

BREXIT; AND NOW?

Today we have woken up to a different United Kingdom, a different Europe; indeed, a different World. For the supporters of Brexit, there is nervous hope for an independent future; for ‘Remain’ voters all is doom and destined to crumble. Common to all, both in the United Kingdom and on the Continent, is a growing sense of disorientation and a divided society.

What lies at the root of this historic event? Underlying both the UK referendum campaigns and recent socio-political developments in the West is the desire for security, stability and independence that is inherent to man’s nature. But this desire might seem to clash with the presence of other people appearing to challenge our ideas, plans, and autonomy – ultimately our whole being.

Looking at this apparent clash, what is the solution?

The Leave campaign argued this desire could best be pursued by cutting the link with the ‘other’, the ‘different’, the ‘uncontrollable’ – with those who do not understand who ‘I really am’. On the other hand, the Remain campaign perceived ‘the other’ as someone who should be tolerated primarily because of economic profit. Neither campaign perceived this ‘otherness’, those different from me, as inherent good; as a value; indeed, as a key to our desire. It is in fact not by chance that the migration crisis played a pivotal role in turning the public opinion towards an exit from the EU.

Yet the challenge of ‘otherness’ remains, even after the Brexit vote. Indeed, as Rowan Williams recently said at the London Encounter, the idea that one can be independent or autonomous is a myth: reality is interconnected; we all depend on others. How can we live, in this historical moment, the relationship with fellow men in the world, different from us, whether in or out of the EU? How can we stay together in this divided country, those who voted Leave and those who voted Remain?

The only possibility is to recover the conviction that the other is a good and not an enemy, as everyone knows and wishes in the depths of his heart. This is the only possible hope for a divided world. Indeed, the European Union was founded on this conviction. The continuation of this conviction is not bound to last forever, but needs to be re-conquered by each generation.

That ‘the other is a good’ is not a doctrine to re-learn, but can only be rediscovered through an ongoing experience of its truth. It is therefore vital to create spaces for dialogue, where the reality of otherness can be verified in experience as – unexpectedly and almost scandalously – a key to my desire and to understanding who I am.

As Pope Francis recently remarked,

“If there is one word that we should never tire of repeating, it is this: dialogue. We are called to promote a culture of dialogue by every possible means and thus to rebuild the fabric of society. The culture of dialogue entails a true apprenticeship and a discipline that enables us to view others as valid dialogue partners, to respect the foreigner, the immigrant and people from different cultures as worthy of being listened to.”

Creating spaces for dialogue in order to help recovering the certainty of the good of the other is more urgent than complaining about the past or worrying about the future. As Christians, we would like to offer this to our country and our world.