

## **In Defense of Dr. Ergun Caner: A Response to His Critics**

**By Dr. Norman L. Geisler**

A talented, dedicated, and highly effective servant of God and convert from Islam has come under a strong attack by extreme Muslims. Why? Basically, it is because he is a converted Muslim and is an effective living, moving, talking representative of Evangelical Christianity. Radical Muslims believe that they should kill such defectors from Islam. If they can't do it physically, they attempt it by character assassination.

What is their tactic? It was to destroy his credibility by making false and defaming allegations about him. Unfortunately some extremist Calvinists, who oppose Dr. Caner's more moderate view, have piled on as well. The result? There has been a miserable and painful disruption of his life, his family, and his ministry.

### **What are the Muslim Charges?**

As anyone with experience knows, it is a whole lot easier to make accusations than to answer them. And if one makes them loud enough, long enough, and far enough (namely, through the world-wide internet), a lot of people come to believe them—even if they are not true.

Having examined all these charges against Dr. Caner carefully and having looked at the related evidence, I can say without hesitation that all of the moral charges against Dr. Caner are unsubstantiated. Further, no one has demonstrated moral intent on any of the factual misstatements he made (which we all make).

### **The Factual Misstatements**

Dr. Caner has admitted to and apologized for some factual misstatements. But no one has proven any evil moral intent in any of them. Indeed, everyone I know who knows Ergun well, knows him to be a man of honesty, integrity, and moral character. For those who have no mercy for those who make honest mistakes, I would only say: Let him who is without mistakes cast the first stone!

Dr. Caner's misspeaks include the following: 1) He said he was 18 instead of 16 which he repeatedly said he was. 2) He said Shabir Ally had died (who is alive) when he meant another Muslim (who is dead); 3) Ergun said they moved to America in 1969 and in another place he said it was 1978. More precisely, he got his citizenship in 1978. 4) Ergun once accidentally said *Mulema* instead of *Ulema* which is the Arabic word for scholar. 5) He mispronounces *Sawm* as "Swam." 6) He is charged with lying because look away or crosses his legs or arms (which is symptomatic of lying)! 7) It is charged that Ergun has shoes on in a mosque picture which is forbidden (Wrong. It is not forbidden in the outer court).

Several things are worth noting here. First of all, none of them are morally culpable since no one has proven intentional deception or embellishment. Furthermore, when Ergun becomes aware of any mistakes, he owns it, corrects it, and apologizes for it. In addition, most of these allegations range

from the trivial to the ridiculous. . Finally, not one of them involves a moral or doctrinal deviation from the Faith.

### **Some Muslim Allegations against Dr. Caner**

These allegations have circulated freely on the internet and unfortunately some have even made it into Christian publications. Most of them center around Dr. Caner's claims to be a former Muslim.

**The Charge that He Could Speak Arabic When He Can't.**—He only claims to be able to speak Arabic the way most non-Arabic Muslims do. Although he was raised in Sweden by a Swedish mother, Ergun learned enough Arabic (as most Muslims do) to read the Qur'an and speak it in prayer.

**The Charges that He was not Turkish as He Claimed.**—This stems from a confusion of his nationality and the country of his birth. Ergun was born in Sweden, but he was a Turkish citizen. According to Swedish law a child born in Sweden has the nationality of his father, and Ergun's father was Turkish. Indeed, he traveled to Turkey with his father to establish his Turkish citizenship. When he came to America, he came as a Turkish citizen with a Turkish passport.

**The Charge that He was never trained in Jihad at a Muslim School.**—The charges that he trained in a Sudanese or Lebanese School (Madrassa) are false and are based on wrongly assuming his statement of "Islamic youth jihad" was in reference to a specific terrorist organization. He trained in the one attached to his Mosque as all Muslim children do. And he was trained there in Jihad, as all the other children are—even those who never take up a gun.

**The Charge that Ergun claimed he "Always Lived" in a Muslim Country before Coming to the US.**—Although, the phrase "always lived" is not precise. There is no evidence of an evil intent to embellish here, as his critics say. True, Sweden was not a Muslim country, but he did live as a Muslim with a Muslim father while in Sweden. After all, Ergun's father was from a Muslim country, Ergun was a citizen of a Muslim country, and he lived as a Muslim in Sweden. It would be an embellishment to say that if he was not a Muslim and not a citizen of a Muslim country.

**The Charge that He falsely Claims that "I Came as a Jihadist from Turkey".**—Ergun denies making this statement, and I have not seen any document refuting his claim. He does claim to have been trained in Jihad, as all Muslim children are. And he is of Turkish ancestry. The rest is apparently extrapolated by his detractors.

**The Charge that Caner Falsely Claims to have been a Devout Muslim.**—Caner photos prove of his activity in the Islamic religion. He has a picture of his *masallah* (when circumcised at age 12); a photo of him praying in the mosque; a picture of his reading the Qur'an in recitation. He also has a photo of his receiving a certificate from an Imam. His bother Emir, also a former Muslim, has vouched for the veracity of his claims.

**The Charge that Caner Claims to have Learned "Perfect" English in Brooklyn.**—Caner denies that he said his English was "perfect." But he did learn some English while living in the old Jefferson

Hotel while the family first migrated to the United States. They moved to Ohio where his English improved.

**The Charge that Caner could not have Offered his Muslim Prays in the School Bathroom as he said he did.**—This was neither a shameful or unacceptable practice for Muslims, as some critics claim. The Islamic Hadith allows it, and it is done by devout Muslims to this day as has been pointed out by former Muslim Hussein Wario ([www.husseinwario.com](http://www.husseinwario.com)).

**The Charge that Caner Claimed Ramadan was Forty Days Long.**—Muslims claim this feast is only 30 days long, and Caner said it was forty days. Caner cites Muslim authorities to the contrary, showing it can last up to forty days. Even the Qur'an (Sura 2:51) speaks forty days of fasting.

**The Charge that Caner Confuses the Shahada with the Beginning Words in the Surat at-Fatiha.**—It is alleged that no knowledgeable devout Muslim would confuse these two. But both are part of Islamic prayers that are recited many times every day. The first is the confession and the second is a recitation.

**The Charge that His Family Did Not Disown Him When He Converted to Christianity as Caner Claimed they Did.**—It is true that after the divorce he was raised by his mother who obviously had not disowned him since she was no longer a Muslim. But his Muslim father who had remarried did disown him. This is the Muslim "family" to which he referred. This was very painful to him since he lived only a half hour away but could not even speak to him.

**The Charges that He was not Turkish as He Claimed to be.**--This stems from a confusion of his nationality and the country of his birth. Ergun was born in Sweden, but he was a Turkish citizen. According to Swedish law a child born in Sweden has the nationality of his father, and Ergun's father was Turkish. Indeed, he traveled to Turkey with his father to establish his Turkish citizenship. When he came to America, he came as a Turkish citizen with a Turkish passport.

**The Charge that Caner Falsely Claims that he has had more than Sixty Debates with Muslims.**—Critics challenge this statement and claim it is an intentional embellishment. But they mistakenly assume that all debates are formal. Caner lists many formal debates in the last ten years or so. But he has also engaged in multiple informal debates as well. There is no evidence to deny his claim. Indeed, given his numerous encounters with Muslims, it is reasonable to assume there were at least sixty.

**The Charge that no Knowledgeable Muslim Would Mis-cite the Hadith as Caner Did.**—It is charged that Caner often cites the Hadith without mentioning the actual name of the collection. But, as even Muslim scholars admit, there is no "official" way to cite the Hadith. It is often cited without reference to the collection.

**The Charge that Caner did not Debate Shabir Ally in Nebraska.**—Dr. Caner has admitted that this was a mistake and has publically apologized for it. He did, however, engage another Muslim while in Lincoln, NB. No one has proven this was an intentional deception, as some critics claim.

**The Charge that Caner has Used various Names in Publications.** Dr. Caner has used “E. Michael Caner” in one book while using “Ergun Mehmet Caner” in other books. Why? His mother desired that he use Michael, a name she always wished to give him, while Dr. Caner used “Mehmet” in honor of his father, especially after his father’s passing in 1999. Some have even attacked his nickname, “Butch,” which he has used since moving to the South and was a name given to him by those who had difficulty pronouncing his first name.

**The Charge that Caner Claims to have a Ph.D. when it is Only a Th.D.—**Actually, his degree is a D. Theol. But these degrees are equivalent, as even accrediting agencies attest. Many seminaries have converted the Th.D. into a Ph.D. program.

### **Some Concluding Thoughts**

Reviewing these allegations reminds me of the numerous similar statements I have made in the past. I could easily be proven a liar on similar ground. For example, when asked where I was born, I have given at least three different answers over the years: In Detroit, in Warren, and in Van Dyke, Michigan. All are true. It was metropolitan Detroit (literally a half mile into the northeastern suburb). It was in a place once called Van Dyke and now called Warren.

When asked what my father’s name was, I have said Fonse (which is what most people called him, or Alphonse, or more formally Alphonso). If one’s motives are to discredit, it would not be hard to discredit me or almost anyone with the kinds of arguments used by Caner’s critics. If, on the other hand, one wants to be fair, then there are no real grounds to support the allegations of Caner’s critics that he is a liar and a fraud who repeatedly embellished things to support his own claims. No group authorized to investigate his statements have proclaimed any such conclusion. Nor did the Board committee at Liberty University that examined him. Rather, they said, “After a thorough and exhaustive review of Dr. Caner’s public statements, a committee consisting of four members of Liberty University’s Board of Trustees has concluded that Dr. Caner has some factual statements that are self-contradictory [as we have discussed above]. However, the committee found no evidence to suggest that Dr. Caner was not a Muslim who converted to Christianity as a teenager.... [as his critics had charged]. Hence, The university has offered and Dr. Caner has accepted an employment contract for the 2010-2011 academic year. Dr. Caner will remain on the faculty of Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary as a Professor.”

Clearly, Liberty found no moral culpability or doctrinal deviation or else they would not have kept him on the faculty. One can only speculate as to why his contract as Dean was not renewed. Certainly, it could not have been because Liberty is an institution that has eschews controversy. For it could be said that the founder Jerry Falwell, whom I have greatly admired and praised, had “controversy” as his middle name! My own guess, having taught at Liberty University and knowing many of its leaders and workings quite well, is that the decision was more institutional in nature.