

Liberty University demotes seminary president

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LYNCHBURG, Va. (ABP) — Liberty University has demoted the president of its theological seminary after investigating claims that he exaggerated or fabricated parts of his testimony about converting from militant Islam to Christianity.

Trustees of the school begun by Jerry Falwell issued a [statement](#) June 25 saying Ergun Caner made "factual statements that are self-contradictory" and that he would step down as dean of Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary when his contract expires June 30. The statement said Caner was offered and accepted a contract allowing him to remain on the faculty as a professor for the next academic year.

Ergun Caner, demoted
as president of Liberty
Baptist Theological
Seminary in Lynchburg,
Va. (RNS
PHOTO/Courtesy Ergun
Caner)

Trustees said they accepted Caner's basic testimony of growing up a Muslim before converting to Christianity as a teenager but "found discrepancies related to matters such as dates, names and places of residence."

Liberty officials originally defended Caner, dean of the theology school since 2005, against blogs questioning written descriptions of his academic credentials and recorded testimonies about being trained as a jihadist

terrorist while growing up in Turkey.

After media outlets including *Christianity Today*, Associated Baptist Press and the Lynchburg *News-Advance* ran stories showing that Caner in fact grew up in Ohio the son of a divorced Muslim father and Lutheran mother, the university announced May 10 that a committee would conduct a formal review.

The June 25 statement said Caner apologized for "discrepancies and misstatements that led to this review." A school official [told](#) the Lynchburg newspaper that Liberty would not be making any additional comments or giving interviews at present.

Caner, [43](#), has not commented about the investigation since a Feb. 25 [statement](#) admitting to "pulpit mistakes" but insisting "I have never intentionally misled anyone."

Questions about Caner's veracity surfaced publicly after Mohammad Khan, a 22-year-old Muslim college student in London, produced and posted 17 YouTube videos [labeling](#) Caner one of several charlatans claiming to be former Muslims and misrepresenting Islam to audiences after 9/11.

Later, James White, director of Alpha and Omega Ministries, a Christian apologetics organization based in Phoenix, started [blogging](#) doubts about claims by Caner that he debated Muslims.

Southern Baptist blogs including [FBC Jax Watchdog](#) and [Ministry of Reconciliation](#) got involved about time that Caner accused the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention of using deception to witness to Muslims on the mission field.

"I just can't imagine that type of lying, and that's exactly what I call it," Caner said in a February [podcast](#) interview criticizing a method used to engage Muslims in conversations that critics say downplays important

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

Caner later [apologized](#) for calling Rankin a liar, saying he "became an idiot" and "stepped over the line" in extending his criticism of the method to casting "aspersion on a brother."

Liberty is not formally tied with the Southern Baptist Convention, but former SBC presidents Bailey Smith, Jerry Vines, James Merritt, Jack Graham and Johnny Hunt serve on its board of [trustees](#). Other Southern Baptist trustees include Ronnie Floyd, who recently chaired a Great Commission Task Force that studied the denomination's effectiveness, and Doyle Chauncey, founding executive director of the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia, which supports Liberty University as a ministry [partner](#).

Caner, the author of books including *Unveiling Islam: An Insider's Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs*, which he co-wrote in 2002 with his brother, Emir, president of the Georgia Baptist Convention-affiliated [Truett-McConnell College](#), has been quoted in [Baptist](#) and [secular](#) media as an expert on Islam.

He has preached at prominent SBC churches including [Prestonwood Baptist Church](#) in Plano, Texas, and [First Baptist Church](#) of Jacksonville, Fla., where archived recordings preserve sermons he preached claiming he came to America to do what the 9/11 terrorists did before being saved from a martyr's death by accepting Christ.

"Jesus strapped a cross on his back so I wouldn't have to strap a bomb on mine," Caner [said](#) in a sermon at the SBC pastor's conference in 2004.

-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.

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