MANI: ISSUES

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My take on the most important issues raised at the MANI consultation. These include; Islam, the Prosperity Gospel and a large country a long way from Africa
Category: Observations

This is the second in my series of posts about the MANI Consultation in Addis Ababa last week. You can read the first one here.



The theme of the MANI Consultation was "Hearing and obeying God in times like these", which is a pretty good theme. Each day started with a time of worship and then a lengthy time studying and discussing the letters to the seven churches from Revelation. The rest of the day was given over to a mixture of plenary and small group sessions in which a lot of ground was covered and a wide range of subjects were raised. In this post, I'd like to mention a someÂ key issues which cropped up in a number of the presentations. This is a personal choice and others may consider other themes more important.

Prosperity Teaching; it was good to hear repeated condemnation of the prosperity gospel movement. This came from the floor, in our table group Bible studies and in a number of coffee time conversations. It's difficult to know how to deal with an issue like this which infects the church world-wide, but it was good to hear so many African leaders speaking out against this heresy.

Unreached People Groups; I was really encouraged to hear the passion with which the delegates at MANI addressed the question of people who have not heard the Gospel. To be honest, I rarely hear the same amount of concern here in the UK. We are good at social action, justice initiatives and such like, but somewhere along the line our concern for people who do not know Jesus seems to have diminished. You can't say the same thing about the Church in Africa.

Islam; the subject of Islam cropped up on a number of occasions.Â A couple of things struck me in particular. Firstly, most of the delegates seemed to believeÂ that there is a concerted Islamic strategy to take over the world. To liberal European ears, this sounds like a conspiracy theory; but then again, our secularised world-view doesn't really equip us to understand radical religious movements. Not only that, but many of the delegates had first hand experience of groups like Boko Haram. I'm not sure what my conclusions are, but I do think that we need to listen carefully to the voice of African experience. The second theme which cropped up on a number of occasionsÂ Â was much more encouraging and clear cut; conversions from Islam to Christianity. It was fantastic to hear some of the stories of what God is doing in both North and Sub-Saharan Africa.



China; it was significant that the meeting was held in a building which was built by the Chinese government as a gift to the African Union. There was a significant Chinese delegation to the consultation (and translation was provided into Mandarin) who took an active part in the proceedings. There was a two way concern; how can the African church evangelise the large number of Chinese expats working in Africa? and what is the role of the Chinese church in reaching the unreached in Africa? This level of interaction and mutual concern from two growing giants in the world church was great to watch. I saw the future of the Church at MANI.

The Next Generation; there was a huge concern for training and equipping the next generation of the church; children and young people. Though the church in Africa is growing rapidly today, the leaders there do not take it for granted that this will continue. There was a lot of emphasis placed on disciple making movements and intentionally helpingÂ the next generation to develop in their faith and to grow into leadership. There was a very healthy stress on supporting the next generation of leaders in the church. I was also struck by the stress that was placed on children's ministry. In my experience, this has not been a feature of African church life - it was good to see some emphasis being placed on it.

Being a Movement; a theme which cropped up in the first devotion was that if the church is not careful it can change from a movement into a monument. This became a bit of a catch phrase for the consultation and was repeated by a number of speakers, particularly in the closing sessions. The notion of moving; being responsive to the call of God and the work of his Spirit was stressed repeatedly.

Tomorrow, I'll take a look at the significance of the MANI meeting for the church here in the UK.