

Shock Therapy

First I assumed I had a bad case of jet lag. After spending two weeks in Africa in August, it was difficult to ease back into my routine. During my first few days home I assumed my body was struggling to adjust to the time change. But after a month it was obvious that my spirit wasn't settled.

Was it depression? A doctor might have recommended Prozac. But I didn't want to medicate this pain.

The ache I felt inside began after I spent a day interviewing Christians in Kaduna, Nigeria, a city where militant Muslims stage regular rampages against believers. In 1992 Muslims burned 230 churches to the ground. Similar waves of violence erupted in 2000 and 2002.

Zachariah Pidung, a 35-year-old man who is missing half of his left arm as well as his right hand, was one of the first to tell me his story. Muslims wielding machetes, swords and clubs showed up at his house last November. Zachariah watched as they butchered his two older brothers, doused their bodies with gasoline and set them ablaze.

They tried to kill Zachariah too, but after they cut off his arm and hand and set him on fire, he rolled into a watery ditch and pretended to be dead. During our interview he lifted up his shirt to show me the leathery scars on his back.

Hajara Mogari was one of 18 widows who shared their

testimonies with me. One February morning in 2000, she said, crazed Muslims threw petrol bombs through the windows of her house to force everyone out.

Hajara lost her husband, four of her children, a daughter-in-law and two grandchildren that day. "After they dumped the bodies in a well, they threw concrete blocks on top of them," she said, wiping away tears from a face weathered by grief.

Pastor Samuel Kujiyat miraculously survived an attack in 2000, but then he had to bury a female parishioner who was murdered and set on fire by the mob. All that was left of her body was a charred skull.

What amazed me the most about these people was not what they had suffered but the fact that they are ready to suffer again. "There is something about Christianity that makes you willing to die for it," pastor Kujiyat said.

Some Christians have left Kaduna to seek safety in southern Nigeria—but many others are staying because they know someone must maintain a witness for Christ on that hellish spiritual battlefield.

"We have decided not to allow persecution to deter us," another pastor, Olaniyi Adegboyega, told me. "Those of us who are ministering in the north always face intense pressure to abandon our work among the Muslims. We ask for our brethren in the West to continue to pray for us."

Perhaps the reason I was so traumatized by this trip is that I see such a discrepancy between the faith displayed in northern

Nigeria and the kind of gospel we preach inside our comfortable Christian cocoon here in the United States. It is indeed bizarre when you contrast the genuine passion of the suffering church with the shallow, what's-in-it-for-me message we broadcast to the world.

The people of Kaduna changed my life forever. Although I was never attacked by a Muslim mob during my visit, the fire these brave Christians endure scorched my soul and left the smell of smoke in my conscience. I hope I never recover.