

# **THE BAKERSFIELD STATEMENT:**

## **Declaration of Warning Concerning Influencers Global Ministries**

### **PREAMBLE**

Influencers Global Ministries (“the Influencers”; IGM) was founded in 2001.<sup>1</sup> The core goal of the ministry is to “guide individuals into an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup> The purpose of The Bakersfield Statement is to call out the grave errors and unbiblical doctrines of the Influencers. Bakersfield, California is home to one of the regional branches (“Influencers Bakersfield”) which is hosting over one major event per month, drawing many churches and pastors to believe the Influencers are on the cutting edge of Christian spirituality. Their impact is growing steadily and rapidly in the area. Additionally, the Influencers are spreading both nationally and globally, listing on their website over three dozen new U.S. cities in development and locations in Brazil, Costa Rica, Colombia, five African nations, and Canada.

This statement is not an “in-house” discussion of secondary issues of theology. The Influencers represent a direct frontal assault on the gospel of Jesus Christ, the authority of Scripture, the sovereignty of God, and the historic Christian faith.

- The Bakersfield Statement is a call to orthodox pastors to stand against this dangerous assault on the Church.
- The Bakersfield Statement is a call to local churches to guard your own flocks by severing all ties with the Influencers (2 John 10–11).
- The Bakersfield Statement is a call to Christian schools to sever all ties with the Influencers and seek orthodox materials for students.
- The Bakersfield Statement is a plea with those leading and involved with the Influencers to abandon this organization and instead be disciplined in the Scriptures by qualified elders in the local church.

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<sup>1</sup> Rocky Fleming, along with several other businessmen, was instrumental in the founding of the organization.

<sup>2</sup> Influencers Global Ministries, “About Us,” Influencers, 2023, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://www.influencers.org/about-us/>.

## **We, the undersigned, agree with the following AFFIRMATIONS and DENIALS related directly to the Influencers.**

The following articles express our deep concern about the errors of the Influencers.

### **ARTICLE 1: The Claim of Special Revelation from God**

**We AFFIRM** that to claim special revelation from God to spiritually exercise authority over others is a sign of a false teacher. Spiritual authority is derived from Scripture alone and given to qualified male shepherds by Christ, the head of the church (Col. 1:18), through His Spirit setting apart men (Acts 20:28) by the calling and ordination of other qualified male shepherds (1 Tim. 4:14, 5:22; 2 Tim. 2:2).

**We DENY** that any group claiming to be Christian may be led by one individual claiming personal revelation from God. The founder of the organization was in “his own desperate search for God’s answers [and] **God breathed** John 15 into his spirit. ‘If you abide in Me,’ Jesus said, ‘you will bear fruit’” (emphasis added). The founder gathered in 2001 with seven other Christian businessmen and “in an honest, heartfelt season of searching for intimacy with Christ, God **downloaded** some specific steps and by the end of it, the men realized that something very special had just been given to them by God” (emphasis added).<sup>3</sup> This became what is now known as “The Journey.” *The Journey Leader’s Guide* states that, “The Journey has a rhythm and flow. It syncs with the Holy Spirit who is present in it. It is a message from Scripture that is slowly transferred, as the participants engage in the process. **It must be followed as inspired**, or it will not become a healthy organism that reproduces” (emphasis added).<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the term “downloaded,” while a modern term, heavily implies direct revelation from God.

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<sup>3</sup> Influencers Global Ministries, “Our History,” Influencers, 2023, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://influencers.org/about-us/our-history/>. Additionally, *The Journey Leaders Guide, 2023 Revision* states, “When Rocky Fleming guided the first Journey group and God downloaded the process to him.” No author named, *The Journey Leader’s Guide, 2023 Revision* (Rogers, AR: Prayer Cottage Publications), 18.

<sup>4</sup> No author named, *The Journey Leader’s Guide, 2023 Revision* (Rogers, AR: Prayer Cottage Publications), 73.

The terms “God breathed” and “inspired” both represent English versions of *theopneustos*, used in 2 Timothy 3:16 of the giving of Scripture by God. The frequent use of the word “revelation” is found throughout the Influencers’ written documents. This term is employed as a manner of speaking about receiving extra-biblical messages from the Lord during private prayer (e.g., pp. 16, 34, 42, 58 of The Journey Study Guide). This understanding of extra-biblical revelation, combined with claims that the founder of IGM has received “inspired” revelation which he has “downloaded” from God, imputes an authoritative and prophetic quality to IGM materials.

## **ARTICLE 2: The Devaluing of Expository Bible Preaching**

**We AFFIRM** the high place of expository Bible preaching in the Christian life in concert with membership in a local church. The preached word is the preeminent means of sanctifying the church as explained in 2 Timothy 4:2, James 1:19–24, 1 Corinthians 2:4, and Romans 10:14, “How will they hear without a preacher?”<sup>5</sup> While we affirm that Protestants heroically gave their lives to translate the Bible into common languages as an inestimable gift for the average Christian to read and grow in the faith, this should never minimize, nor replace, Christ’s gift of ministers who publicly read and teach the scriptures for the purpose of our maturation in sanctification (Eph. 4:11–14; 1 Tim 4:11–16; 2 Tim 4:1–5).

**We DENY** that the experiential path sought by the Influencers is a pathway to truth. Spiritual truth is found solely in Scripture and is to be taught and preached by qualified elders in the context of the local church (John 21:15–17; Acts 20:17–31; Eph 4:11–16; 1 Tim 4:11–16; 1 Tim 5:17; 2 Tim 2:2; 4:1–5). The Influencers use “guides” who are leaders of small groups who are not permitted to question, correct, or reprove anything that is taught or believed in the group. Because they perceive everyone as being on an individual path to truth, doctrinal standards are highly discouraged, and the truth of theology is minimized. This is explained in *The Journey Leader’s Guide*: “Guides must influence from the perspective of a fellow participant, NOT THAT OF A TEACHER” (emphasis theirs).<sup>6</sup> And, “Remember, you are not ‘teaching,’ The Journey! You are facilitating discussion

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<sup>5</sup> All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the Legacy Standard Bible.

<sup>6</sup> *The Journey Leaders Guide, 2023 Revision* (Rogers, AR: Prayer Cottage Publications), 10.

and leading out of your own experience.”<sup>7</sup> IGM material asserts that quality Bible teaching does little more than keep a believer alive and is not a vital part of sanctification: “I had found it so easy to get all of my feeding in God’s Word from the great teaching I received in church. But this diet was not enough to grow me. In fact, it was barely enough to sustain me, evidenced by the way I would fall back toward my old sinful nature as the week passed.”<sup>8</sup>

### ARTICLE 3: The Devaluing of Qualified Elders

**We AFFIRM** the New Testament pattern of a plurality of qualified elders as described in the qualification passages of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The church appoints elders, as Paul with Timothy, by other qualified elders who commission and lay hands upon men who have been tested (1 Tim 3:10), trained (1 Tim 4:6), and approved (2 Tim 2:15).

**We DENY** that spiritual leaders may be self-appointed, particularly when claiming to give leadership to the Church universal. *The Journey Leaders Guide* states, “God doesn’t call people who are qualified. He calls people who are willing, and then He qualifies them. (Richard Parker).” The founder of the organization has never been biblically qualified or ordained as a suitable elder or shepherd that can be ascertained from the IGM published materials. He is self-appointed and the clear final spiritual authority in the ministry, along with his board of directors. Pastors of local churches are only characterized positively if they see the Influencers as having led them to the changes the Influencers could provide. “It wasn’t long before pastors and churches began to inquire about this life-changing process.”<sup>9</sup> Pastors are generally viewed as temporary and mostly unnecessary except to facilitate the agenda of the Influencers. *The Journey to the Inner Chamber* delineates “mentors,” defined as pastors of local churches, and states that the Christian needs “the **occasional touch** of a mentor to help him”

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>8</sup> Rocky Fleming, *The Journey to the Inner Chamber* (Las Vegas: Next Century Publishing, 2010), 39. Please note that *The Journey to the Inner Chamber* has multiple editions in which the page numbers differ from one another. The page numbers referenced in The Bakersfield Statement cite the 2010 edition, as noted in the author’s explanation of the book inside the front cover.

<sup>9</sup> Influencers Global Ministries, “Our History,” Influencers, 2023, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://influencers.org/about-us/our-history/>.

(emphasis added).<sup>10</sup> Only those who have completed the Journey are “released to take the name ‘Influencer’ and begin to bear fruit that lasts by expressing Christ-like love to all those around him.”<sup>11</sup> This devalues the high calling of the local church elders and elevates the Influencers as approving or disapproving of such men.

#### **ARTICLE 4: The Devaluing of the Local Church**

**We AFFIRM** that the believer in Christ is placed into the body of Christ with the full duty and expectation of membership and meaningful accountability to a local church led by qualified elders (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 14:23; 20:17–31; Rom 12:3ff; 1 Cor 12:1ff; Gal 6:6; Eph 4:11ff; 1 Thess 5:12–13; Heb 13:7, 17; 1 Pet 5:1–5).

**We DENY** that a parachurch organization is ever the means by which God leads His church. The Influencers place a high emphasis on the Christian faith as being only an individualistic relationship between believers and Christ. While their official statement of faith affirms the local church, in practice, they affirm the priority of the individual over the meaningful involvement in and accountability to the local church. The local church is devalued in that the Influencers believe they exist because God “is calling His Church back to himself.”<sup>12</sup> “We believe God is awakening The Church” (through the Influencers).<sup>13</sup>

#### **ARTICLE 5: The Embracing of Mysticism and Emotionalism**

**We AFFIRM** the historic protestant faith in which the ordinary means of grace are available to all true Christians. These means of grace function in the context of membership in the local church and include the reading and preaching of Scripture, baptism, the Lord’s supper, prayer, worship, fellowship, and church

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<sup>10</sup> Fleming, *The Journey to the Inner Chamber*, 35–36.

<sup>11</sup> Influencers Global Ministries, “9-month Journey,” Influencers, 2023, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://influencers.org/the-journey/9-month-journey/>.

<sup>12</sup> Influencers Global Ministries, “Our History,” Influencers, 2023, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://influencers.org/about-us/our-history/>.

<sup>13</sup> Influencers Global Ministries, “Our DNA,” Influencers, 2023, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://influencers.org/about-us/our-dna/>.

discipline. The historic Christian faith sees these means of grace within the church as the instrumental means to “abiding in Christ” (John 15:4). Jesus clearly distinguishes those who abide in him from those who fail to abide in him. Those who abide are born again believers. Those who do not abide in him are false professors who will be cut off and cast into the fire (John 15:6). We affirm the Westminster Shorter Catechism wherein it states that, “The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.”

**We DENY** that “abiding in Christ” is the attainment of emotional and mystical experiences only available to those who go through the Influencers program or those who find a mystical secret that leads them into a spiritual experience not available to all of Christ’s church through the means Christ has given in his word. “At its core, the Influencers is a ministry which guides individuals into an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.”<sup>14</sup> The goal of the program is to guide people to what they call “the inner chamber,” in which they now experience a mystical state of spiritual awakening. The body of Christ is divided into those who do “abide” and those who do not “abide.” For the Influencers, John 15 teaches that “abiding in Christ” is an experience of some Christians who have gone through the Journey, or something akin to the Journey. This “abiding in Christ” is demonstrated in emotional experiences and a nebulous definition of the fruit of the Spirit. These experiences are not anchored in Christ’s own teaching about keeping the commandments (John 15:10). The full nine-month Journey is to begin with the step called “Enlightenment.” “The Enlightened segment of The Journey is the foundation of the journey process. The step by step understanding of the four personal aspects of God (He Knows, He Cares, He is Willing and He is Able) are (*sic*) designed to help the participant realize that God is a loving, caring and intimate God who wants to involve Himself in every area of the participant’s life.”<sup>15</sup> *The Journey to the Inner Chamber* describes “this special

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<sup>14</sup> Influencers Global Ministries, “About Us,” Influencers, 2023, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://www.influencers.org/about-us/>.

<sup>15</sup> Influencers Global Ministries, “9-month Journey,” Influencers, 2023, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://influencers.org/the-journey/9-month-journey/>.

'secret' place."<sup>16</sup> The author further describes spiritual growth as a "mystical journey."<sup>17</sup> The New Testament never describes spiritual growth as a mystical journey. Instead, Isaiah 8:19–20 points believers to the Scriptures as the source of truth. In the context of those pursuing answers from mystical sources, Isaiah writes, "Now when they say to you, 'Inquire of the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.'" We are to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

## **ARTICLE 6: The Devaluing of the Bible as the Sole Source of Spiritual Authority**

**We AFFIRM** that the written Word of God is the sole and supreme authority for Christian life and godliness (Ps 19:7–9; 138:2; 2 Tim 3:16–17)."

**We DENY** that extra-biblical emotional experiences, or teaching not rooted solely in Scripture, can give any added information or revelation concerning God (2 Pet 1:19–21; Rev 22:18–19). As Proverbs 30:5–6 makes clear, "Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar" (cf. Deut 4:2; Rev 22:18–19). But for the Influencers, the "Enlightenment" segment of the Journey gives a "new understanding of God." And this new understanding of God comes by first reading the book, *The Journey into the Inner Chamber*, as a revelatory allegory seen as spiritually authoritative for Journey participants.<sup>18</sup> In fact, a new recruit's response to the allegory is the guide for their suitability for the program: *The Journey Leader's Guide* states, "It is important to spend some time with your Journey recruits, discussing the precepts laid out in *The Journey to the Inner Chamber*. This book and their reaction to it will tell the recruits if the nine-month Journey is right for them and will help you, as a Guide, assess the spiritual state

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<sup>16</sup> Influencers Global Ministries, interview with Bryan Craig and Rocky Fleming, *The Secret Place*, podcast audio, August 24, 2023, <https://influencers.org/resources/podcasts/>.

<sup>17</sup> Fleming, *The Journey to the Inner Chamber*, 112.

<sup>18</sup> Influencers Global Ministries, "9-month Journey," Influencers, 2023, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://influencers.org/the-journey/9-month-journey/>.

of your future participants.”<sup>19</sup> Rather, God honors only the one who is “humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at [His] word” (Isa 66:2). While the Influencers Journey program highlights a method of looking at the Bible (The “STAR” method: Scripture, Thought conveyed, Application made, Response given), the “Thought conveyed” part denies Scripture as divinely objective truth with a discernable authorial intent, but rather asks the participant to record what the Scripture passage subjectively means to him.

Further, **WE DENY** the Influencers’ view of Scripture as lacking clarity, or being mysteriously hidden from any believer (Heb 5:11–14). The organization teaches that, “As the new baby in Christ matures, he needs to be moved to a deeper understanding of God’s truths that are *hidden in the Bible*.”<sup>20</sup> The truths of Scripture, according to their material, “are often hidden from plain view.”<sup>21</sup> This view of Scripture is contrary to 1 Corinthians 2:14 which states that the truth of Scripture is hidden only to the lost person: “But a natural man does not accept the depths of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually examined.” In contrast, Psalm 119 presents the Scripture as understandable and accessible (e.g., 119:2, 4, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 18, 19, 24, 27, 34, 36, 66, 71, 99, 104, 105, 108, 125, 128, 130, 160, 169, 176).

## **ARTICLE 7: The Alteration of the Biblical Gospel**

**We AFFIRM** that the biblically required response to the gospel is God-given faith which is necessarily demonstrated in the ongoing fruit of repentance and obedience (Matt 3:8; 4:17; Mark 8:34; Luke 3:8; John 1:12; 4:41; 15:10; Acts 2:38, 46–47; 3:19; 8:22; 13:48; 17:30; 20:21; Rom 1:16; 3:21–22; 1 Cor 15:1–4; Eph 2:8–9; Titus 3:5; Jas 2:17; Rev 16:11).

**We DENY** that emotional experience may be equated with a genuine encounter with God, and that this emotional experience is indicative of actual saving faith (Matt 13:20). While the doctrinal statement of the Influencers promotes the gospel in theory, in practice, the emphasis of the ministry is geared toward

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<sup>19</sup> *The Journey Leaders Guide, 2023 Revision* (Rogers, AR: Prayer Cottage Publications), 12.

<sup>20</sup> Fleming, *The Journey to the Inner Chamber*, 27. Emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.



emotional transformation, not repentance and saving faith. The emphasis is that God “desire[s] for intimacy with His children,” such that the emotional mystical journey is one way in which “God began inviting us into new opportunities.”<sup>22</sup> The Influencers promote that a person can seek a “personal, abiding, intimate relationship with the Lord” which may then *result* in salvation.<sup>23</sup> The emotional experience conjured up at a retreat is presented as essentially equal to salvation in Christ. Salvation is presented as a major change to one’s marriage, work, etc.<sup>24</sup> *The Journey to the Inner Chamber* teaches that the person without Christ has the major spiritual need of “unconditional acceptance.”<sup>25</sup> The new believer is described as spiritually unhealthy until he has discovered the spiritual secrets offered by the Influencers.<sup>26</sup> According to the author, the new believer has vital spiritual things missing from his life.<sup>27</sup> This is mystic Gnosticism repackaged. It is the seeking of special higher knowledge only available to some.

## **ARTICLE 8: The Disconnect with the Historic Faith**

**We AFFIRM** that biblical Christianity has a heritage of gospel proclamation, defense of the Scripture, elevation of the church, and evangelization of the lost. The history of the church affirms the constant providential work of God to spread the gospel, transform the lost, and continue the growth of kingdom citizens.

**We DENY** that any parachurch organization with no connection to the great providential events of church history may lay claim to being the hope for the church. While it is true that the church has often had seasons of greater light or darkness, due to relative moral and doctrinal decay, Christ is building his church

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<sup>22</sup> Influencers Global Ministries, “About Us,” Influencers, 2023, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://www.influencers.org/about-us/>.

<sup>23</sup> Influencers Global Ministries, “Val Nixon, Tulsa, OK,” Influencers, 2023, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://influencers.org/written-testimonies/val-nixon-tulsa-ok/>.

<sup>24</sup> Fleming, *The Journey to the Inner Chamber*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. The Protestant Reformation is a reformation of the church in the midst of the spiritual darkness that descended upon her in the late Medieval period. But the Reformers never claimed to be receiving new revelation from the Lord. Contrary to the Influencers, the Reformers exhausted themselves, and often gave their lives, to reform the church from within. They did not form “parachurch” ministries to bring a corrective to the Church universal. It seems that the move of God in the world starts with the founding of Influencers Global Ministries in 2001. According to published materials, when we abide, then we are the laborers Christ will employ for the harvest and “The Church has failed to understand this.”<sup>28</sup> The use of the capital in “Church” is employed to refer to the universal church. This is a bold claim for IGM to be the corrective for the entire Church.

## **ARTICLE 9: The Devaluing of Progressive Sanctification**

**We AFFIRM** that walking by grace alone through faith alone is necessarily expressed in obedience to all that God commands in Scripture. The Holy Spirit transforms us ever more into the image of Christ as we walk by faith in Christ and in accord with God’s word. While the best of us will never make more than small beginnings in holiness prior to our glorification, the standard of God’s holy requirement in the Law is not thereby lowered.

**We DENY** walking in obedience to the commands of Christ is something which happens as a result of mystical experience, or as a result of the Journey. For example, one testimonial affirms that during an Influencers retreat, “I came face to face with God” and then the author credits that retreat for complete transforming obedience to the Lord.<sup>29</sup> Walking in obedience to the commands of Christ is presented as something that happens as a result of mystical experiences and the Journey. This is nothing more than a rehashing of the errors of the Wesleyan-Holiness and Keswick theologies of the Higher Life movement teaching that a second work of grace is necessary to truly experience God in intimate personalized ways. Further, we deny the teaching that “true holiness is

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<sup>28</sup> Rocky Fleming, *Abide: An Allegory of Truth* (Rogers, AR: Prayer Cottage Publications, 2018), 104.

<sup>29</sup> Influencers Global Ministries, “Val Nixon, Tulsa, OK,” Influencers, 2023, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://influencers.org/written-testimonies/val-nixon-tulsa-ok/>.

not our being sin-free, but rather that we sin less.”<sup>30</sup> The organization teaches that it is possible for the true abiding disciple to arrive spiritually to a place where other Christians are not: “I knew that I had completely walked through the door to ‘the Inner Chamber.’”<sup>31</sup>

## **ARTICLE 10: The Denial of the Sovereign Omnipotence of God**

**We AFFIRM** that God is wholly sovereign in all his dealings with humanity, that God “works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11), that God “[declares] the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My counsel will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’” (Isa 46:10), that “our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases” (Psalm 115:3). We affirm God’s omnipotence in all things. God is able to do all his holy will and no one can thwart his hand (Job 42:1–2; Is 14:27; 43:13; Lu 1:37). See also Lamentations 3:37–38, Genesis 50:20, and Romans 8:28.

**We DENY** the teaching of IGM materials that God has “limitations at times to work in our lives” and that a person “can hinder God’s ability.”<sup>32</sup> We deny that “as mighty as God is, He can be hindered and limited in being able to help us.”<sup>33</sup> We deny a view of God in which “life [is] out of God’s control.”<sup>34</sup> We deny any view of God’s grace toward us that is limited by our own will. If our will is the basis of God’s grace, then grace is no longer grace. It is our own work (Eph. 1:3–14, Rom 9:16; Rom 11:6).

## **ARTICLE 11: The Denial of Biblical Regeneration and the Indwelling Spirit of God**

**We AFFIRM** that salvation in Christ is a regenerative act of God in which the saved is a completely new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), possesses “every spiritual blessing” (Eph

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<sup>30</sup> Fleming, *Abide*, 90.

<sup>31</sup> Fleming, *The Journey to the Inner Chamber*, 108.

<sup>32</sup> Journey Study Guide, “Enlightened,” 41.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>34</sup> Journey Study Guide, “Enabled,” 126.

1:3), and God has “granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the full knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (2 Pet 1:3).

**We DENY** that the making of a “new man” is a post-salvation journey or experience as taught in *The Journey to the Inner Chamber*.<sup>35</sup> We deny that the filling of the Holy Spirit is only available to those who have arrived at the “inner chamber.” *The Journey to the Inner Chamber states that the “Influencer is filled with the Lord’s Spirit because he comes directly from the Feast in the Inner Chamber”* (emphasis added).<sup>36</sup> This creates a division of Christians *without* the work of the Spirit of God and those *with* the work of the Spirit of God (cf. 1 Cor 12:13; Rom 8:9).

The Bakersfield Statement is a call to stand against this assault on the Church, for pastors to guard their flocks from the Influencers, for Christian schools to cease using IGM materials, for those in leadership of IGM to abandon the organization and disavow affiliation, and for those attending Influencers events to cease affiliation with the Influencers (2 John 10–11).

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<sup>35</sup> Fleming, *The Journey to the Inner Chamber*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.