

NJPN Column in the Catholic Universe: Paul Southgate - Energised or Paralysed?

Pope Francis proposed a striking image of Church: “I see the church as a **field hospital after battle**.” What the Church needs most today, he says, is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity.

This is the very quality Covid has denied us. We have been isolated, socially distanced, locked down, furloughed, un-hugged and un-plugged.

Francis’ battlefield image is not a comfortable one: it evokes terror and trauma, suffering and sacrifice, death, and devastation, and wondering where God is in all this. To make a difference, to uncover God’s promise of “I will be with you” makes “**nearness and proximity**” the crucial strategy.

The Battle of Brexit gave us the opportunity to explore national identity, common values, international relations. We wasted it and are now losing sight of our national ideals, our national compass. There is not even the suggestion of healing and warming, of bridge-building over a growing and cataclysmic rift in the national spirit highlighted at the referendum. What are we steering by, guided by, aiming towards? What do we value most? On what basis can the UK stay together, or will we disintegrate? Maybe the rich and powerful do not want the debate. Does the Church?

So, on to the Battle of Covid and its fearsome aftershocks. Will the Church be energised or paralysed? The Bishops’ ‘The Common Good’ was published 25 years ago in 1996. Cardinal Hume introduced it by saying: “the future of humanity does not depend on political reform, social revolution or scientific advance. Something else is needed. It starts with a true conversion of mind and heart.” Now is the opportune time to re-frame ‘The Common Good’, to fashion solidarity with our allies in other Churches and Faiths and call for a new conversion – ecological, educational, economic, equality.

Our young people ask, “What’s the point?” as they see their aspirations and prospects drain away. We absolutely owe it to them to make the point, inspire their hope and vision, get alongside them to educate, encourage, and equip

them. The elders need to dream dreams so that our young people can see visions and prophesy (Acts 2:17).

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NJPN Conference 23-25 July at <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference/>