



Episode 616: Pope Francis and the State of the Catholic Church: The Inside Scoop

Guest: Roger McCaffrey

WOODS: You know, I've talked to your nephew on this show, Matt McCaffrey; I have talked to –

MCCAFFREY: I have listened to him on this very show.

WOODS: Indeed. I've talked to his wife, Carmen.

MCCAFFREY: And I've listened to her on your show. The only question I have is which regime are they going to end up being economists for? The British one or when we get a president like Rand Paul?

WOODS: (laughing) I guess we're just going to have to see. I'm not sure how welcome they'd be in any regime, which goes to show they're doing good work. All right, I want to talk to you about a subject that I've gotten a lot of requests about from people who, some of them are Catholics who are just, you know, bewildered, and others are non-Catholic who are interested and also bewildered about –

MCCAFFREY: Well, good, because I'm bewildered.

WOODS: (laughing) Okay, that's the word of the day. All right – basically just about the Catholic Church, what's going on now, Pope Francis, just try to make sense of it all. So I would like to actually start off with a couple of concepts here, again bearing in mind that we're going to have an audience whose knowledge level is going to be very varied but whose interest level will be quite high. So where I want to start is either with the concept of a right-wing liberal, because I want people to understand, they think in the Church we have liberals and conservatives, and that's not really the right way to think about it, because really by the standards of Cardinal Ottaviani in the '60s, there are no conservatives in that sense. Everybody's one stripe or another of a liberal. But another way we can start off is by talking about Pope Benedict XVI and then contrasting him with Pope Francis. I'm going to actually defer to you. How do you think we should kick this baby off?

MCCAFFREY: Well, I mean, Francis – that is, Bergoglio – is an Argentinian leftist, and Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, was a German conservative. They both kind of embraced politically the post-war model of democracy worship, but they have different takes on

theology. But on the other hand, they both embraced the Second Vatican Council, and Benedict was a peritus or an expert at the Council. But he spent the rest of his life trying to explain away problems presented by Vatican II, whereas Bergoglio, Pope Francis, is re-embracing some of the very things that poor Ratzinger was trying to deal with.

WOODS: Yeah.

MCCAFFREY: So it's a total mess. Not it's a total mess, and it doesn't look like it's going to clear up any time soon if Francis gets his way with Church personnel, and that is the key to his pontificate, not just his off-the-cuff blurtings, which tend to be left-wing, but the personnel he's selecting methodically and under the radar. So that's a thing that – and by the way, Church politics is more my thing than this various doctrinal explications, which, by the way, are few and far between, because he's not interested in doctrine, Pope Francis.

WOODS: Yeah, it's very interesting. I mean, he seems impatient with people who are interested in these things, which would be, of course, all of his predecessors and, like, the whole Catholic population (laughing). So it is – with him, you know, he'll give these interviews, and he'll say these things that you just think are crazy, like, why would you – Martin Luther himself would not want the pope to be present for a commemoration of the Protestant Reformation. Luther wouldn't want him there.

MCCAFFREY: (laughing) Right.

WOODS: And yet Francis can't wait for this to happen. I mean, there's something very, very odd about this.

MCCAFFREY: Very odd, yeah, and you're not alone in saying so, so rest assured that many, many leading churchmen privately and, you know, men at the very top in the College of Cardinals, voting cardinals are up in arms about not just his ecumenical gestures – and I'm excluding the Russian Orthodox gesture, which I think is very important, actually. He's not all bad. He's not screwing up 100% of the time. And this week, Tom, he's not screwing up at all, because he's on retreat.

WOODS: (laughing) Well, so that's something.

MCCAFFREY: I want to be positive.

WOODS: Yeah, I appreciate that. That's what I associate with the McCaffrey name. Talk to me about some of the personnel decisions that are being made that nobody really knows about, that only people who are really close Vatican observers would know about.

MCCAFFREY: Exactly.

WOODS: I mean, for example, Cardinal Sarah, isn't he at Worship? He's pretty good, isn't he?

MCCAFFREY: Yeah, and he's the one man and he was a surprise pick by Pope Francis to head the congregation which oversees the sacraments and the Mass. The problem is that he's deemphasizing it. However, you know, Sarah was a good pick, but you know, he's fired Cardinal Burke, who's rightly a hero for conservative Catholics. He's downplaying the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which was Ratzinger's old dicastery – Benedict XVI, that is – and most of his bishop selections, like the two in Italy he just made, these are disastrous. Let's just look at it politically. You don't need to know their names – I've forgotten their names. They're both leftists. They both emphasize what we used to call the social gospel. Who can be opposed to being kind to the poor? I never thought I was unkind to the poor. But you know, they're men who disturb the Italian hierarchy.

So those are two examples. One has been appointed Archbishop of Bologna. He'll get a red hat. He'll be voting in the next conclave. The other's been appointed Archbishop of Naples. He'll get a red hat. He'll be voting in the conclave. Just take it from me, they're left wing. You got Cupich in Chicago. He's a leftist. And on and on. And there's a new Apostolic Nuncio in Washington. He's the man who helps the pope pick all 190 American bishops eventually. There are 190 diocese in the U.S. Those guys are going to be predominantly left wing. It's back to the 1970s and early '80s with this personnel roster. And the thing is, he's only been pope for three years.

WOODS: And you know, in a way Vatican II is too conservative for him. If you actually look at the documents – and believe me, you know that I know about all the loopholes and all the, as Michael Davies used to call them, the time bombs in the text of the Council documents. Nevertheless, I look at these documents and I think Francis would never write any of these. These are still too traditional for him.

MCCAFFREY: Yeah.

WOODS: And you know, when he says crazy things that everybody knows are crazy things, everybody has gotten into this habit that they got into under John Paul II, who is falsely portrayed as a conservative to the world – although I would take him at this point. Believe me. He would do and say very odd things – odd if you thought he was a conservative, which he wasn't.

MCCAFFREY: Right, right.

WOODS: But the conservative Catholics, so-called, would explain them away and there'd always be an explanation. Oh, he didn't really mean what he obviously did mean, and he meant this. Well, so now they're still trying to do this with Francis, but he's saying so many crazy things in such a short amount of time, nobody can keep up with him.

MCCAFFREY: (laughing) Right. Well, and so the posture of one of the leading conservative Catholics in the U.S. regarding Pope Francis – and this is a direct quote – is, "Shut up and pray." This was told to me over brunch a few months ago (laughing). I think she had the wrong guy, not that I was interested in digging deep with her into his elocutions. And by the way, he doesn't mention Vatican II that much, so that's kind of a breath of fresh air. I was getting tired of those clichés from the previous two popes. But I think you're exactly right. He doesn't find the documents that conducive to what he's trying to do, which is to work a political revolution. At the very least, he's trying to work – he's picking up where Paul VI, who was a leftist politically for his time, he's picking up where Paul left off, hence the embrace of the climate change mantra and, by the way, the criticism of Donald Trump, for heaven's sake, and the embrace of Obama.

WOODS: Yeah.

MCCAFFREY: So you know, this is part and parcel of what Pope Francis sees as being a Catholic, and that's why *The Times* loves him; that's why Obama loves him; that's why Eleanor Clift looks like she – if you watch *The McLaughlin Group*, I keep expecting her to announce her conversion.

WOODS: (laughing) Yeah, I know. Except Francis would not really be sure how he'd feel about that. I mean, maybe he would (laughing) –

MCCAFFREY: Yeah, he probably – (laughing) exactly, tell her not to convert. You know, help us with Buchanan first.

WOODS: (laughing) Yeah. It is a bizarre, totally bizarre situation. Would you mind just taking a minute, though – I have a very, very good friend, who, we were driving around one day, and he's not a Catholic and he said, you know, I hear Catholics talk – I hear Judge Napolitano talk about Vatican II and he'll call himself tongue in cheek a pre-Vatican II Catholic. And he said, you know, I'm a reasonably informed person, but honest to goodness, I don't even know what that means. So just tell me, what was the gist of Vatican II?

MCCAFFREY: Well, it depends on who you talk to, but I'll tell you that at the time –

WOODS: And the time, we're talking about Ecumenical Council of the Church that met from '62 to '65.

MCCAFFREY: Right, but it was convoked by the man who died before it started, which – he didn't die before it started, but he died –

WOODS: Early on.

MCCAFFREY: – more or less at the beginning, John XXIII. And as he said, to throw open the windows – this rhetoric he uses, it reminds you of Francis – throw open the windows, air things out. He also chided in his opening remarks to the Council, Pope

John XXIII, you know, old stodgy Catholics who were "too negative" and "too pessimistic" – these were his words about the Church's posture and the way the Church dealt with the modern world. And within 10 years, the Church had lost about 10,000 priests, English-speaking priests alone, and within 15 years, make that 15,000. So I think he screwed up too.

But anyway, the pre-Vatican II Catholic is nothing more than someone who likes to worship at the Latin Mass and probably studied doctrine out of the Baltimore Catechism, and I might add, believes that the events of the gospel took place in space and time. In other words, they're real, not mythological. So that's a summary of what a pre-Vatican II Catholic is. And a post-Vatican II Catholic, Francis is the epitome of one. Tells you to relax about these things. As long as your orientation is basically correct and basically Christian, relax about doctrine, don't get hung up on it, that's not going to convert anyone. In the meantime, you and I each probably know 50 people who have converted by reading their way into the Church, that is to say reading doctrinal commentary, reading Scripture, reading the Catechism.

WOODS: Now, okay, so how is it possible then – I mean, Benedict, at least by post-Conciliar standards, was certainly conservative and he was the most conservative pope we've had since Pius XII.

MCCAFFREY: Right, he had second thought.

WOODS: Yeah, but yet somehow Bergoglio gets elected. How?

MCCAFFREY: Well, it's because Ratzinger and indeed Wojtyła, Francis' predecessors, were both kind of split. They were sort of half – they were both post-war European liberals, and that's, you know, you could argue not all bad. Certainly they had a flexible view of how you approach Catholic tradition. So for example, Ratzinger was a Balthasarian. Von Balthasar definitely took a new approach to Catholic tradition. Wojtyła was a phenomenologist or what they now call personalist. Don't get me going on that, because I'm just about out of definitions on those two items, and they're a total bore, but they have nothing to do with Catholic tradition, those points of view. But both men were moral conservatives. They were appalled by the new morality. Francis seems to argue that we really have to deal with advocates of the new morality and even exemplars of the new morality, so he is different from his predecessors, and yet he was appointed by Wojtyła and many men like him. That's exactly how he got elected.

So what we now have net is we've got a College of Cardinals, I would say about a third of them are avidly pro-Francis. I mean, this captures the political situation in the Church. A third of them are avidly pro-Francis. He's picked 26% of the College of Cardinals, voting cardinals. Another third are up in arms about him. They know there was a mistake made. And another third are probably neutral. So that's the situation right now politically in the Church. In another three months he's probably going to pick 20 more voting cardinals, and then it's Francis' church and it's Katy bar the door.

WOODS: Let me just clarify for listeners. When you say Wojtyła you're referring to John Paul II.

MCCAFFREY: Yeah, John Paul, yeah.

WOODS: And the thing is that, see, John Paul would appoint people that would just make us pull our hear out, and —

MCCAFFREY: Most of the time.

WOODS: Yeah, most of the time. Now, he would, from time to time a decent person passed through, whereas somebody like Francis would never appoint somebody — almost never — that you and I wouldn't be horrified by, so that when —

MCCAFFREY: Yeah, he would never knowingly appoint a solid man to an important position.

WOODS: Yeah, so I mean, when you're somebody like that with a leftist agenda, you don't have this view that, well, you know, I'll throw a scrap to everybody. It's always ruthless and single-minded, and that's what I see in Francis.

MCCAFFREY: That's exactly right. I'm very impressed by his use of power, but I have to say I knew it was coming. It was quite obvious, the way he behaved in Argentina and also pretty obvious I think when he accepted everybody's resignation, which Benedict XVI did not do. You know, you had a different guy in there. And then when you fire Cardinal Burke, and remember, he not only fired him as in effect the Chief Justice of the Church's court; he fired him from a couple of congregations, one of which was the Congregation for Bishops, and replaced him with a center-left type. And that's been replicated a hundred times by Pope Francis. That's the kind of thing most people don't see. They see his blurtings from the airplane press conferences. They don't understand that those blurtings are personified in his picks to run the Church.

WOODS: Well, let me say something about Cardinal Burke, who was in — I remember him back when he was in La Crosse, Wisconsin; I think that was his diocese, and then he became kind of a bright light for some time and then when he was basically demoted because now he's running — what is it, the Knights of Malta?

MCCAFFREY: He's not even running them; he's just an advisor.

WOODS: Okay, so he's just been knocked out completely. And I remember, again, there were so-called conservative Catholic, who, their view is the pope theoretically can make a mistake, yes, but the popes who make mistakes, those are all previous mistakes. There's never a current pope, even though all current popes become previous popes, right? There are no mistakes at the time. So they all had to convince themselves that, really, if you look at it the right way, this is kind of a promotion, because it gives Cardinal Burke a lot of extra spare time. I'm not kidding you. I heard

people say that. This is like straight out of the Soviet Union, that type of brainwashing.

MCCAFFREY: I can't — I mean, you really can't have a conversation with people who cling to fable. I mean, this is not Catholicism. First of all, why are we afraid of the truth? Why can't we say it when Francis and ourselves disagree?

WOODS: Yeah. There's nothing that says you can't do that, nothing whatsoever.

MCCAFFREY: I mean, it's just so — it's childish. It's really childish, so I've learned to kind of — because I know such folks too, although fewer and fewer, I have to say.

WOODS: Yeah, thankfully — Francis is waking some of the up, actually.

MCCAFFREY: He's really dividing. He talks about building bridges not walls, but man, that's a long bridge he's building to me.

WOODS: (laughing) Yeah, I know it. Exactly.

MCCAFFREY: It's going to take him a very, very long time to cross that bridge.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, and it's rickety and swinging and you have to swing on a vine to get through some of it (laughing).

MCCAFFREY: Oh my lord, but on the other hand, you know, there are some — the clock strikes twelve twice a day, and sometimes he does or says something that's I think valuable, and it's fascinating to watch him not use his power on the SSPX priests, these traditionalists who have been around now for 45, almost — yeah, I guess 50 years. And he's basically regularized this group. And that's another thing that folks I don't think realize. He has regularized this group through the back door.

WOODS: Yeah, this is the Society of St. Pius X of, again for people who don't know this, they are traditionalists, and you know, Roger and I have our disagreements with them on some things, but by and large what you're dealing with here are people who just want to worship and live like Catholics, and that's the one thing that can't be tolerated. So it really is — it's just like traditional political correctness, where you can tolerate anything that's leftist, but anything that's traditional needs to be ridiculed, stamped out, smeared. So it is interesting that he's been somewhat favorable toward them. It surprises me very much, actually.

MCCAFFREY: Yeah, me too, although again, the day he was elected I spoke to a Latin American priest. In fact, he's basically half-Argentinian, as it were, and he said to me, you know, nobody's talking about this, but when he was running Buenos Aires, he certified the Society of Pius X as a Catholic entity. So they could have been thrown out of the country were it not for Bergoglio, so he's always had that odd but real element of flexibility. So who knows, Tom? But I can tell you that when a pope singles them out

as he did in this document on the Year of Mercy, explicitly by name and says their priests can hear confessions, that's regularizing a religious community.

WOODS: Plus, aren't we hearing a lot of rumors about some kind of announcement or something that's coming around the corner? We've been hearing this for decades.

MCCAFFREY: Correct, so you know – but in this case, he is independent enough, this pope, to just simply announce tomorrow that he considers them regularized. After all, he's done that. In effect that's exactly what he's done by giving them faculties to hear confessions, if you get my drift.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah.

MCCAFFREY: So I think probably he'll regularize them explicitly and call it regularization. So anyway, that's interesting, and you can't really fault him for trying to clean up the Vatican bank. What I fault him for on that front is that it's nobody's damn business what the books of the Vatican bank look like. Why should a pope be beholden to the European Union?

WOODS: I agree with you on that.

MCCAFFREY: The Vatican's a separate state, so you know, I don't see why the Holy Father has to genuflect to the UN or the European Union, both of which are exactly what he's doing, and they're going to rue the day that they opened the Vatican's books to anybody and basically are apologizing for the condition of those books. It doesn't make sense, and it conveys that you feel weak and secular powers can do much more to you.

WOODS: Let's see, what else can we say? Let's say – why not? Let's say a little something about liturgy. You and I have an abiding interest in this subject.

MCCAFFREY: Yeah, well, this is another interesting thing about Pope Francis, and that is that he's retained the man that we all used to call the good Moroney. There are two Moroney involved in the Catholic Mass debate, and one of them is as bad as the good one is good. But the good Moroney was brought to the Vatican by Pope Benedict, and he's the man who appears in every other photo of the pope. He's what you might jokingly call, but he's really a fine man, the umbrella holder. He never changes his expression. He's always beside the pope. But he's really an astute liturgist, who, in a different pontificate, would be made a cardinal. But Bergoglio's kept him, and he could have fired him immediately. So when you mention liturgy, that's the kind of thing that we need to keep in mind about Pope Francis. I can't always explain him; I just know a political leftist when I see one.

WOODS: But yet, when you hear his own opinions on liturgy and if the subject of the old liturgy comes up – which he always brings up. There are no cardinals in the world who are raising this issue with him; he brings it up. It's always to be disparaging or to joke about people who like the old liturgy, you know, which was – for people who

don't know, the Catholic Mass was modified in '69 and '70 to give you pretty much what you see today, and there are a lot of people, like Judge Napolitano, who prefer to worship in the old style, and Benedict said you had a perfectly good reason for that. There's nothing wrong with this. I mean, basically what Benedict said in his letter in 2007 is what is the matter with you people in the episcopacy here? This is the most sacred thing – we used to present this as the most sacred thing in the world, and now when people still long for it you're condemning them for being, you know, maybe mental cases or something. And that kind of is Francis' view that, well, I guess it must be just some weird fashion that I can't understand. So he goes out of his way to try to understand, so-called, every leftist in the world, but he can't understand traditionalists in his own church.

MCCAFFREY: Exactly. And he grew up with them, because we were all traditionalists before 1962, in terms of worship, and I doubt he was quoting bad theology when he was a seminarian.

WOODS: How about liberation theology? Where does he stand regarding that?

MCCAFFREY: Well, he's re-embraced a couple of liberation theologians who were in bad odor under Wojtyła, under John Paul II and under Benedict XVI, so again, actions speak louder than words. He denies he's a Marxist.

WOODS: But he has many good friends who are Marxists.

MCCAFFREY: Right, and after all, as he says, I can understand their point of view. Well, that's interesting.

WOODS: (laughing) I know. Or they stole our ideas. Not really, actually.

MCCAFFREY: (laughing) Yeah, whereas Wojtyła, John Paul, always made it a point, usually verbosely, to differentiate between Marxism and the social teachings of the Church. But this guy, you know, is interested in no such distinctions really, although he denies he's a Marxist. Have you noticed him on the Trump issue, and should we even talk about that?

WOODS: Eh, I mean, why not? If I still have listeners who haven't deserted me over the Trump issue (laughing) –

MCCAFFREY: I mean, you know, he is what he is. The point is that to the extent that he speaks the truth, leading Catholics don't like him.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah, that's true. Certainly the neoconservative Catholics, because they're all the same. I'm sure they're all Rubio people. Like, they can't even be Cruz people. I can at least sort of understand that.

MCCAFFREY: Right, right. I mean, the pope has an allergy to anyone who's in any sense a conservative, obviously has an allergy to the marketplace.

WOODS: Yeah.

MCCAFFREY: And that's what's so noticeable about him, that every left-wing cliché he makes his own. The only area where — the only issue he so far has stayed neutral on is dolphins, Tom.

WOODS: (laughing) That's right. Because I think, I'm pretty sure he's against cancer, right? Like John Paul II, he was against cancer?

MCCAFFREY: Right, yes.

WOODS: He's in favor of sports, I think. He wants people to play soccer.

MCCAFFREY: Yeah, in fact, I think he spoke to the Vatican. There was a big, big meeting on sports last year, and I'm sure he delivered an address to them, so there you go.

WOODS: Yeah.

MCCAFFREY: He's probably against tobacco, but no encyclical yet on tobacco.

WOODS: We'll wait and see. By the way, I got an email from somebody who said I was being too hard on Francis in an episode I did, because he said, you know, you're misreading him. He's a capitalist. He's favoring the market. And I just wrote back and said, you know, for years and years I tried to be nice to people like you, but you're delusional. Like, this is ridiculous. I mean, people are laughing at you for trying to force his words into that mold. He is not a capitalist. Or they try to claim he's just against crony capitalism. Yeah, that's like saying Bernie Sanders is just against crony capitalism. I'm sure he is against that, but he's also against capitalism capitalism, given every word that comes out of his mouth.

MCCAFFREY: It's too silly to even engage such folks —

WOODS: Yeah.

MCCAFFREY: — and I'll tell you that privately conservative Catholics, however you want to describe them — and I'm including priests and prelates — are really upset, deeply disturbed by the thrust of the pontificate and by a dozen specific statements. So privately, the people who are mum publicly are really upset. I mean, I talk to charismatics; I talk to traditionalists; I talk to major church figures whom I would never quote, but believe me, Tom; they're up in arms. And if there were a conclave tomorrow, if the Holy Father died, there would be a reaction, and you'd get probably a guy well to his right in every sense. So I think that illustrates my point best.

WOODS: Yeah, see now if I were one of the conservatives in the College of Cardinals, and again a conservative relatively speaking, I would be — but the thing is I think you would get excommunicated for this, so I have to be careful. But I would be slightly

wanting to campaign or talk to my other conservatives and say, look, this time we cannot be divided. We've got to have one candidate. Now, maybe he doesn't have to say who that candidate is, because I think you're not allowed to do that, but can the conservatives talk to each other and say, whenever we get in there we have to just put personalities aside and settle in on one candidate? Are they allowed to do that/

MCCAFFREY: Absolutely they are, yes. And they do. I mean, you know, there's phraseology I suppose that they use, but since I've talked to one cardinal – and no, it's not an American, so people shouldn't try to guess, because I've talked to a bunch over the years. One of them told me who he was going to vote for (laughing).

WOODS: (laughing) Oh, okay.

MCCAFFREY: You know, it wasn't right before a conclave, but yeah, they're talking right now. Are you kidding me? They are up in arms. Even buffoons like Timothy Dolan of New York, Cardinal Dolan, are privately – and he hasn't said anything to me, so I'm just –

WOODS: Yeah.

MCCAFFREY: I'm inferring from things I've heard from others and things that he's said. I mean, you know, even he's upset.

WOODS: Okay, all right. Well –

MCCAFFREY: How's that for a good, cheerful ending?

WOODS: It actually is a cheerful ending. It actually makes me feel I'm not completely crazy (laughing).

MCCAFFREY: No, no, no, by no means. People who rush to the defense of Francis and try to explain away his more radical remarks are really blowing in the wind now. There aren't too many left.

WOODS: Yeah.

MCCAFFREY: From our point of view, you know?

WOODS: I remember the way you put it when people would explain away why John Paul II would do oddball things. You said, these people attribute to him thoughts he does not have –

MCCAFFREY: (laughing) Yeah.

WOODS: – in order to explain away his behavior.

MCCAFFREY: Exactly. Exactly, and well, I couldn't have put it better myself (laughing).

WOODS: (laughing) Yeah.

MCCAFFREY: But also, I like to call them the "paragraph 89" people –

WOODS: (laughing)

MCCAFFREY: – because they always, you know, there's always some sentence in a papal document, no matter how upsetting. And it's always deep in the document, and it vindicates their point of view in their eyes.

WOODS: And then what they neglect to mention is that that entire paragraph is totally vitiated in paragraph 137.

MCCAFFREY: Yeah, and probably in the first 80 paragraphs.

WOODS: (laughing) Yeah.

MCCAFFREY: You know, I mean, we just have to be honest. The faith has survived bad popes.

WOODS: That's right; that's right. And in other words, when you convert to Catholicism, the point is you do not have to get a lobotomy. You can actually observe what your senses are telling you and draw conclusions.

MCCAFFREY: Precisely. And one other thing: this is a great line from, it was President Kennedy to Senator Eugene McCarthy, and McCarthy quoted it to Pat Buchanan. They were talking about Vatican II, Kennedy was very interested that it was coming, you know, when it had been convoked. And he knew Gene McCarthy was a so-called Catholic intellectual, and he said to McCarthy – he was asking him, why, you know, and McCarthy didn't give him a good explanation, and JFK said to Senator McCarthy, "When things are right in the party, you don't call a convention."

WOODS: Yeah.

MCCAFFREY: So I mean, you can take that two ways, and both of them are instructive. So my point is, Church politics plays a huge role in trying to understand what popes do – modern popes, because they're on the tube all the time, and they're not infallible. So Church politics, you have to bring that prism into this to understand Pope Francis.

WOODS: Now, when you say they're not infallible, I'm going to get a lot of the angry emails, so just clarify that for people who aren't getting you.

MCCAFFREY: I mean, their charisma, they so rarely invoke infallibility, so they can only be infallible on specific matters of faith and morals, which they define, and it's even

understood in the Church that they have to invoke their infallibility in order for it to be understood as an ex cathedra statement, the statement that's binding on us all. But man, when you're talking about Donald Trump and the Trump wall, you are no more infallible than my pet hamster.

WOODS: (laughing) Although I have to say, your pet hamster's had some insights over the years.

MCCAFFREY: Well, he builds walls, you know?

WOODS: (laughing) All right, listen. I'd like to have you on sooner, but obviously when there is a conclave you're my go-to guy. Remember years ago when we worked on *Latin Mass* magazine, and you did, the cover story was "African Pope?", and I think we had Cardinal — I don't know if it was Gantin or —

MCCAFFREY: Yeah, Gantin.

WOODS: Yeah, one of the African cardinals, we put on the cover. So okay, oh wow, is there going to be an African pope? And you open up to your article, and the whole article is why there would not be an African pope.

MCCAFFREY: Well, the time has come in I think the next conclave, there'll be — an African will be a finalist, I'll put it that way.

WOODS: And yet it seems like certainly the progressives would find it hard — it's bizarre that we even have to talk this way about the College of Cardinals, but it seems like they'd have a hard time finding a suitable African candidate, because all the Africans can't stand them.

MCCAFFREY: I don't entirely agree —

WOODS: Oh, tell me, okay.

MCCAFFREY: Yeah, well, there's one who is now passes for a centrist. I would have always considered him a center-left, Cardinal Napier of South Africa. And you know, Cardinal Sara, of course, and he's the man we'd love to see elected, but he won't be elected, Tom. He's much too frank and much too blunt, and he's the author of the famous line, which we'll make famous if it isn't already: "Doctrine is Christ." I mean, you couldn't clash more directly with Pope Francis than to say that.

WOODS: But on the other hand, I mean, talk about blunt. Ratzinger was extremely blunt in his Lenten homilies, and then he got elected.

MCCAFFREY: Right, true, but the composition of the College has already been radically changed by Pope Francis. He's picked 26% of the voting cardinals, and by June that will be more like 35 to 40%. But anyway, there are a couple of liberal — there's

one liberal African cardinal, Turkson. He's probably not going to be elected, but he could be. So they're not one voice down there.

WOODS: Okay, I didn't realize – because you always read these news stories about how – like for instance, Cardinal Kasper made a disparaging reference to the African bishops just because they're stupid and backward and superstitious, basically, was more or less what he was – and that's why they don't understand my brilliant theology.

MCCAFFREY: (laughing)

WOODS: Yeah, I'm sure that's the explanation, right?

MCCAFFREY: Yeah, there's tension, but there are plenty of African church liberals. Many of them were trained in Rome, and Rome's pontifical universities are not – most of them are not solid.

WOODS: You know, I guess it's got to be the case of the worst import from the West into Africa has been liberalism. I mean, their political leaders go and get educated in the West, and then they came back after decolonization and tried to impose socialism on these poor people. I mean, you know what? Don't send anybody anywhere, you know? Be educated in Africa. Be happy with what you have, because it could be a lot worse. You could be educated in the West.

MCCAFFREY: Absolutely. One cardinal, I forget which one, African cardinal, told his fellow Africans that they have an obligation not to emigrate to western Europe. He said they need to stay here. So there is that element in the African church, that they're fiercely – well, they have a different kind of social outlook.

WOODS: Yeah.

MCCAFFREY: It's going to be interesting, but if we get another batch of Bergoglio-Francis cardinals, it's going to be very tough to see anybody – to elect anyone really good.

WOODS: Well, we'll have to leave it there. Roger McCaffrey, I appreciate the time. It was great fun talking to you. We'll have to do it again.

MCCAFFREY: Any time, Tom. Thanks.