

Disassembling the European Assembly

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I remember a time when I used to eagerly anticipate the opportunity to attend church leader meetings. I imagined that these gatherings provided the spirit and truth required to fuel the leadership of our spiritual communities and organizational departments; something like the HARP workshops I attended, only exponentially more powerful. During my gap years, before studying at university, I had the privilege of being to participate in a few international youth programs in Korea – STF Assemblies and CARP conventions – which delivered educational content coupled together with an optimistic vision for the future. They were transformational, resurrecting programs.

With the memory of those experiences, I then experienced the European Assemblies.

I'll be honest with you: The difference was disheartening.

I want to share some personal reflections on the European Assembly that took place in Cavallino Treporti, Venice, last weekend. But to put things into perspective, I'd like to confess that I offered a special 7-day prayer condition to prepare my heart for the Assembly. My desire was to return without feeling depressed or cynical. Previous European Assemblies had succeeded in transforming me, but in the wrong ways. Rather than feeling empowered and hopeful, I often returned feeling drained and despondent. Having committed myself to participate in this year's assembly – I didn't have to attend, although I felt a duty to attend in order to serve my community – I wanted to prayerfully guard my heart as preparation for the assembly.

I was also supported by the thought of the other members of my young men small group: the goal we set at our last meeting was to find 10 things every day for which to be grateful. If I was going to come close to succeeding in this goal, I'd need to actively search for the treasures God had prepared for me in this Assembly.



My mettle was tested almost immediately after joining the Assembly since my analytical mind quickly found little things that could have been better. But before allowing myself to complain, I reminded myself of the prayers I had offered and felt it would be an awful shame to descend into cynicism so quickly over such small, forgivable oversights. So I held out with the determination of giving the 3-day program a fighting chance.

It is thus with some pleasant surprise that I'm now able to report that I returned from the Assembly feeling mildly inspired. That is no small accomplishment!

I'd like to be brief and specific about why I feel this way.

Firstly, the exposure to the Brazil model of small groups [[youtube.com/watch?v=10gnKxHKZQ0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10gnKxHKZQ0)] filled me with reassuring confidence. I have been deeply moved by the reports about this initiative and was pleased to see that its value has been recognized and promoted by others. When I had the chance to ask how long such a model took to develop, the answer was as comforting as it was realistic – 10 years. I

believe that anything worth building will take a good length of time to build. It is with this reassurance that I confidently continue to plug away at something small to begin with, hoping that over time it will grow in health and gather the strength to become something much bigger.



A powerful message shared by the European Continental Director, Pres. An, [Young Shik An] was that we can confidently become owners of *Cheon Il Guk*. As the children of God, we can inherit everything from the original owner, who is God. We can take all the responsibility. As we aspire to become owners of God's heavenly kingdom through practicing true love, we can also exercise creativity, choosing how we take responsibility, not just following directions. These words go against the culture many of us have experienced in our movement; we can either interpret them as hollow and meaningless, or as inspiration that the culture of our leadership is shifting and evolving into something more healthy, more principled.

I was quite startled by the presentation delivered by the Project Manager of the Vision 2020 Project, Mr. Sam Nagasaka. The shock was twofold: not only was the conveyed content engaging and logical, but Mr. Nagasaka's style of delivery was warm and contemporary. I would compare it to a lengthy TED talk. The Vision and Mission of Project 2020 were elegantly summarized as "Substantial *Cheon Il Guk*" and "Love Heaven | Love People | Love Nation" respectively. Certain areas required specific attention were identified, specifically developing our leadership, supporting our families and developing our organization. While other areas were mentioned as being important for balanced, healthy growth, these three were identified as the most urgent areas being addressed. Some patience will be required to see change in these areas, but I was convinced that steps are being taken in the right direction within the international headquarters in Korea.

(A video of the above two speakers can be watched here: vimeo.com/album/2784174/video/89284698)

I was blessed to be involved in one of the seminars led by David & Patricia Earle. They offered me a platform to share shortly about my experience with small groups, before testifying to their experiences of developing a tribal messiah foundation in Birmingham. The discussions within the seminar (which was repeated with another group) were quite enlightening, and although I had little time to prepare, I was grateful for the chance to inspire others.



I enjoyed some breath-takingly good tiramisu while speaking with Hayashi san

While sharing a meal with Mr. Hayashi of the 43LG community, he shared with me his conviction that we should attend meetings such as this Assembly not only with the desire to receive but also with the desire to give. I hadn't thought about what I would be able to offer, and yet I was approached by a number of people asking about my experiences and research. During much of the free time, during meals or during the outing in Venice, I found myself having valuably deep conversations with people I had only just met. When it was time to depart I realized that there were many people with

whom I had wanted to spend time but didn't get the chance; it was humbling to think that I could serve others even my attitude was to receive.

Another highlight of the prepared program was the exciting presentation about DPLife (53 minutes into this video: vimeo.com/album/2784174/video/89285390) presented by Demian Dunkley from the

USA. I was inspired to see how our faith was being presented in a style accessible to a contemporary audience. This was being accomplished with the employment of an online marketing company, professionals with no connection to our movement, which allowed the team from the USA to truthfully present our greatest assets so that they can be found easily and understood in the context of real life.

My highlight from the whole program was the final session (the video of which can be watched here: vimeo.com/album/2784174/video/89352107) Madre Innocenza, the Catholic nun who was responsible for the retreat center where the Assembly was hosted shared her brief reflections on our group. She had realized that there are people beyond those in her community who are concerned with building a world of peace. She was also deeply moved to profess that while she was working to build world peace, we WERE world peace! The standing ovation she received was as much an expression of gratitude for her team's marvelous hospitality (did I mention the food was amazing?) as it was for her words which came as a message from God to encourage us.

Also speaking in the final session, the Rev. Thomas Hwang (who is the international vice president of our movement, and secretary general of the recently created supreme council) used his hour of time to deliver a varied and engaging session. I could see how oriental and occidental cultures were married in his approach, which was refreshing and hopeful. Rather than convey everything he shared, I will focus on the unprecedented ceremony he conducted (54 minutes into the above linked video): He invited all the 2nd generation members to line up at the front, and with all the remaining 1st generation members standing, we were instructed to offer a standing bow to each other. The Rev. Hwang then asked the 1st generation members to recite a repentant message to the 2nd generation members; this was done tearfully and sincerely by many if not all. Subsequently the 2nd generation members were invited to recite a pledge of commitment to complete all that the 1st generation members had started. It was a startlingly powerful experience, almost overwhelming.

It was just a ceremony; many rituals can be performed half-heartedly or even empty-heartedly, especially if one simply followed the crowd in reciting the words without conviction. But like all ceremonies, if one chooses to take it seriously, it can become the symbolic gesture that represents a significant internal transformation. The sanctity of the marriage blessing, for example, is not exclusively in the drinking of some wine or participation in a wedding ceremony (amongst the conditions entailed) but in the attitude of the person participating: these acts should indicate a change of lineage that has taken place in the heart of the participant. Likewise, this ceremony conducted in Venice could have deep meaning for those who want it to have deep meaning. If the word "sorry" was attached with genuine feelings of repentance, then I accept it. I would likewise hope that the promise made by myself and the other 2nd generation members can be followed up with determined action.

But as far as spontaneous ceremonies go, it was pretty special.

In conclusion, while acknowledging some of my precious highlights from this Assembly, I'd like to emphasize that I think there's still huge room for improvement: The worship component needed a lot more investment; the lack of reliable WiFi throughout the facility was painfully inhibitive; the seminars were hit and miss; also would also like to see the Assembly marketed in a more competitive fashion, seeking to inspire people to attend so that all members feel welcome to participate. (Since we're all tribal messiahs, we are all called to lead.) A catchy but relevant motto could have succinctly communicated the aims and purpose of the Assembly. (The actual motto was too long, in my opinion, and could have been distilled.)

I will probably want to attend again next year. I'd like to imagine that in future years, this kind of Assembly will involve many more hundreds of impassioned leaders and that the program will be more able to handsomely serve them an appetizing portion of inspiration for the year ahead.