

A Modern Church

By Allen Dvorak

The last few weeks have been quite interesting. Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) announced his resignation as pope after serving in that role for nearly eight years. The last pope to resign (typically they serve until death) was 600 years ago.

The normal hiatus between popes was shortened; the papal conclave began less than two weeks after Benedict's final day as pope. As might be expected, there was much speculation concerning his successor. Benedict is recognized as a "conservative" among Catholic theologians. Would his successor also be a conservative? Would the next pope come from the United States or Canada?

Then the white smoke that indicates the College of Cardinals has chosen a pope was seen and the name of the new pope was announced. Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio wasn't one of the names mentioned in the media as a "frontrunner" in the balloting for pope. An archbishop from Argentina, Bergoglio is likewise a conservative (from a Catholic viewpoint!) in his religious convictions. Almost immediately there were those who expressed the hope that the new pope (who adopted the name Francis) would "bring the Catholic Church into the 21st century." In their view, Pope Francis could make the Roman Catholic Church relevant again by leading it in the direction that western society has taken with regard to social and moral issues. The Catholic Church has opposed abortion, women in the priesthood and homosexuality.

The pressure being brought against the Roman Catholic Church to conform to current social values is the result of postmodernism, the view that truth is relative rather than absolute. Postmodernism accepts the premise that truth is subjective, not objective. As such, moral truth can change over time; what was morally wrong in the past may, in time, become morally acceptable.

Many churches have accepted postmodernism to some extent. Some denominations, for example, who taught against divorce in decades past now accept divorced individuals into their fellowship with little or no question. Western society is slowly being trained by various forces to accept homosexuality as a morally acceptable lifestyle. As public perception of homosexuality has changed, so has the teaching of some churches. Whereas homosexual practices were roundly condemned as sinful by these groups in the past, they have become more and more "accepting" of those who openly practice homosexuality. Some churches even welcome homosexuals as religious leaders in their local congregations.

Of course, God's Word is truth (John 17:17) and it does not change. God's law regarding divorce and remarriage remains the same today as it was in the days of the beginning of the gospel. Homosexual practices were condemned by the apostle Paul and they continue to be immoral today (Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

With that historical context, it is understandable that many people would expect the Roman Catholic Church to follow suit and drop their objections to abortion, homosexuality, divorce, etc. Although it is impossible for us to know the future, it would appear that Pope Francis will not gratify their desire.