Shakespeare, Johann Sebastian Bach, Dante, you name it. I got to teach all these wonderful things to all these cheerful young people. And I could speak my mind, not that – I don't politicize in classes at all, and I don't hide the fact that I'm Roman Catholic, but I had freedom to talk about anything. I didn't have to worry. Until about a year or so ago. We'll see how this shakes out. My colleagues who do teach in

philosophy and theology have been under the gun for a little bit longer, because they – You know, they're really out on the line, right? They've got to teach the Catholic teachings, and most of the secular faculty finds those teaching abominable.

WOODS: Now, what about the possibility – this depends of course on your tolerance level for abuse, which may be low –

ESOLEN: Yeah.

WOODS: Have you considered taking the offending articles you wrote and, in light of your experiences, developing a whole book out of it, doubling down on it?

ESOLEN: No, I haven't thought about that yet. You know, the strange thing about all of this is that I know, I know very well, that if I could have students in small groups – because when you're a big group, the big group dynamic then takes over. But I could talk to any students about anything. It's faculty that are hardened in their ideologies. Students are fine, you know? If I could have the opportunity to speak to them, then all this would become very different. But they're being encouraged by people from the outside not to talk to me. They have a Facebook page calling for boycotts of my classes. My gosh. I mean, I have wonderful things to teach these kids. All they have to come and do is ask, you know? It's right there. And it's not going to hurt me personally; it just hurts them. So people who are urging them to do this don't have their best interest in mind.

WOODS: And unfortunately, as you say, what a narrow – in fact, "narrow" is just not a good enough word here – stilted – I still can't quite come up with the word – way to look at the world, that all you can do when looking at the world or history or other cultures is to view everything through a 21st century left-liberal lens in left-liberal categories. You can't even understand other people. For all their talk about diversity, how could they understand almost any of the other cultures of the world if all they can think about is gender oppression?

ESOLEN: Yeah, well, that's one of the beauties of studying ancient cultures and medieval cultures and Renaissance cultures. You're forced out of your grid, the current political grid. And then – Well, that's the great beauty of a liberal arts education. It liberates you. Newman said this – all the great thinkers about liberal arts education in the last 150 years said the same thing – it liberates you from the narrow confines of your own place, your own time, even your own culture. And that is all to the good. And that of course is what I have to offer all kids here. I don't care who comes to my office wanting this sort of education. I welcome everybody. I'm not the one who thinks in terms of ethnicity and the other stuff. They are. The irony is just incredible.

WOODS: You have a book called, among your many books, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Western Civilization* –

ESOLEN: Right.

WOODS: – and that's of course a series of books I've contributed to. Now, in that book you teach a lot of things that, as you say, the typical college student or even in some

cases college professor has not learned. Now, when I usually encounter defense of Western civilization against leftist attacks, the defenses very often take the form of defending Enlightenment views, as if the Enlightenment is Western civilization, and then they go and smack down the left that way.

ESOLEN: Right.

WOODS: What's your approach?

ESOLEN: Well, the Enlightenment is a narrow slice of Western civilization and, in many ways, not a particularly nice one. The way we teach Western civilization, we go back all the way – some of the teams in our Western civilization program go all the way back to the Babylonians to pick up the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and then begin to compare it with very the different Book of Genesis. We take them all the way back at least to the ancient Hebrews, perhaps even beyond the ancient Hebrews.

So our students, by the time they get to the Enlightenment, our students should have a fund of knowledge about the world before so that Enlightenment pretenses will ring a little bit hollow. I mean, what's the great art that the Enlightenment produced? We got Beethoven; we got some pretty good poetry. But generally when it comes to that sort of thing, the Enlightenment is rather thing. And the thinking in the Enlightenment is rather narrow – its philosophy, in any case. And we hope the students will be able to see around it, beyond it, something other than it. It's got its limitations, but if that's what you mean by Western civilization, the Enlightenment, that's very little; that's pretty narrow.

WOODS: What's wrong then with the typical student view of the way Western civilization has gone, that, okay, we had backwards, superstitious people for 1700, 1800 years, and then all of a sudden, people threw this off and said, This is nonsense. We need science and microscopes and magnifying glasses. What's wrong with that?

ESOLEN: Well, first of all, what's wrong with that is somebody who talks that way really doesn't know what they're talking about. They have no great knowledge of the ancient world or Middle Ages or the Renaissance. They have at best a comic book set of bigotries about that – as you said, it was 1700 years of ignorance. It's crazy: all I have to do is say to people, look, I'm going to show you the greatest folk art in the history of the world – that is, folk art, it comes from the lived experience of the people; it's produced by very ordinary people, many of whom do not know how to read, yet it expresses their loves and their deepest longings as people. They are the Gothic cathedrals that are spread all over Europe during the High Middle Ages. That is folk art. So there you have the greatest folk art in the history of the world by far, I think, and arguably the most beautiful buildings that mankind has ever produced, more beautiful in the Middle Ages before the Industrial Revolution put a lot of grime on their outsides. So these places shone like jewels.

And so you're telling me that that whole era is to be dismissed? It's the era that invented the university system that you supposedly love so much. What, do you think it was invented during the time of Immanuel Kant? I could just point over and over. If these people were such dummies, how come they produced what Henry Adams said? And he wasn't even a believer. If these times were so dark, how come they produced

four-fifths of the world's greatest art? That's Henry Adams. I don't know that I would go so far as to say four-fifths, but you see the argument, right? How come they produced people whose names are Dante, Thomas Aquinas, Chaucer, Bernard of Clairvaux, and so on? I mean, the people who talk as if the West began with the Enlightenment are just ignorant.

WOODS: But unfortunately, I think that's the view that not only the left has of – Well, you have different kinds of the left. You have the left that is anti-Enlightenment in some ways; you have the left that is pro-Enlightenment, and you have the right that thinks the Enlightenment is all there is to Western civilization. And then you have like a small sliver of people who actually are interested in all of Western civilization – not to say that everything in it is defensible –

ESOLEN: Right.

WOODS: – but to say that it began in the 18th century and Voltaire is one of the great figures of all history is extremely impoverished, to put it mildly.

ESOLEN: Right, and it involved terrible people too, who wrote one half-decent book. Yeah, I will take – I wouldn't trade one paragraph of Thomas Aquinas or one canto of Dante's *Divine Comedy* for the collective works of Voltaire, a narrow and somewhat bigoted man. Yeah, the funny thing is that the people on the right who think they are conservative, whose ideas of Western civilization spring almost completely from the Enlightenment, what they actually are are classical 19th century liberals. The true conservative sees the limitations of 19th century liberalism that now goes by the name of conservatism. So they're people like Russell Kirk and all that, who want to recover the whole breadth and depth of Western civilization, which of course includes the Hebrew Scriptures, which don't come from Europe at all but come from Asia, the Near East. Yeah, that part I suppose is an in-house fight on the right, but you know, it does frustrate me too to hear people on the so-called right talking as if they were coming right out of a salon in Paris in 1780.

WOODS: And yet, the interesting thing is that when you look at Russell Kirk's political views and what he's calling for in a program for conservatives, and he even wrote a book on economics that's basically pretty laissez faire.

ESOLEN: Yeah.

WOODS: The political program he favors is not altogether – it's not a million miles away from what a 19th century liberal would favor.

ESOLEN: Yeah, I kind of blame him for that (laughing). Yeah, economics is not my strong suit, so I sit on the fence there. I know that that wouldn't please my friends at the Acton Institute. I remain unpersuaded of the 19th century liberal case, which now conservative, for laissez faire economics.

WOODS: Ah, this would have been a good conversation.

ESOLEN: Yeah, my great man, Charles Dickens, was no fan of it.

WOODS: Oh yeah, but — No, no, no, I can't start in on Charles Dickens. Yeah, no, no, no, he was just such a horrible moralizer.

ESOLEN: (laughing)

WOODS: No, no, no, I can't do this. But the thing is I have a lot of friends — well, I don't know if they would — I think of myself as their friend (laughing). I don't know how they feel about me. But for a long time, I wrote for the Traditional Catholic Press, so *Crisis* magazine we would have viewed as squishy, you know? That was how we were, right? *Crisis magazine? What's the matter?* But a lot of them — not all, but a lot of them just couldn't take — because I do basically favor laissez faire economics, but instead of this being a, Well, let's talk this out; we're all friends; let's try and talk this out, it really became like an excommunication. But at least they didn't excommunicate me the way — There were no protests; there were no bullhorns.

ESOLEN: Right, yeah.

WOODS: It was just, We'd rather that you not publish with us anymore. And if that's the way people want to disagree with each other, I'm totally all in favor of that.

ESOLEN: Yeah.

WOODS: But I know that group of people. I understand what their arguments are. And for people listening who have heard, I wrote a book called *The Church and the Market*. That was really not aimed at socialists; it really was aimed at traditional Catholics who have a different criticism. They're not critiquing the market economy for the reasons that Hillary Clinton might.

ESOLEN: Right.

WOODS: It's a much more — and I'm much more sympathetic to their arguments, which is why I wanted to take them seriously. Whereas most of the time, as you probably know, if you're right of center and you're skeptical of the market economy, you get treated like you're Bernie Sanders. And that's not what you're saying, and that's not where you're coming from.

ESOLEN: No, no, no. This should be a very cordial, friendly, in-house discussion among Catholics about just what it is that a free economy is supposed to provide, and I think the Church does teach that there ought to be very broad freedoms in the economy. You'll find that in the writings of Pope Leo XII, whom I wrote a book about. And we always have to ask the question that an ideologue would not want to ask, which is, Exactly how does this policy here play itself out in terms of the human good, in terms of the common good? And that may differ, actually, from place to place and time to time, from situation to situation. But those are questions that deal with pragmatics and less with ideology.

So though I am very sympathetic to the Acton Institute — and I hope they hire me, actually — but I've also got that distributist part of me too from Chesterton and Belloc and the others. And I always want to keep asking the question: in these particular

circumstances, what economic policies should we follow in order to produce the good society, to bring about the common good? I don't think that's a question that can be answered in the abstract; I think it has to be rooted in time and place. But that's an argument that we can have amongst ourselves.

WOODS: Yeah, and I always wanted to have that discussion. I really did, because I thought that would be fruitful and it would force me to think a little bit harder about a lot of things, and unfortunately I was just more or less expelled from that particular group. And a guy I had once written a book with wrote an entire book denouncing me. And a whole book, so in a way I was flattered that I was worth a whole book.

ESOLEN: Who was that?

WOODS: Chris Ferrara. Does that name ring a bell?

ESOLEN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

WOODS: Yeah, all right, so let's not — I'm not about personalities here on the show. I'm really about the ideas.

ESOLEN: Well, that's a shame; that's a shame. You know, a Robert Sirico and a Dale Ahlquist should be able to talk to each other. We should all be able to talk to each other about these things —

WOODS: Yeah.

ESOLEN: — because basically we all believe the same things. If we're Catholics and we're interested in politics, economics, and the common good — we basically agree on what this life is all about, where it's aimed; we have broad agreements on what actually constitutes the common good — then our question is how do you practically achieve it, how do you bring it about. And as I said, those are questions that deal with pragmatics, situations. We've got to see. But that should be a very friendly argument. What's going on here is not a friendly argument.

WOODS: No, it's not; it's not. I mean, I didn't want to be attacked by the left — I mean, at this point in my career where I'm not beholden to anybody and I don't earn a regular paycheck from anybody, it doesn't matter; it only elevates my profile. So in a way it's fine; it's no problem for me.

ESOLEN: Yeah.

WOODS: But I remember what it was like collecting a paycheck and having major newspapers denounce my *Politically Incorrect* book because it said all kinds of forbidden things. And what's interesting was just like in your case, they didn't actually correct me. They didn't say, This is a factual error Woods makes, and we're going to correct him. It was, How dare he say this? It was that kind of approach.

But then going back just for a second to the Traditional Catholic Press, the bizarre thing about this of course is, I mean, this all took place pretty much at the end of

John Paul's pontificate and during Benedict. And when Benedict became pope, I think a lot of orthodox Catholics breathed a bit of a sigh of relief, like, Okay, things are somewhat normal now in the Catholic faith. Maybe normality will be restored. But frankly – and I don't expect you to comment on this – but frankly, in the Catholic world of Pope Francis, the idea that a free market Catholic is your biggest enemy is absurd. The idea that I would be expelled – not that I'm particularly keen on getting back in. See what I mean? This is ridiculous. You can't pick your battles?

ESOLEN: Yeah.

WOODS: Yeah, so –

ESOLEN: Yeah, no, no – yeah. Gosh.

WOODS: Anyway, boy –

ESOLEN: And you know what I always say to faithful Catholics and faithful Christians of other communions? I say all the time – and this comes from my experience at *Touchstone* magazine, which is edited by Catholics and Eastern Orthodox and conservative Protestants. I say, look, you know, we've got a whole lot of enemies out there that just want to crush us. They don't want to hear anything about Christianity at all. That's the stuff out there; there's a lot of bad stuff out there and a lot of harmful stuff for humanity. Aim your guns at that. Don't aim your guns at each other. What do I care, really, if the uniform of the guy whose rifle is aimed in the same direction as my rifle is aimed, his uniform is a little bit different than mine? I'll let the captain, Jesus Christ, sort that out in the end. But he's my ally. Anybody right now who is resisting the secular imperialism of the West, that person to that extent is my ally. If he's a Christian, he believes in Christ, he's really my ally. He's my brother. But that Catholics who are orthodox should be denouncing one another because of differences of opinion on such a thing as economics, that's appalling to me. That's absolutely appalling.

WOODS: I want to make sure and link on the show notes page – this is Episode 782, so TomWoods.com/782, I will link to – I want people to be able to read the articles that you wrote that caused all this ruckus, because I want them to see – I want them to read them and then say, "That's it? That's what led people to protest?"

ESOLEN: I know.

WOODS: People have got to see this.

ESOLEN: They're very mild, and the students are hardly in them at all. They're mainly aimed at faculty members, and they ask questions about what we mean by diversity, the questions that nobody asks. So I asked them.

WOODS: Yeah, the sorts of things you're supposed to – I feel silly even saying this anymore – the sorts of questions you're supposed to ask when you're in college. You're supposed to be open-minded and – Boy, what a farce that turned out to be, unfortunately. What a shame.

ESOLEN: Well, you know, that's part of the problem when you have – I mean, we believe in the three-personed God. We are oriented towards eternity. If you lack that, then current politics takes over, I think, and it becomes of ultimate concern. It becomes a matter of life and death, when there are 50 things more important in any given day than current national politics or should be in your life. One of the cures for being really upset about the recent election is to go to church, but they don't have that available to them. That's too bad. And so when they get to college, they're not grounded enough to be able to ask questions that would change their points of view about these secondary matters like politics, because it's been elevated to a religion.

WOODS: Well, and that's just it, because it's not a secondary matter to them –

ESOLEN: No, it's not secondary.

WOODS: – so they can't compute – this is everything to them, and they have made it into a kind of a god. And before we went on, I said it would be like if Lady Gaga somehow became pope. It would totally disorient the Catholic world. No one would really be able to understand – It would be hard to make sense of your life under those circumstances. And even crazier when you make the state into your ultimate, and this result happens, of course all there can be is wailing and gnashing of teeth. And just today, I saw somebody on Facebook, a leftist, saying, Well, I've been apathetic up to now, but now I'm going to get involved. And of course, what does "get involved" mean? Wave signs, sign petitions, call your congressman. And I said there's so many other, vastly more meaningful ways to "get involved" where you would really influence and help people and change people's lives, and all you can think of is signing a darn petition.

ESOLEN: I know; I know. Yeah, you love mankind? Do the dishes.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah, exactly right.

ESOLEN: Actually do something good for somebody today. And maybe you could start cleaning up your own life, you know, because your life is probably a mess. Everybody's a sinner, after all. But when politics is your god, then you can project onto your political opponents every evil. You don't have to look in the mirror and say, You know what? I'm actually kind of a rat. I say bad things about my enemies, I tell lies, I waste my time, I click on things online that I shouldn't be looking at, are all a lot of things about me that need purifying, that I need to atone for and to confess. No, you don't have to do any of that. If politics is your god, all you have to have is the right – you have to check the right items on a list of political opinions.

WOODS: Exactly.

ESOLEN: And if you do that, then you are justified. You are righteous. And so you can treat your enemies with contempt. You can do anything you please. But then when you become disappointed by political events, what's left? It's like the world has come to an end. It's crazy.

WOODS: And of course this – and we'll close this, but this is sort of the reason that it's impossible to imagine the most – I'm talking about the sort of leftists who shout down speakers. I'm not talking about a thoughtful person who happens to be on the left.

ESOLEN: Right.

WOODS: I mean, you know, it's a dwindling breed, but we know some of those people.

ESOLEN: Right.

WOODS: My old dissertation director used to be the provost at Columbia, Alan Brinkley. I classify him that way. He knew I had different views from him, and he was an excellent dissertation director for me.

ESOLEN: Right.

WOODS: But I'm talking about the really, really hostile ones. This is why it's impossible to imagine them sitting down and really trying to have a meeting of the minds with somebody who disagrees with them, because they – because politics is their ultimate, this is where good and evil meet. This is Manichaeism, so if you are opposed to me, you are evil. You don't have a perspective. I don't sit down with Satan and say, What do you think about such and such? What do you think about our highway policy? I wouldn't even think to do that. And so likewise, that can't happen. And again, it's because this sacrilizing of the secular has taken place. You can't even meet each other on common ground and say, Let's try to talk about our differences. That can't even happen.

ESOLEN: Right. No. It can't. It's a cosmic battle. In the recent unpleasantness – that is finally over, Deo gratias, hallelujah – you wouldn't even be able to say – supposing that you believed this, but you wouldn't even be able to say to them, Look, we've got two buffoons running for president. They would rebel against that. *What do you mean?*, you know? You would offend them by shrugging and taking politics lightly. Now, of course it can't be taken *that* lightly either; it does have consequences for human life, for life in the United States. But in a certain sense it's healthy to take it lightly, because there are infinitely more important things.

So if you laugh at their political preoccupations, they get very angry. But they need to hear that laughter. I mean, come on. You've got somebody hyperventilating because the election went in the opposite way from what he wanted? Is that really a sign of somebody who's healthy? Isn't that ipso facto a sign of somebody who's got his priorities mixed up? They don't see it. My gosh, it's holy water and all the sacraments put together for them.

WOODS: Well, everybody, I want you to go to the show notes page for this episode, TomWoods.com/782, read the articles we've been talking about, and while you're at it, although Tony has a lot of books, pick up his translation of *The Divine Comedy*, because that's a way – could there be a more delicious rebuke of the present American political system than to withdraw and simply read Dante? Go and do that,

and read it with a beautiful translation that you will love and you'll learn a tremendous amount from.

Well, best of luck, Tony. I hope everything turns out well. You deserve the best possible resolution, and I hope that comes. And think about that YouTube video.

ESOLEN: Thank you, Tom. I think that is a great idea. That is a great idea. People have not gotten it into their heads – I guess I haven't gotten it into my head – right now we've got ways of getting ideas out there.

WOODS: We do indeed. See, when you're like me and you're a freelancer for a living, you learn that a long time ago. If I don't use my ways, I've got nothing. So glad to help. All right, thanks again, Tony.

ESOLEN: Thanks, Tom.