

Africa's Miracle

One of the most astounding spiritual awakenings in history is shaking Nigeria today. I saw it for myself in December, when I traveled to the city of Lagos to attend the largest Christian gathering on the planet. I was one of the 2 or 3 million people who attended the Holy Ghost Congress, a three-day celebration sponsored by the Redeemed Christian Church of God—a denomination that is starting three churches every day.

The numbers associated with this African revival are mind-blowing. On the second night of the congress, I walked for 30 minutes into the crowd and never reached the back. A quarter of a mile further from where I stood, throngs of people were seated under a gigantic, pavilion-like structure with a metal roof that can seat an additional 1 million people.

I was told there were 10,000 ushers in the audience that night. They were stationed across a field that was wired with 2.5 kilometers of electrical cord for the sound system. Workers spent an entire year making the crude wooden benches that covered the dusty ground.

To capture the energy of the moment, I moved near the front of the crowd—just as the praise team began to sing a chorus accompanied by congas and traditional talking drums. I began to sway to the rhythm, and in a few moments I found myself in a frenzied circle with several young African pastors—who probably didn't realize until that night that some white men can actually dance.

When the music ended

we hugged and high-fived, and then I listened to their testimonies of courage in the face of suffering. All the men were from northern Nigeria, where Muslims in recent years have killed Christians, burned churches and attempted to impose strict Islamic law.

Bisi, a pastor from Kwara state, told me: "Some Muslims believe that physical violence will stop the growth of the church in Nigeria." Another minister, Fakulade, said Muslims in the northern city of Kaduna have been known to put a price on a pastor's head.

Then I met Emmanuel, a 21st century apostle who has established "prayer cells" all over northern Nigeria, focusing his evangelistic efforts on Muslims. Islamic gangs have tried to murder him twice, and he showed me the scar on his throat to prove it. "A Muslim is afraid of two things: God's love and the Holy Spirit's miracles," he explained.

Emmanuel says the persecution has kept him "sharp in the Spirit" and increased his passion for God. "Because of our isolation, and the resistance we have experienced, we got to know Christ in His reality. It helped our Christianity," he said.

This man's die-hard commitment to spreading the gospel in the face of hostility gave me assurance that the Holy Spirit is working today to overcome the threat of militant Islam. If such boldness spreads to the millions of new Christian converts in Nigeria, Africa and the Middle East will be transformed in our lifetime.

Yet I can't help but wonder about my own country. Recent studies show that church membership is actually declining here. What's it going to take to jolt the American church into revival mode?

Hopefully some of this African zeal will infect us on this side of the Atlantic.