

SENSE OR NONSENSE OF HUMAN FRAGILITY IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN SOCIETY, BRUSSELS 21ST OCTOBER 2011.



This was the first such symposium ever to be held in the European Parliament which had not been organised by a formal lobby group (FEAMC). It was therefore a very significant day with talks of a very high standard on issues largely overlooked by the European Parliament. Regrettably few MEPs actually attended but, of course, on a Saturday they would normally be elsewhere.

We heard of evidence that pre-historic man had cared for the injured members of society 5000 years ago, having accepted the need to organise themselves to do so. More recently a concentration on a more 'mathematical' approach had replaced rational thought and separated us from our humanity. Autonomy had been superseded by automation – which allows us to blame everything on the machine! Can robots be taught right and wrong? In a similar way a market based approach, with a single minded concentration on profit, had brought about the financial crash. Attempts were being made to set up controls on a national or European level, but not yet on a World scale.

Hospitals had ceased to provide hospitality. The doctor must care for the ill, not the illness: the patient is never just a 'case'. A volunteer may not 'savoir' (know all about) but he should 'connaitre' (know) the patient. All have the right to receive necessary help in their fragility. The Eucharist is an inspiration to us all.

The strength of Europe must become more constructive, less destructive. Ecology often seems to be opposed to economy with a failure to recognise any limits: de Foucault spoke of 'frugal abundance'.

Society has become dehumanised, with everything done for the greater benefit of the majority but in an amoral way. Society often seems to be run in an irresponsible, even psychopathic, sort of way. The Creator has a plan and we must play a role in respecting it. When we die we must leave the world a better place for those who are to follow.

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FEAMC BRUSSELS OCT 2011

Brussels is remarkably easy to reach from London – little over 2 hours by rail – apart, that is, from problems in getting to St Pancras International. Two successive local trains had been cancelled and it looked as if we might never get there at all! But leaving London at 1 o'clock we were there in time to have tea in the Grand Place. This famous square,

dating largely from just after its destruction by the French in 1695, is full interest and very evocative. Finding the Museums were all open late (Thursday) were also able to visit the Municipal Museum in the Maison du Roi in the Square before adjourning to Chez Noel (a typical Belgian restaurant) for a fish dinner.

On Friday there was a special meeting in the European Parliament. This was well attended with excellent speeches. I was interested to find that in the coffee bar (really for MEPs) a coffee could be had for as little as 95¢! Lunch was provided, with a generous selection of filled rolls, followed by fruit. We had discovered a bus which took us back to the Gare Centrale, close to our Hotel (which we had booked through Eurostar) but it was a very long time coming (shades of London!) and gave us little time for any exploration before dinner.

Saturday was the meeting of the 'bureau' (council) starting with Mass said by the papal Nuncio to COMECE (European Bishops' conference). Disappointment was expressed that the strongly worded statement passed in Berlin as a reply to WHO's 'Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe' had not yet been submitted. This was to be done urgently. The next FEAMC European congress in Rome in November 2012 was discussed. The issue of how best to communicate with the younger generation was again raised. Meetings of Ministers in Brussels that weekend concerning the European financial crisis did not impinge upon us! Our meeting finished about 4pm and, using the bus, I had time to get to the Museum of Musical instruments before it shut – one of the fascinating Art Deco buildings for which Brussels is widely known. At 8pm those of us who were attending the official dinner at the Scheltema restaurant assembled in the Grand Place and formed a 'crocodile' to our destination. Walking through the region of the Rue des Bouchers, between the many restaurants, one is constantly accosted by touts trying to tempt you in! The dinner, courtesy of the Belgian' Guild' began with shrimps, followed by Waterzoi (speciality, a sort of stew) of Chicken and a Brussels sweet. Belgian has no wine of its own but French and German are available and provided for us.

The meeting being we attended Sunday Mass at the Cathedral of Sts Michel et Gudule, a formal occasion with choir and organs (sic). The readings were printed in either French or Flemish and read in the other language. After Mass we took a trip to the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, the largest Art Deco Church (begun 1905) in the world. Then back into Brussels and by metro and tram to the Maison Horta, the house of the leading architect of the Art Deco movement (designed by himself), and to another nearby example of the same style. Fascinating but not much to my taste! We had dinner in our Hotel – also Belgian in character but a much less interesting environment.

On the Monday there was time for a little shopping before taking the 12.25 train to London (arriving 1.35).

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