



Spirit- Empowered Mission

**Africa's Decade of Pentecost
and the New Testament
"Strategy of the Spirit"**

Denzil R. Miller

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SPIRIT-EMPOWERED MISSION: AFRICA'S DECADE OF PENTECOST AND THE NEW TESTAMENT "STRATEGY OF THE SPIRIT"

DENZIL R. MILLER *

INTRODUCTION

The Africa Assemblies of God is poised for what could be the greatest evangelistic and missionary advance in the movement's more than 100 year history, since, in the early months of 1907, the first Pentecostal missionaries from the Azusa Street Mission set foot on the shores of West Africa.¹ Across the continent Assemblies of God (AG) churches are committing themselves to more perfectly heed the commission of Jesus to "make disciples of all the *ethnē*" (Matt. 28:19).² Realizing that Jesus' coming is near, and sensing the unrelenting compulsion of the Spirit, they are rising up to evangelize the unreached peoples, people, and places of Africa and the nations in the power of the Holy Spirit.³

* Note: This booklet is an adaptation of the author's paper, "Power for Mission: Africa's Decade of Pentecost and the New Testament 'Strategy of the Spirit'" originally presented at the Africa Assemblies of God Alliance World Missions Congress held in Limuru, Kenya, on February 25–March 1, 2013.

CHAPTER 1:
**THE AFRICA ASSEMBLIES OF GOD
DECADE OF PENTECOST**

In preparation for this unprecedented missionary advance, the Africa Assemblies of God Alliance (AAGA),⁴ has launched continent-wide initiative from 2010-2020 called the “Decade of Pentecost”⁵ (DOP). The initiative’s defining goal is to see ten-million new believers baptized in the Holy Spirit and strategically mobilized as Spirit-empowered witnesses, church planters, and cross-cultural missionaries. This goal is at the heart a broader strategy of multiplying Spirit-empowered missionary churches throughout Africa and beyond.

On Pentecost Day this year (May 19, 2013) the Decade of Pentecost emphasis will complete its third year.⁶ During these three years, AG churches have taken bold steps to implement the initiative across the continent. Thus far, in twenty-one Acts 1:8 Conferences⁷ in all parts of Africa, AAGA-related national churches have committed themselves to, by 2020, plant 40,923 new churches and win 9,123,750 individuals to Christ. Further, they have committed themselves to deploying 1,069 new cross-cultural missionaries and reaching 139 specific unreached people groups in Africa and the Indian Ocean Basin. In order to accomplish this, they have further committed themselves to recruiting and training 25,839 new ministers of the gospel and to seeing from 75-100% of their membership baptized in the Holy Spirit and then mobilized as Spirit-empowered witnesses, church-planters, and cross-cultural

missionaries.⁸

Decade of Harvest Advances

Africa's spiritual leaders view this grand vision of a Decade of Pentecost (DOP) as more than just another church program. They rather envision it as a continuation and natural outworking of the grace God afforded the movement during the previous two decades, beginning with the launching of the now-historic Decade of Harvest (DOH) in January of 1990.⁹ This early initiative was the first continent-wide emphasis of its kind in the Africa AG. It was done in concert with AG national fellowships worldwide. During those ten years leading up to the dawning of the new millennium, the African church redoubled its efforts in evangelism and church planting. This evangelistic effort targeted several up-to-then unreached peoples and places of Africa.

During that same twenty-year period, an enhanced missions awareness was birthed in many national AG churches. African leaders began mobilizing their churches for greater missions endeavor. The oft-heard battle cry in those years was "Missions, Africa can to it too!" It was during that time that the Africa Assemblies of God Alliance (AAGA) came into being,¹⁰ along with its subsidiary agencies, including the AAGA World Missions Commission and Africa AG Care.¹¹ To help facilitate the burgeoning work in Africa, the Africa Office of the U.S. AG Division of Foreign Missions¹² created the Africa Harvest Projects and Coordination Office¹³ and Africa Theological Training Services.¹⁴ Other AGWM ministries came into being during this time, notably Africa Tabernacle Evangelism and Africa's Children.

During the DOH the Africa AG experienced unprecedented growth. As the decade began, about 2.1 million believers worshiped in 11,800 Assemblies of God churches in 31 sub-Saharan countries. At its end the number of constituents had nearly tripled to 6.3 million, and the number of AG churches had more

than doubled to 24,019. Additionally, the AG had entered into 8 new countries, bringing the total to 39 countries in which AAGA-related national churches were active.

It was, however, during the decade following the DOH (i.e., the first decade of the twenty-first century) that true exponential growth began to occur in the Africa AG. Building on the momentum of the DOH, the pace of missionary activity and church growth was accelerated so that by 2010 the movement had grown to 15.9 million constituents meeting in 65,000 congregations throughout Africa and the Indian Ocean Basin. An ever expanding missional awareness came into the churches along with a growing commitment to reach the remaining unreached tribes of Africa. In addition, several national churches had instituted national missions departments and had deployed missionaries to various places on the continent and beyond. Others were beginning to institute their own programs. During that same ten year period the number of ministerial training institutions increased dramatically.¹⁵

A Troubling Trend

And yet, while all of this positive progress was being made, another not-so-encouraging trend was being observed in Africa AG churches. While the original DOH declaration had called for a “continent-wide revival accompanied by a resurgence of Pentecostal power” and for the “full spectrum of the Spirit’s work in the Church,”¹⁶ and the American mission, citing Acts 1:8, had earlier committed itself to “fervent prayer, fasting, and Pentecostal preaching ... in pursuit of a Holy Spirit outpouring across Africa as a prelude to the Decade of Harvest,”¹⁷ such a continent-wide outpouring had not materialized.

As the Africa AG was becoming ever larger, it was, at the same time, steadily becoming less Pentecostal, at least statistically. Annual reports revealed that the great majority of AG constituents in Africa had not been baptized in the Holy Spirit, and year-by-year

the percentage of those baptized in the Holy Spirit was steadily decreasing. Leaders noted with alarm that the message of the baptism in the Holy Spirit was being neglected in the churches, and as a result, comparatively few were being baptized in the Spirit.¹⁸

The 1993 annual survey done through the Assemblies of God World Mission (AGWM) U.S. Office revealed that only 20% of AG constituents in Africa were reported to have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. This finding was received with varying degrees of concern in the African church and in the American mission. Seven years later, in 2000, another annual report revealed that the percentage had dropped to 17%. The message was clear: *this unacceptable trend must be addressed and reversed*. If the Africa AG was to maintain its spiritual dynamic and fulfill its missionary destiny, the church needed to seek God for a continent-wide Pentecostal outpouring with millions of its members being baptized in the Spirit and empowered as Christ's witnesses to the lost.

In response, in 2000 the AAGA leadership corporately demonstrated their commitment to Pentecostal revival by issuing a continent-wide call for AG churches across Africa to go "Back to the Upper Room" and seek God for a fresh Pentecostal outpouring. Four years later at their 2004 General Assembly in Accra, Ghana, the Acts in Africa Initiative (AIA) was commissioned by AAGA to aid the Africa AG in addressing this critical need. The ministry was mandated by AAGA to assist their 50 national churches in sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian Ocean Basin to mobilize themselves for Spirit-empowered mission by "calling for a powerful Pentecostal outpouring in our churches."¹⁹ According to the AAGA mandate this was to be done, in part, through national and international Holy Spirit Conferences on the continent.

In my talks with several African AG church leaders in all parts of Africa, I have listened as they passionately spoke of their desire for a such a powerful outpouring of the Spirit on their churches. This thirst for authentic Pentecostal revival is mirrored in the zeal

of AG believers to personally experience God's power. Wherever the message of Pentecost is presented and the people are given an opportunity to receive the Holy Spirit, they respond with great enthusiasm. Most are immediately filled with the Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues and greater zeal to reach the lost with the gospel.

A recent Africa statistical report reveals that the downward trend in Spirit baptisms may have been reversed.²⁰ For the first time in two decades the report indicates that there has been an increase in the percentage of AG constituents who are baptized in the Holy Spirit. This report indicates that 19% of AG adherents have been baptized in the Spirit. This increase, we believe, is the result of the strong emphasis on Spirit baptism during the first year of the Decade of Pentecost.

CHAPTER 2:
**LOOKING BACK: LESSONS LEARNED
FROM THE “DECADE OF HARVEST”**

As the Decade of Pentecost enters into its fourth year, it may serve the movement well to take a thoughtful look back to the Decade of Harvest of the 1990’s, and to learn from the movement’s successes and failures in carrying out that initiative. To my knowledge, to date no such published analysis has been done. As has been pointed out, the DOH served as an effective launching pad for a dramatic increase in evangelistic and missionary momentum in the Africa AG. The initiative helped to propel the movement forward, accelerating its missional effectiveness for not just one, but two decades of significant and sustained growth. Below is my attempt at such an analysis. I will seek to answer the question, “What lessons can we learn, both positive and negative, from the Decade of Harvest that will serve us in advancing the Decade of Pentecost?”

Positive Lessons

What then made Africa’s DOH of the 1990’s such an extraordinary success? I suggest that, among other things, the following five elements contributed to the success of the DOH. They represent five elements that should be emulated during the Decade of Pentecost:

1. Unified Vision Combined with Individual Initiative

The guiding ethos of the DOH was a unified continental vision calling for “every national church to manifest renewed and enlarged missionary vision to send forth laborers claiming the nations for Jesus Christ.”²¹ This united vision focused on heightened evangelism, aggressive church planting, and increased missionally-focused pastoral training. Significantly, the vision was fully embraced by national churches and partnering missionaries and missions agencies alike.

It is further significant that the unified continental vision of the DOH was coupled to individual initiative. As each national church ran with the vision, they developed their own ways and means for carrying it out. The shared vision produced a continental sense of common mission; the individual initiative facilitated individual buy in, encouraged an entrepreneurial spirit, and served to effectively implement the mission in each nation. The combining of these two elements—united vision and individual initiative—produced a powerful missional synergy resulting in the outstanding results that are now a part of AG Africa’s history.

In like manner, if the DOP is to enjoy maximum impact, each of the 50 AAGA-related churches, along with all of the their AGWM partners, must fully embrace the initiative and zealously implement its goals and values into their individual ministry contexts.

2. Synergistic Partnerships

During the DOH powerful synergistic partnerships were formed. As individual entities moved to accomplish common goals, it became natural for them to join hands. Partnerships were formed between national churches, partnering missions and missionaries, Bible schools, para-church agencies, and numerous other entities. These creative partnerships helped to launch new and creative evangelistic, missionary, and training initiatives and served to

revive old ones. They became a force in advancing the collective vision of the DOH.

Similar synergistic partnerships will be key to effectively advancing the current DOP initiative. As national churches and missionaries strive together with one heart and one mind to accomplish the common vision of evangelizing all of Africa and the nations in the power of the Holy Spirit, a powerful missional synergy will occur resulting in the greatest missionary and evangelistic advance in the history of the African church: "Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword" (Lev. 26:8).

Significantly, the present DOP offers even greater opportunities for forming synergistic partnerships than did the earlier DOH. New, more universally accessible communications technologies, including the World-wide Web, e-mail, social media, texting, video conferencing, and other emerging means provide greater opportunity for creative cross pollination and the sharing of ideas and resources that were unavailable during the DOH. If the Africa AG is going to rise to its full potential during the DOP, and the unreached of Africa are to be reached, such synergistic partnerships must be exploited to the maximum. Every AG minister, missionary, and leader will be required to lift up their eyes and look at what God is doing in and through the AG Africa DOP initiative, and then to work together in creative synergetic partnerships in reaching the lost of Africa and beyond in the power of the Spirit. Together we can reap the greatest harvest in the history of the church in Africa, and possibly in the world.

3. Persistent Focus on Evangelism and Church Planting

Another strength of the DOH was its sustained and unwavering focus on reaching the lost through aggressive church planting. While other emphases were initiated, they were almost always

connected with church planting. Whether it be Bible school training, lay discipleship training, campus ministries, mass media outreach, youth ministries, children's ministries, humanitarian response, or any other initiative, all was carried out in the context of, and often with the specific goal of, planting vibrant new churches. And everyone knew it.

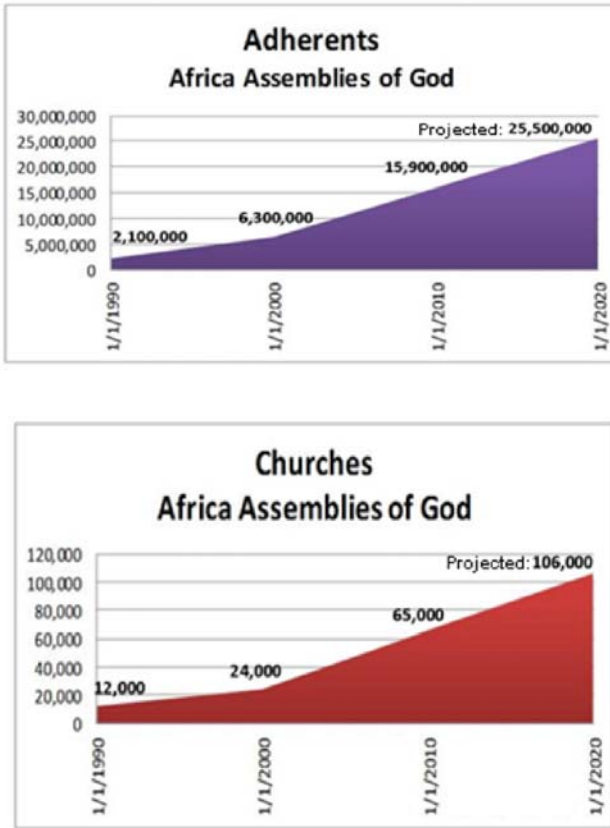
This unwavering focus on reaching the lost through aggressive church planting continued through the DOH into the first decade of the twenty-first century and resulted in powerful missional momentum and great forward advance. During the two decades from 1990 to 2010 the Africa AG added 13.8 million new adherents and planted 43,000 new churches and outstations, some among formerly unreached peoples. That progress is charted, along with the projected growth of the AG during the DOP, in Figure 1 below.

During the present DOP we must remember well and collectively reaffirm this lesson of the DOH. To forget it will inevitably mitigate the movement's effectiveness. During the DOP, however, we must take it a step further. This emphasis on evangelism and church planting must be expanded to include all of the yet-to-be reached people, peoples, and places of Africa

4. Training for the Harvest

The DOH was further characterized by a strong focus on expanded and more effective leadership training. The Africa Theological Training Services (ATTS), led by the late Dr. John V. York, was created to address the need. It was surmised that, if during the DOH the Africa AG were going to plant thousands of new churches, then they must be about training thousands of new pastors and church planters. During the DOH new Bible schools were established and old ones were revamped. Significantly, the decadal focus was not so much on "training to *conserve* the harvest," as some have re-envisioned it, as it was on "training *for*

Figure 1: Growth of the Africa Assemblies of God (1990-2020):



the harvest,”²² that is, training to advance the harvest. Dr. York’s heart-cry was twofold: Our training must be intentionally missional, and it must be thoroughly Pentecostal.

During the DOP our ministerial training institutions must be mandated to critically revisit their mission statements and reevaluate their reasons for being to ensure that they, too, are training *for* the harvest and that their school’s guiding ethos is thoroughly Pentecostal and intentionally missional. They must beware of the ever-so-subtle but debilitating shift from training *for*

the harvest to training *to conserve* the harvest. Further, faculty, student body, and national church must together "own" the vision and goals of the school and firmly commit themselves to ensuring that they are implemented.

5. A Spirit-driven Call to Missions

During the DOH and the first decade of the twenty-first century, AG leaders and churches heard and responded to the persistent call of the Spirit to fully engage in cross-cultural missions. This response was nurtured through the Eleventh Hour Institutes (EHI) developed by Dr. Lazarus Chakwera and Dr. John York and promoted by the Africa Theological Training Services. One stated purpose of the EHI was to serve the African church in mobilizing for greater and more effective missions involvement. These short-term institutes were held in various places across Africa and helped inspire missions consciousness and vision.

During this same period regional coalitions were formed to advance missions,²³ and national missions committees were formulated (or reformulated) to advance intra-country and international missions. In addition, many local churches became increasingly involved in planting churches cross-culturally and in neighboring countries.

During this present DOP the Africa AG can be expected to capitalize on the missional momentum of the previous two decades and to accelerate their missionary advance. This intention is reflected in the "Official Communiqué" developed at the recent AAGA World Missions Commission's first Pentecostal Missions Consultation held in Limuru, Kenya, on February 28-29, 2011. There the gathered delegates from AG churches across Africa cited five pressing areas of need in the Africa AG as they collectively mobilize for strategic missions:

1. The need to strategically focus on *the evangelization of Africa* as rapidly as possible, with a twofold focus on the unreached Islamic peoples of North Africa and the greater Arab World and the remaining unreached peoples of sub-Sahara Africa and the Indian Ocean Basin
2. The need to create an ongoing *information database* on these above-mentioned unreached peoples to be shared with our constituent national churches
3. The need to develop *strategic partnerships* across the continent between the national churches affiliated with the Africa Assemblies of God Alliance
4. The need to develop a *strategic prayer network* focusing on the unreached peoples of Africa
5. The need for *missional mentoring* among our national churches as a means of strengthening and building capacity within all of the national churches of the Africa Assemblies of God
6. The need to develop a truly biblical and missional model for *compassion ministries*, all the while remaining focused on the core mandate of the church, that is, reaching the lost for Christ.²⁴

As we address these critical needs, we must, as did the early church, constantly look to the Spirit for power and direction (Acts 15:28).

Two Shortfalls

While such reflection as the above (i.e., focusing on the strengths that helped make the DOH a success) may offer useful insights into how the Africa AG may more effectively move forward during the current DOP, it is also beneficial to examine certain shortfalls that may have mitigated the overall effectiveness of the DOH. In my opinion, two of those shortfalls were (1) the

failure on the part of many to consistently emphasize authentic Pentecostal experience and practice and (2) widespread financial impotence in the churches often resulting in aborted mission. If during the present DOP the movement is to fully realize its potential as a effective missions force in Africa and beyond, these shortfalls must be identified and addressed.

1. Failure to Emphasize Authentic Pentecostal Experience and Practice

While the original DOH declaration pointed to the critical need for an Holy Spirit outpouring in preparation for missional advance, both empirical and anecdotal evidence reveal that there was a failure on many fronts to follow through on these early Pentecostal impulses.²⁵ Admittedly, the need was often emphasized in publications and on a national and corporate level. However, in most cases, it was not sufficiently implemented on the grassroots level. During the DOH many churches were planted, but, in far too many cases, these churches were neither intentionally "Pentecostalized" nor aggressively "missionized."

Further, a strategy for planting Spirit-empowered missional churches was not generally taught in the movement's ministerial training institutions. Unfortunately, in some cases, because an authentic, missional Pentecostalism was not clearly understood nor emphasized, a spurious form of Pentecostalism was instituted in many churches, that is, a quasi-Pentecostalism that inordinately focuses on personal material blessing rather than on fulfilling God's mission in the power of the Spirit. Unfortunately, in my observation, this critical emphasis on authentic Pentecostal experience and practice continues to be neglected by many AG pastors, church leaders, and missionaries.

It was this neglect that necessitated AAGA's calling for a Decade of Pentecost in 2009. What is now required is universal "buy in" on the part of pastors, churches, and partnering

missionaries and missions organizations. In the words of the 1988 AGWM Decade of Harvest declaration, we must "consecrate ourselves to fervent prayer, fasting and Pentecostal preaching ... in pursuit of a Holy Spirit outpouring across Africa," fully believing that this emphasis "will inevitably produce the power we need to evangelize (Acts 1:8)."²⁶

2. Financial Impotence

A second shortfall mitigating the missional impact of the DOH was the endemic financial impotence of many churches. This financial impotence occurred on both national and local levels. While many churches zealously embraced the goals and vision of the DOH, the lack of financial viability often thwarted effective mobilization. As a result, national church offices went unfunded, local churches struggled in implementing their outreach strategies, and newly-created missions agencies were stymied. In such cases, the all-to-often tendency was to look to external sources for needed funding rather than applying biblical principles of giving and wealth creation. As a result, local, more viable and sustainable means of funding were not generated.

As the Africa AG mobilizes for the DOP, this need must be aggressively addressed and systematically remedied. More biblical, Spirit-driven funding models must be taught in our schools and implemented on all levels. The focus on Western-oriented funding must be balanced by a scriptural, God-focused, faith-filled African model of funding.

The simple fact is that Africa AG has grown beyond the ability of outsiders to fund its mission. If the task of reaching all of Africa and the yet-to-be-reached peoples of Africa and the world is to continue and thrive, our faith and focus must be squarely on the God of all heaven and earth who stands ready to "supply [our] every need ... according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). Biblical principles of giving must be widely taught and

practiced. Such principles include a clear understanding of God's mission along with trust in, and application of, the biblical principles of faith-filled sacrificial giving. The newly-formed Africa Financial Empowerment ministry led by AGWM missionary, Ken Krucker, has emerged to serve AG national churches in creating such a model.²⁷

CHAPTER 3:
A WAY FORWARD:
A NEW TESTAMENT “STRATEGY
OF THE SPIRIT”

As we mobilize for dramatic decadal evangelistic and missionary advance, we must do so with a keen awareness that we are engaged in a great spiritual conflict “for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

We must, therefore, never forget that ours is not a carnal but a spiritual battle and can only be fought and won with spiritual weapons (2 Cor. 10:3-4).

During this DOP, as we boldly advance into the enemy’s long-held, previously-unreached strongholds, he will inevitably mount a vicious counter offensive. He will seek to derail, distract, and demoralize the church at every turn. Scripture, however, informs us that we are not to be “outwitted by Satan” nor are we to be “ignorant of his designs” (2 Cor. 2:11). The battle for the soul of Africa will be won only as we successfully engage and defeat these entrenched spiritual powers.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul thought it necessary to inform them of the spiritual conflict in which they, and all Christians, must engage (Eph. 6:12-20). Undoubtedly, he wrote in vivid remembrance of the spiritual warfare in which he himself had

fought while in Ephesus (Acts 19:11-41).²⁸ It was also there that he had seen his greatest missionary success (Acts 19:10).²⁹ That success was achieved, however, only after he had “fought with [spiritual] beasts in Ephesus” (1 Cor. 15:32, cf. Acts 19:11, 21-41). In his instruction to the Ephesian believers, Paul alerts them to the necessity of employing the “whole armor of God”—or, as Knox translates this passage, “all of the weapons of God armoury”³⁰—as they engage in this spiritual conflict. In the same passage Paul presses his readers to be “strong *in the Lord* and in the strength of *his* might” (v. 10, emphasis added).

This spiritual warfare will not be won in conferences, classrooms, or medical clinics, as essential as these things may be; it will be won in front line hand-to-hand spiritual conflict. It will be won through Spirit-ignited intercessory prayer (Rom. 8:26;) and Spirit-empowered proclamation of the gospel accompanied by supernatural manifestations of kingdom power (Mark 16:15-16; Rom. 1:16). Further, Paul’s teaching on spiritual warfare should be understood in the context the broader “strategy of the Spirit” which he employed during his missionary career, a strategy that we will now discuss.

An careful examination and comparison of the missionary strategies of the Heavenly Father in sending Jesus into the world, of Jesus in sending His church to the nations, and of Paul in mounting his Ephesian campaign reveal certain common essential elements of a New Testament Strategy of the Spirit. This strategy, I believe, can—and should—be used as a template today for our DOP missionary and church planting efforts. Let’s now examine these strategies of the Father, Jesus, and Paul.³¹

The Father’s Missionary Strategy in Sending Jesus

The Heavenly Father “*mobilized*” the Son by sending Him to earth with a clearly-defined strategy: Jesus would come in the Father’s name (Luke 13:35; 19:38; John 5:43), and He would

carefully execute the plan the Father had given Him (Heb. 10:7; John 5:19; 12:49-50). Before He began His ministry, however, He would need to be *empowered* by the Spirit. Jesus received this empowering at His baptism when "the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove" (Luke 3:21-22). Upon receiving the Spirit Jesus immediately "began His ministry" (v. 23). His entire ministry was thus anointed and enabled Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1, 14, 16-19, Acts 10:38). In fulfilling His ministry Jesus bore *witness* to the truth by proclaiming the gospel with "authority and power" (John 1:7; Luke 4:18-19, 36) and by performing miraculous signs through the Spirit's power (Luke 5:17; 6:19). Finally, through the same enablement of the Spirit, He offered Himself up for the sins of mankind (Heb. 9:14).

Early on in His ministry Jesus began the process of passing on His redemptive mission on to His disciples. He called them (Luke 6:13-16), trained them (Mark 3:14), and empowered them (Luke 3:15-16; Acts 1:4-8; 2:33) to carry on the ministry that the Father had given to Him (John 20:22; cf. Luke 24:46-49). All along, He taught that they were to do it in the same way that they had seen Him do it (John 14:12; 20:21).

Jesus' Missionary Strategy in Sending the Church

In sending His church to the nations Jesus employed the same missionary strategy the Father had used in sending Him to earth. The three key elements of that strategy, as we have seen, were mobilization, witness, and empowering. The Father "*mobilized*" the Son by sending Him to earth to do His will; Jesus mobilized His disciples by training them and sending them out to preach the good news. Jesus bore *witness* to the kingdom by proclaiming the gospel in the power of the Spirit with signs following (Luke 4:18-19; 9:6); He then commissioned His disciples to do the same (Mark 16:15-18). And, just as He, Himself had been empowered by the Spirit before beginning His missional ministry, He commanded His

disciples to “stay in the city until [they were] clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49; cf. Acts 1:4-5, 8). The disciples obeyed, and on the Day of Pentecost “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). This empowering came to them again and again throughout their ministries (Acts 4:8; 31; 8:17-18; 9:17-18).

Paul’s Missionary Strategy in Ephesus

In his ministry Paul employed the same threefold Strategy of the Spirit that the Father had employed in sending Jesus to the earth and Jesus had employed in sending His church to the nations. He was simply “working the plan,” that is, he was emulating the missionary strategy that he had observed in Jesus and the Heavenly Father. This missionary strategy of Paul’s is indicated in both his own description of his ministry in Romans 15:17-20 and Luke’s depiction of his ministry in Acts, especially in the Ephesian Campaign (Acts 19:1-11ff).³²

Paul Describes His Missionary Strategy (Romans 15:17-20)

Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans in preparation for an upcoming visit to their city (Rom. 1:10). His visit was to be an extended stopover on a missionary journey ranging even further westward into Spain (15:28). He wrote to solicit their support for this anticipated missionary campaign (15:23-24). He hoped to prepare them for his upcoming visit by informing them of his missionary plans and by making them aware of the purpose and nature of his missionary ministry.

In 15:17-20 Paul explains to the Christians in Rome how he went about his missionary task. These verses represent his most comprehensive explanation of his missionary strategy, a strategy that relied heavily on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Paul describes his missionary strategy in this way:

¹⁷ In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. ¹⁸ or I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; ²⁰ and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, ²¹ but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.” (Rom. 15:17-21)

In this passage the apostle reveals three key elements of his missionary strategy:

1. Mobilization: Focus on the yet-to-be-reached

Paul clearly understood his calling and mission; God had called him to be “a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles” (v. 16). He had been sent to preach the gospel “where Christ was not known” (v. 20, NIV) and his eyes were steadfastly fixed on “the lands beyond” (2 Cor. 10:16). It was because of this high calling that Paul had now set his sights on Spain. With these things in mind, he wrote the Romans to explain to them how he had gone about fulfilling his missionary calling, and by implication, how he intended to do it in the future.

2. Witness: Proclamation + demonstration

At the center of Paul’s strategy to reach the Gentiles was *Spirit-empowered witness*: He was committed to boldly proclaim the message of Jesus Christ, the message he believed to be the only means of salvation (1 Tim. 2:5; cf. John 14:6; Acts 4:12). He tells the Romans that “from Jerusalem and around about as far as

Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ" (v.19, NASB). The book of Romans is itself an extended explanation of that message.

When Paul said that he had "fully preached the gospel of Christ," he was not, however, speaking exclusively of content. Nor was he claiming that he had proclaimed the gospel in every locality, or to every person. He was saying that he had included every necessary element and action required for the gospel to be presented in its powerful totality. When Paul says that he *fully* preached the gospel, he is making specific reference to how he had done it "by word and deed" (v. 18). And since Paul clearly defines "deed" as "the power of signs and wonders" he is saying that the gospel has not been fully preached until its truth has been clearly proclaimed and its power has been convincingly demonstrated.

3. Empowering: Reliance on the power of the Spirit

In this passage Paul declares his total reliance on the Spirit of God to enable him in ministry. His ministry had been in "word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders," and he did it all "by the power of the Spirit of God" (v. 19). Throughout his ministry, the Holy Spirit, whom he received when Ananias laid hands on him many years previously (Acts 9:17-18), remained the source of Paul's spiritual power. This fact dramatically influenced the way Paul carried out his apostolic ministry (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 2 Cor. 12:12; 1 Thess. 1:5).

In summary, Paul explained to the Romans that his missionary ministry was Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered, charismatic in nature, and focused on those who had never heard the message of the gospel. His aim was to "fully preach the gospel of Christ," which for Paul involved both saying and doing, and doing included a demonstration of the power of the gospel through signs and miracles performed through the power of the Spirit.

Luke Depicts Paul’s Missionary Strategy (Acts 19:1-11)

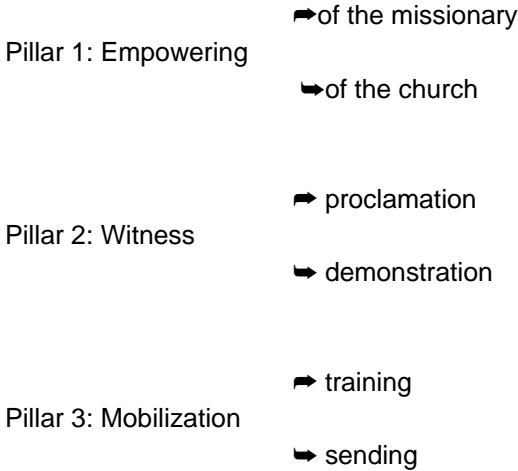
In Acts 19 Luke portrays Paul’s missionary strategy in much the same way that Paul described it in Romans 15. The emphasis is on *empowering*, *witness*, and *mobilization*. These three strategic pillars of a New Testament Strategy of the Spirit are charted in Figure 2 below. Let’s look briefly at each one as it is presented by Luke in Paul’s Ephesian Campaign:

Pillar One: Empowering

Paul arrived in Ephesus with a definite strategy in mind, a strategy that would ultimately produce his greatest missionary success.³³ As we have noted, it was the same strategy employed by the Heavenly Father in sending Jesus to the world and by Jesus in sending His church to the nations. So, just as Jesus began His ministry full of the Spirit, Paul began his Ephesian ministry full of the Holy Spirit. This fact is evident from the nature of his ministry there: he preached with boldness (cf. Acts 4:8 cf. 13, 29-31), prayed with others to receive the Spirit (19:6), and worked “extraordinary miracles” (v. 11). Throughout the book of Acts, Luke consistently portrays Paul and a Spirit-empowered, charismatic apostle (i.e., Acts 9:17-19; 13:4, 9; 16:6-7).

Paul, however, was not only concerned with himself being full of the Spirit, he was concerned with the church being full of the Spirit. If it were to fully participate in the mission of reaching all of Asia with the gospel, the Ephesian church would need to be empowered by the Spirit just as he was. Therefore, upon arriving in Ephesus, he immediately addressed the issue of the spiritual empowerment and vitality of the church there. Before he would attempt to mobilize them to reach Ephesus and Asia Minor with the gospel, they, too, would need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. He, therefore, inquires of them, “Did you receive the Holy

Figure 2
The New Testament “Strategy of the Spirit”



Spirit when you believed?” (v. 2). Or, in other words, “Are you spiritually prepared to participate in the upcoming mission?” This same concern likely persisted throughout Paul’s entire time in Ephesus. He must have continued to labor to see that those who were constantly being brought into the community of faith were also being empowered by the Spirit. It is also likely that Paul instilled in his disciples this same passion to see their converts filled with the Spirit (cf. Acts 20:20).

Thus, two essential aspects of the first pillar of Paul’s missionary Strategy of the Spirit (that is, *empowering*) are revealed: (1) the empowering of the cross-cultural missionary, and (2) the equally important empowering of workers in the church being planted (Fig. 2). This two-fold empowering thus laid the spiritual foundation for the church in Ephesus to become a center of mission

activity to reach out to the remainder of the province.

The same is true today. As we advance to fulfill our Decade of Pentecost goals of reaching millions of people for Christ, planting thousands of new churches, and reaching hundreds of yet-to-be-reach peoples and places, we must prioritize two things: the spiritual empowering of the missionaries and church planters we deploy, and the spiritual empowering of the churches we plant. Every church we plant must become a new center of Spirit-empowered missions activity. It must have within itself the spiritual dynamic and clear missionary vision necessary for it to impact its surrounding area and beyond with the gospel.³⁴

Pillar Two: Witness

Again following the pattern established by Jesus and the Father, the second pillar of Paul's missionary strategy in Ephesus was *witness*. Paul thus bore witness to the gospel in two ways: through powerful proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom of God and through equally powerful demonstrations of the Spirit's power. This proclamation began when Paul "entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8; cf. 8:12; 20:25; 28:23, 31; Matt. 24:14).³⁵ And Paul's oral witness in Ephesus was accompanied by powerful demonstrations of kingdom power (vv. 11-20). These signs of the kingdom included divine healings and demonic deliverances. Thus, the second pillar of Paul's strategy of the Spirit, like the first, had two components: powerful proclamation of the gospel and a demonstration of its power through accompanying signs. No doubt the witness of Paul's newly Spirit-empowered colleagues included the same two elements.

As we execute our Decade of Pentecost strategies we, like Paul, must be ever vigilant that we clearly and convincingly proclaim the true gospel of Christ.³⁶ We must beware of distractions and diversions from preaching this God-ordained message, including

most notably, the false “prosperity gospel” that has captivated many of our churches, and has diverted many from aggressively reaching out to the unreached with the message of Christ. As we boldly proclaim Christ to the lost, we must pray for and expect God to extend His hand to confirm the message with supernatural signs and wonders wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 4:30-33).

Pillar Three: Mobilization

Following the lead of the Father and Jesus, the third pillar of Paul’s missionary strategy of the Spirit was *mobilization*. Once the church had been empowered by the Spirit, and as the gospel was being clearly and convincingly preached, Paul began mobilizing the Ephesian church for regional missions. Paul’s mobilization of the Ephesian church is indicated in verse 10: “This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord,³⁷ both Jews and Greeks.”³⁸ Without leaving Ephesus, Paul reached the entire province of Asia with the gospel in just two short years. This could only have been accomplished by effectively mobilizing the believers in Ephesus. Paul did this in two ways: First, he trained workers and church planters in the rented school of Tyrannus (v. 9). Note the implicit cause-and-effect relationship between Paul’s leadership training and the fact that in the space of only two years everyone living in Asia heard the word of the Lord.³⁹ Further, the school’s curriculum must have included a strong practical emphasis on church planting and evangelism, and the atmosphere of the school must have been saturated with the presence of the Spirit.⁴⁰

Then, once the believers had been trained—or more likely, while they were yet being trained—Paul sent them into every corner of the province to preach the gospel and plant Spirit-empowered missional churches. Doubtlessly, they employed the same missionary strategy as their mentor. The application of this

strategy resulted in a spontaneous multiplication of churches throughout the entire region so that in just two years “all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (v. 10). Paul’s strategy clearly included reaching people from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, for Luke says the gospel was presented to “both Jews and Greeks.”

In light of these powerful truths, every church leader, Bible school teacher, and local pastor in Africa must, like Paul and Jesus before them, envision themselves as mobilizers of the church. They must, as the Spirit leads, acquire the vision and skills needed to train and send their people into the harvest field declaring the message of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit—and planting His church among every people and in every place until Jesus comes again.

CONCLUSION

On Pentecost Sunday this year the Africa Assemblies of God will enter the fourth year of its Decade of Pentecost emphasis. During the first three years of the initiative the churches have made significant progress in setting and implementing their DOP goals. Already thousands have been reached for Christ, hundreds of churches have been planted, and formerly unreached tribes have been engaged. Others national AG churches are just beginning to mobilize, yet mobilizing they are. With ever-increasing force, the wind of the Spirit is blowing across the continent.

As we move boldly forward in the DOP, we would do well to learn from our experiences of the Decade of Harvest. We must move together with unified vision and purpose; we must cultivate and facilitate synergistic partnerships; we must remain ever focused on evangelism and church planting; we must train *for* the harvest; we must heed the call of the Spirit moving us to reach the unreached peoples of Africa; we must find biblical, Spirit-driven, Africa-centric means of funding the mission; and we must persistently emphasize authentic Pentecostal experience and practice in all of our churches.

Above all, as we advance the DOP, we must firmly grasp and effectively apply a biblical, Spirit-driven strategy of mission. Such a New Testament Strategy of the Spirit can serve as an effective framework for African church's mobilizing for effective mission. Therefore, during these final seven years of the DOP initiative, we anticipate the greatest forward advance, and the greatest harvest of souls, in the one-hundred year history of the church of Africa. Let us, therefore, unreservedly commit ourselves to this God-given vision of the Decade of Pentecost.

ENDNOTES

1. Specifically, these early missionaries from the Azusa Street Mission, Los Angeles, California, went to Monrovia, Liberia, and Benguela, Angola. Cf. *The Apostolic Faith*, Vol. I, No. 6, Mar 1907.
2. All scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from the English Standard Version (ESV), Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 2002.
3. A close examination of the five recordings of Jesus' Great Commission reveals three target audiences: (1) "every creature" (Mark 16:5, NKJV), that is, every person; (2) "all nations" (Matt. 28:19; cf. Luke 24:47), that is, every *ethne*, or people group; and (3) to "the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8), that is, every place.
4. AAGA is a multinational coalition of 50 African national churches and the Assemblies of God missionaries working in partnership with them.
5. The Decade of Pentecost website can be accessed at www.DecadeofPentecost.org.
6. Day of Pentecost 2013 will take place on May 19.
7. Acts 1:8 Conferences are missions mobilization conferences conducted by the Acts in Africa Initiative in cooperation with AAGA-related national churches. The Acts in Africa initiative website can be accessed at www.ActsinAfrica.org.
8. "Africa Assemblies of God Decade of Pentecost Goals Summary," as of April 15, 2013. See Appendix 1. Note: Twenty-seven of the 50 AAGA-related national churches in Africa have not as yet communicated their Decade of Pentecost goals to the Acts in Africa office.
9. In Africa the "Decade of Harvest" was known as "Africa Harvest 2000."
10. AAGA was established in 1990.
11. Both agencies were established by AAGA in 2000.
12. Now called Assemblies of God World Missions or AGWM.
13. Now called Africa Harvest Ministries or AHM.

14. Also known as Africa's Hope or AH.
15. According to Africa's Hope, the Africa AG is presently training 14,000 ministerial students in 251 Bible and extension schools across sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian Ocean Basin.
16. "Declaration of Commitment to the Worldwide 'Decade of Harvest' through Africa Harvest 2000," January 13, 1989, All Africa Leadership Conference of the Assemblies of God, Lilongwe, Malawi.
17. "Declaration of Commitment—'Decade of Harvest' 'Harvest Africa-2000,'" Feb. 22-26, 1988, Harare, Zimbabwe.
18. In my ministry travels in thirty-one African countries in all parts of Africa, I have observed the need firsthand.
19. "Africa Assemblies of God Alliance-AAGA, Minutes of the 2004 General Assembly," October 6-10, 2004, Accra, Ghana.
20. AGWM Statistical Report, December 31, 2010.
21. "Declaration of Commitment to the Worldwide 'Decade of Harvest' through Africa Harvest 2000," January 13, 1989, All Africa Leadership Conference of the Assemblies of God, Lilongwe, Malawi.
22. "Training for the harvest" was the original ATTS mission statement.
23. Those coalitions included the East Africa Assemblies of God Alliance (EAAGA) Missions, the Central Africa Assemblies of God Alliance (CAAGA) Missions, the Southern Africa Assemblies of God Alliance (SAAGA) Missions, and the West Africa Assemblies of God Alliance (WAAGA) Missions.
24. Denzil R. Miller and Enson Lwesya, eds., *Globalizing Pentecostal Missions in Africa: The Emerging Missionary Movement in the Africa Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: AIA Publications, 2011), 8.
25. Empirical evidence includes statistical data gleaned from "Annual World Statistics" reports completed by national church leaders and submitted to the Assemblies of God World Missions Research Office for compilation and reporting. Anecdotal evidence includes the authors personal experience in training leaders and ministering in Holy Spirit conferences in more than 30 sub-Saharan conferences. During these conferences he has been able to preach

- in many AG churches and talk with AG leaders on all levels from local to national.
26. “Declaration of Commitment—‘Decade of Harvest’ ‘Harvest Africa-2000,’” Feb. 22-26, 1988, Harare Zimbabwe.
 27. The Africa Financial Empowerment (AFE) website can be accessed at www.AfricaFinancialEmpowerment.org.
 28. This theme of spiritual warfare in Ephesus is developed further by C. Peter Wagner in chapter 21 of his book, *The Acts of the Holy Spirit: A Modern Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000), 466-489.
 29. Robert P. Menzies calls Paul’s work in Ephesus “the chief achievement of [his] missionary carrier” (*Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts*. Sheffield, Eng: Sheffield, Academic Press, 2005, 220). Robert C. Tannehill calls it “the climax of Paul’s missionary work” (*The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 2, “The Acts of the Apostles,” Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1994, 236.) Tannehill continues, “Ephesus is not just another stop in a series. It is Paul’s last major place of new mission work; indeed, it is the sole center of mission noted in the last stage of Paul’s work” and is “meant as a lasting model for the church after Paul’s departure” (236).
 30. Eph. 6:12, *The New Testament in the Translation of Monsignor Ronald Knox* (Sheed and Ward, 1944).
 31. Some of this material is adapted from the author’s book, *Empowered for Global Mission: A Missionary Look at the Book of Acts* (Springfield, MO: Life Publishers Intl., 2001), 235-242; 261-266.
 32. Paul also describes his missionary methods in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and 1 Thessalonians 1:5-8. In both descriptions he emphasizes the central role of the Spirit’s powering in advancing the kingdom of God.
 - 33 See note 31.
 34. Early twentieth-century Anglican missiologist, Roland Allen, addressed this issue: “There is no particular virtue in attacking a centre or establishing a church in an important place unless the church established in the important place is a church possessed of sufficient life to be a source of light to the whole country round”

- (*Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 1962), 12.
35. Paul's ministry in the Ephesian synagogue is reminiscent of the ministries of Jesus and the apostles in Jerusalem, who daily taught and preached in the temple (Luke 19:47; Acts 5:42). Paul's teaching concerning the kingdom of God also reminds us of Jesus' post-resurrection ministry when for forty days He spoke "about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Jesus' primary kingdom themes during this time were the global mission of the church (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8) and the need for the empowering of the Spirit to accomplish that mission (Matt. 28:20; Mark 16:17-18; Luke 24:49; John 20:22; Acts 1:8). Paul likely emphasized these kingdom themes in his teaching ministry in Ephesus. While in Ephesus, Paul also taught "publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20-21).
 36. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul defined the gospel: "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you ... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared [to many]" (vv. 1, 3-4). The message of Christ's death and resurrection also formed the heart of the apostolic *kerygma* as recorded in his sermons in Acts (9:20, 22; 13:26-33; 14:15; 17:2-3, 17-18). Today, the message of "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," must remain the centerpiece of our missionary ministries.
 37. That is, the message of the *Lord* Jesus Christ, the gospel.
 38. Not only did the gospel permeate all of Asia, as is indicated in verse 10, at the same time the gospel penetrated all of the city of Ephesus, for the message of Christ's power "became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled" (v. 17).
 39. C. Peter Wagner concurs, writing, "What would the curriculum have been like in such a school? Luke seems to suggest a cause-and-effect relationship between this and the fact that 'all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus' (v. 10) before the end of

two years. This means that the chief foci of the curriculum were likely to have been evangelism and church planting” (*The Acts of the Holy Spirit: A Modern Commentary on the Book of Acts*, Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000), 470.

40. Paul’s training procedure also seems to have included on-the-job mentoring. This is hinted at in verses 8 and 9 where Paul included the newly Spirit-baptized disciples in his evangelistic ministry. Luke notes that Paul “took the disciples with him” as he reasoned daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This mentoring relationship is further evidenced by the way he remained in close contact with the disciples in Ephesus (20:17-38). Paul presumably mentored his students in his missionary methods. He later wrote Timothy in the same city of Ephesus instructing him, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

OTHER WORKS BY THE AUTHOR

Power Ministry: How to Minister in the Spirit's Power (2004)
(also available in French, Portuguese, Malagasy,
Kinyarwanda, and Chichewa)

*Empowered for Global Mission: A Missionary Look at
the Book of Acts* (2005)

From Azusa to Africa to the Nations (2005)
(also available in French, Spanish, and Portuguese)

Acts: The Spirit of God in Mission (2007)

In Step with the Spirit: Studies in the Spirit-filled Walk (2008)

*The Kingdom and the Power: The Kingdom of God:
A Pentecostal Interpretation* (2009)

*Experiencing the Spirit: A Study of the Work of the Spirit
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*Power Encounter: Ministering in the Power and
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*You Can Minister in God's Power: A Guide for
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*The Spirit of God in Mission: A Vocational Commentary
on the Book of Acts* (2011)

OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

Proclaiming Pentecost: 100 Sermon Outlines on the Power of the Holy Spirit (2011) (Soon to be available in French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Swahili) (Associate editor with Mark Turney, editor)

Globalizing Pentecostal Missions in Africa (2011)
(Editor, with Enson Lwesya)

The 1:8 Promise of Jesus: The Key to World Harvest (2012)

Power for Mission: The Africa Assemblies of God Mobilizing to Reach the Unreached (Editor, 2013)

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