MANI: IMPRESSIONS

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Some initial reflections on a pan-African missions' conference, including some important lessons for other conference organisers!
Category: Africa

I spent last week at the 2016 MANI Consultation in Ethiopia. For the next few days, I'll be blogging some of my impressions of the meeting.

MANI is the movement for African National Initiatives, an umbrella group for Agencies and Churches in Africa who are seeking to be involved in the Great Commission. They describe themselves in this fashion:

> ***MANI*** *flows out of the conviction that: 1) The Church in Africa has a crucial role to play in the fulfillment of the Great Commission in the 21st century; 2) The Church in Africa has the ministry gifts, manpower, and material resources to complete this task in Africa and to make a significant contribution towards global evangelization; and 3) Through the focused deployment of the resources of the African Church, we can partner with the global church to achieve the target of* ***â€œa church for every people and the gospel for every personâ€*** *in the countries of Africa and the world.*

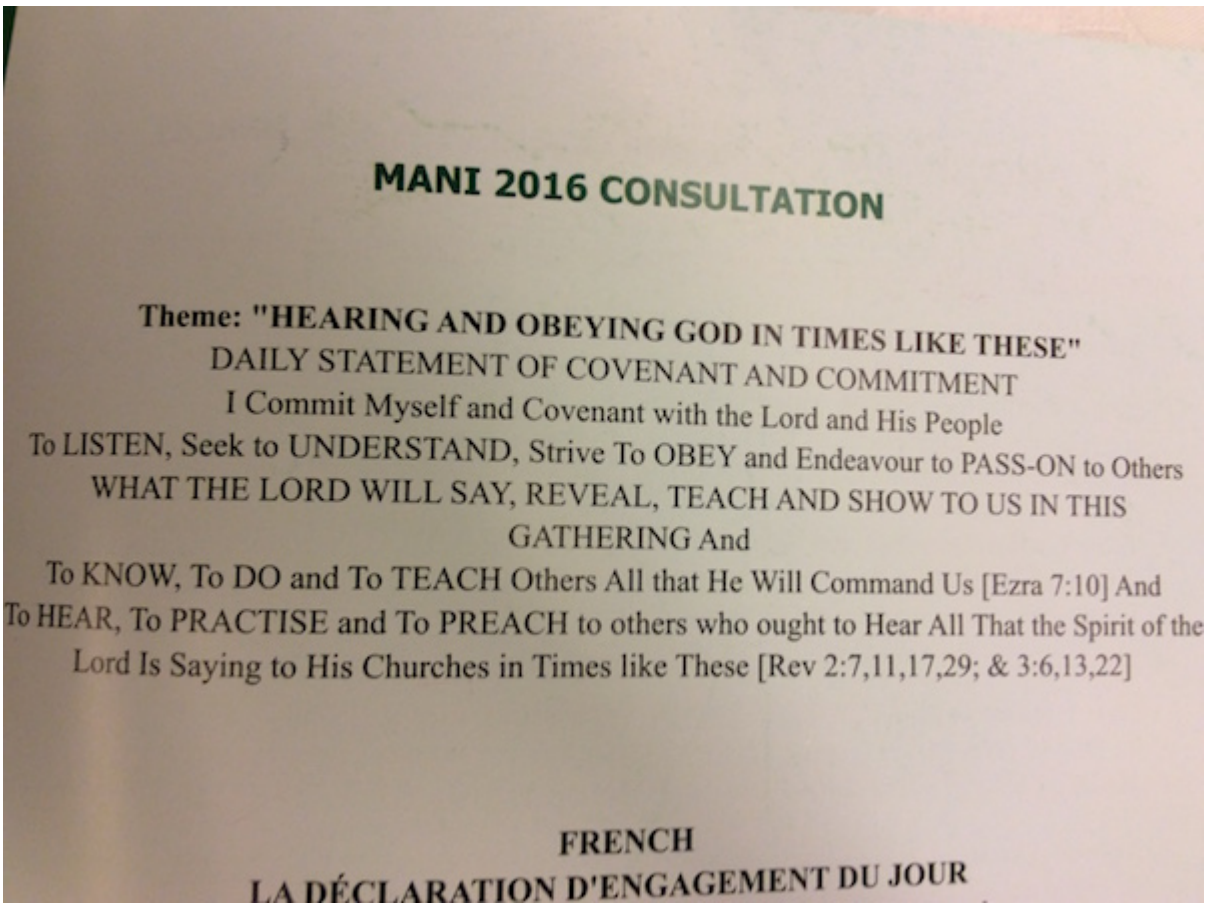
The 2016 consultation was held in the Africa Union building in Addis Ababa and took from Monday 7 of March until the evening of Friday the 11. Here are a few, brief general observations about the conference.

It was big; there were 560 delegates from over 50 countries, the vast majority of them from the African continent. This was far more than gathered at the last European Missionary Alliance meeting and provides a graphic demonstration of the changing face of the Christian church.



It was symbolic; the conferenceÂ in the African Union building, a place where important decisions about the future of Africa are taken by politicians and diplomats. MANI, too, has a continent wide impact. It is a truism, but many of Africa's problems can only be addressed through the impact of the Christian Gospel. MANI's presence at the seat of political power, was very symbolic. There were disadvantages to meeting in such an important public building, not least the long security queues to enter each morning. But the symbolism was very important and a huge encouragement to many of the delegates.

It was serious; let's face it, the African church doesn't get a great press in the UK. All we seem to hear about are scandalous prosperity teachers, or loony leaders who get bitten on the bum by lions. MANI showed a different side of the African church altogether. This was a gathering of serious, dedicated Christians who were very serious both about their own personal piety and about the need for the church to reach out to make disciples of the whole world. This seriousness was illustrated by a short passage that we read together each day.



This was not simply an academic conference or aÂ mission think-tank; it was a serious engagement with Scripture, with the needs of the world and with our personal and corporate response. Anyone who still thinks that the African church is a mile wide but an inch deep, needs to spend time at a gathering like this. The biggest critics of the African church, were not the international delegates, but the African Christians, themselves; they see their weaknesses and are determined to address them - things don't get much more serious than that.

It was Multilingual; most (but not all) of the participants spoke in English. However, there was simultaneous translation available into four languages, French, Portuguese, Amharic and Chinese. In some areas, the conference was not very well organised, but in the area where it really matters; helping speakers of all languages participate, they did Â great job. MANI only represents one part of the world, but in terms of making their conference as open as possible, they did a far better job than either Lausanne or the World Evangelical Alliance have managed in my experience.

I did consider writing something about the terrorist attack on Grand Bassam beach, this morning. However, I find I have nothing to say... perhaps in a few days. Meanwhile, I'm grateful that my friends and friends of friends who were on the beach are all safe, but my heart goes out to the families of those

who headed out to Bassam for a restful Sunday afternoon (as we did so many times) and who did not return. Lord have mercy.Â