

Brexit (Part Two): Exposing The Divide

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As is common for major news events, we find no shortage of “experts” offering their in-depth analysis and opinion about the United Kingdom’s (UK) Brexit vote. Conflicting arguments and forecasts seeking to define and characterize what has happened and what will happen as a result of the groundbreaking referendum abound from all angles and political persuasions. While agreement is rare among the punditry, we can postulate on one common and dominant theme: division.

In fact, to the casual observer, it would appear that consensus is impossible. The world, it seems, is simply dividing against itself—demographic by demographic—and Brexit provides us the proof.

That is to say, those counted among the rich versus poor, male versus female, conservative versus liberal, old versus young, atheist versus believer, hetero versus homo, capitalist versus socialist, or nationalist versus globalist all find themselves further divided and subdivided into an endless number of discordant interest groups, each saying something about Brexit and its impact on worldwide political and socioeconomic trends. This is especially the case in the context of the greater debate between the old world order versus the new.

But first, let us briefly look at what can be agreed on—the easily observable and measurable after-effects.

UK Prime Minister David Cameron has resigned and been replaced by fellow Conservative party member, Theresa May, who has pledged to follow the mandate to lead the country back to fully independent statehood.

The much-anticipated economic disaster never materialized, though world markets were troubled for the two days immediately following the vote. However, by the third business day, the losses began to reverse and most markets are up well beyond where they had been prior to the referendum. The British pound fell and remains down against most other currencies, but many believe the devaluation was inevitable, regardless of the vote. According to government figures, unemployment in the UK has remained stable, actually dropping a small fraction.

Of greater concern, both existential and functional, is the immediate future of the European Union (EU). No less than eight of the remaining 27 countries are considering similar exit referendums, including such stalwarts as France and Italy. Concurrently, Germany is leading a movement to strengthen the EU with calls for greater central power and even for the establishment of a bona fide military force. But further exposing the growing divide, German Chancellor Angela Merkel is under enormous political pressure at home to soften her extreme pro-immigration stance, while the rest of Europe is forced to ponder the frightening ramifications of a strong military led by Germany. Merkel and the EU find their political futures entwined and very much in doubt.

The United States, as de facto head of NATO and a significant trading partner of the UK and the EU, is watching closely, injecting its influence where it can. Nothing less than the future of the international balance of power—economically and militarily—is at stake, especially now that Russia and China are aggressively challenging the hegemony of the West’s traditional power structures.

Meanwhile, the same observers who considered the Brexit vote as a proxy pitting the old world order versus the new, also see the Trump-Clinton U.S. presidential contest in a similar light. Trump has referred to himself as “Mr. Brexit,” while calling for the dismantling of NATO and the renegotiation of long-standing economic treaties, while Clinton was in the “remain” camp while calling for maintaining the status quo and a strengthened NATO alliance.

British politician and journalist, David Howell, opined recently that much of the analysis of the Brexit divide was superficial, that the UK would have preferred to remain in a more relaxed Europe—a less authoritative but modernized EU—but that was never a choice. Rather than the demographic divides, he believes what was really at play is the greater debate between a world of universal connectivity of all peoples and nations—made possible by the digital revolution—and those longing for more personal sovereignty, privacy, and even separation. In his article, “Just how divided is Britain?” he explains:

A kind of schizophrenia is entering the political debate in many countries, weakening governments and bombarding authorities with contradictory demands for more and less control at the same time, filling minds with unease. . . . So this is the real division—between a fractured world and togetherness, between fragmenting disruption and unifying stability, between wanting to break away and wanting to belong, between the pull of global reality and the instinct to turn inward to smaller communities.

Looking ahead to the near term, we can likely expect a growing divide between the combatants of the old and the new world orders as long as Satan, who desires man’s destruction, is allowed to rule over the earth. He is, after all, only too aware of our Savior’s words from Luke 11:17 (ESV), “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.”