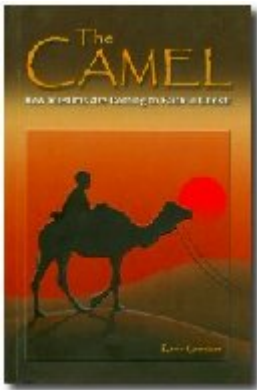


Seminary president labels Southern Baptist mission strategy 'heresy'

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LYNCHBURG, Va. (ABP) — The president of Liberty Theological Seminary has labeled a method used by Southern Baptist missionaries to spread the gospel in Muslim lands deceptive and heretical.



The Camel Method seeks to engage Muslims into talking about Jesus using verses from the Quran as a bridge.

In a podcast interview on the SBC Today [blog](#), [Ergun Caner](#) blasted the "Camel Method," developed by longtime International Mission Board strategist Kevin Greeson to engage Muslims into talking about Jesus using a familiar legend from Islam. The story goes that every good Muslim knows 99 names for Allah, but there is a 100th name that was revealed only to the camel.

According to the [Camel Method](#), the 100th name is Jesus, or "Isa," as the name is spelled in Arabic. Using selected verses from the Quran, the method establishes three points: that Isa — honored in Islam as a prophet but not as divine — is holy, has power over death and knows the way to heaven. From there it goes on to present the plan of salvation by relating it to [Eid al-Adha](#), the Islamic feast of sacrifice.

Through reportedly very effective in working with Muslims, the method has detractors who say it crosses a line between "contextualization" — embracing Christianity in ways that are culturally relevant in a given society — and "syncretism" — a fusion of two different belief systems that cannot be reconciled with biblical Christianity.

For Caner — a former Muslim who has written books labeling Islam a false religion — that line is clear. "The IMB is teaching heresy," he said matter-of-factly.

Caner said Allah as described in the Quran and the God revealed in the Bible have nothing in common. To suggest otherwise, he said, is "absolute, fundamental deception."



Kevin Greeson, a Southern Baptist missionary, developed the Camel Method from experience working with Muslims in Asia.

"You can't start an evangelistic enterprise based on deception," Caner said. "I just can't imagine that type of lying, and that's exactly what I call it."

"So you're saying [IMB President] Jerry Rankin lies?" he continued. "That's exactly what I'm saying."

Greeson, who has served with the International Mission Board since 1993, [says](#) he had little success during his first two years of working with Muslims in South Asia. They didn't believe Jesus was the Son of God or in his resurrection. They did not acknowledge the authority of the Bible, so quoting Scripture was useless.

After discovering a Christian movement in a village where many people were converting from Islam, Greeson asked about the catalyst. From there he developed the Camel Method as a way to treat Muslims with respect while challenging them to confront their own sacred writings as a bridge to the gospel.

The method is not intended primarily for one-on-one witnessing, but for planting of reproducing indigenous churches called "Jesus Groups." Greeson says there are thousands of such congregations in what he calls the largest turning of Muslims to Christ in history.



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Caner said the issue is not whether the method works, but rather if it represents biblical Christianity.

"There's a huge difference between building a church and building a crowd," he said. "There's a huge difference between having a movement with results and having a movement with eternal results."

Caner said he has no problem using the name "Allah" for God when speaking in Arabic — that is the name Arab Christians have used for the deity since before Islam began — but telling a Muslim that Allah in the Quran refers to the Christian God is dishonest.

Proponents of the Camel Method say it isn't intended to be a full presentation of the gospel message but a point of connection with a goal of leading Muslims to accept Christ as revealed in the Bible while retaining their ethnic identity in an Islamic culture.

John Travis, a pseudonym for a Christian who has worked with Muslims in Asia for many years, [says](#) that for the majority of the world's 1 billion Muslims, changing religions is something that is never seriously contemplated.

Yet, Travis says he personally knows many Muslims who have put their faith in Jesus. Some formally convert to Christianity and worship at local churches identified with Western denominations or in small home fellowships with other Muslim-background believers. Fearing persecution, others worship underground. Still others, sometimes called "Messianic Muslims," reject teachings of Islam that directly contradict the Bible — like Jesus did not die on the cross — but do not view or describe themselves as Christians.

International Mission Board trustees adopted [guidelines](#) in 2007 regarding "contextualization" of church-planting methods among unreached people groups.

The IMB supports, for instance, using "Allah" when describing the God of the Bible but not the theological construct represented by the name as used in the Quran. While condoning the use of a culture's sacred text for "bridge building," the guidelines caution missionaries to take care not to imply wholesale acceptance of those teachings. The policy affirms the need to be "ethically sound" in church-planting efforts.

"Integrity requires, for example, that we not imply that a false prophet or a body of religious writings other than the Bible are inspired," the policy says in a footnote. "There is a level of contextualization that crosses the line of integrity. Our board has dismissed personnel who have refused counsel and deliberately positioned themselves beyond that line."

Caner said he does not believe IMB personnel who use the Camel Method are "heretics," just "Christians who are teaching heresy."

-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.