

Why does Ergun Caner need to lie?

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

April 30, 2010

Remember Mike Warnke? The popular evangelical comedian was disgraced in 1991 when *Cornerstone* magazine [refuted](#) his claim to have come to the faith out of a life as a Satanist high priest. Apparently being a funny, engaging speaker with a strong evangelical message wasn't enough of a sales hook for Warnke's career—he needed a dramatically anti-Christian backstory as well.

People love a good conversion story. In the late 70s, Warnke's fabricated drug-dealing Satanist made for an appropriately scary past. Thirty years later, a fake jihadist upbringing does the trick. Ergun Caner, president of the seminary and grad school at [Liberty University](#), has been [under fire](#) for taking some serious liberties with his biography: he's claimed a fundamentalist Muslim upbringing through adolescence before moving to the U.S., when in reality he's lived in the States since age four. (Caner's also been [filmed](#) passing off gibberish as Arabic.)

Like many others, Wade Burleson is [outraged](#) at Caner's deception, and understandably so. But equally troubling is the fact that Caner—like Warnke, a compelling personality with genuine talents—found it worthwhile to fabricate a jihadist background in the first place. Why is there so much credibility to be gained via a story of conversion from a colorful and extreme past? Is it just about the dramatic story arc? Or is it the specific point of Christ winning out over the bogeyman of the week, whether it's Satanism or radical Islam or whatever's next?