

Don't Join the Cult of the Backslider

Many young adults today are abandoning biblical faith or mixing it with other religions. How should we respond?

Since the Wild Goose Festival was held in North Carolina's mountains, you might be tempted to think it was a typical bluegrass festival. Think again. The organizers of this event, which attracted 1,500 people in late June, say their quasi-Christian conference "is going to grow into the largest, best run, most dynamic religious happening in the U.S."

If a slick-haired TV evangelist had made such a pompous statement we would have rolled our eyes and laughed the guy off the stage. But the founder of Wild Goose, a peace activist from Northern Ireland named Gareth Higgins, is convinced his movement will capture the hearts of young Americans who are questioning their evangelical faith and exploring other options.

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**and stand in the
pulpit!"**

To
help them discover this new spiritual path, Higgins brought in
an assortment of
authors, artists, musicians and activists, all from the far
left side of the
Christian spectrum, to speak or perform June 23-26 at Wild
Goose. They included
Jay Bakker, son of TV evangelist Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker;
Frank Schaeffer,
son of evangelical authors Francis and Edith Schaeffer; and
San Francisco
pastor Paul Fromberg, who described his 2005 marriage to
another man and told
the crowd: "God is changing the church through the bodies of
gay men."

The appeal of Wild Goose is
tragic. Many young adults today are leaving the faith
altogether or abandoning
its core tenets. They were raised by Christian parents, but
they feel boxed in
by denominations or doctrines; others are turned off by right-
wing politics;
others are rethinking abortion, homosexuality or even the need
for marriage.
They want a kinder, gentler, softer Christianity that is
acceptable to
secular culture rather than one that
confronts and contradicts it.

The
organizers of the Wild Goose Festival, along with a host of
similar voices, are
ready to lure an entire generation down a different path—one
that mixes

Christianity with other religions, throws out biblical morality and celebrates spiritual rebellion. I call it the Cult of the Backslider, and I believe it is one of the greatest challenges we face today.

We are deaf if we don't hear the alarm bells ringing. The Wild Goose phenomenon is only one indicator of that America's faith is waning and that dark spiritual forces are at work behind the scenes. As we respond to the crisis we must understand the biblical definition of *heresy*. Here are five clear characteristics of heretics, according to New Testament writers:

They deny the lordship of Christ. The apostle John wrote: "Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist" (1 John 4:3, NASB). Any teaching that minimizes the supremacy of Christ, or that elevates other gods or religions, will lead to deception. (Many "post-Christians" today encourage a blending of world religions; some might chant to Hare Krishna while others mix Islam and Christianity.)

They are motivated by greed. Peter warned that heretics have hearts "trained in greed" (2 Pet. 2:14) and that they operate like the false prophet Balaam, who performed his sorcery in order to get rich. We've had our share of false prophets in the charismatic/Pentecostal movement, and we're only now beginning to reap the consequences as megachurches built

on greedy preachers begin to crumble.

They lead people into sexual immorality. The epistle of Jude (the only book of the Bible dedicated exclusively to the topic of false prophets) warns of heretics who “turn the grace of God into licentiousness” (v. 4) and “defile the flesh” (v. 8) through immorality. Heresy almost always gives people permission to engage in sexual sin. That’s why backsliders are eager to believe it.

They encourage experimentation with paganism. Paul warned Timothy that in the latter days Christians would fall away from the faith because of teachers promoting “deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons” (see 1 Tim. 4:1). Heretical teachings often lure people to engage in occultic practices.

They “sneak in” to the church without being noticed. Another common trait of heresy is its ability to mask itself. Peter warned that false prophets “will secretly introduce destructive heresies” (2 Pet. 2:1). Heretical teaching rarely comes from the outside. Instead, it enters the church in ways we would never expect: through a best-selling Christian author, a wildly popular celebrity or right over the airwaves through a Christian TV program. It might even walk down the church aisle and stand in the pulpit!

May God protect us from the Cult of the Backslider. I’m praying that He will raise up young leaders

who are filled with
compassion, empowered by the Holy Ghost and brave enough to
point their
generation back to biblical truth.

J. Lee Grady is
contributing editor of *Charisma*. You
can follow him on Twitter at leegrady. His most recent book is
10 Lies Men Believe (Charisma House).