

Some Christian Bookstores Pull Best Sellers by Author Tommy Tenney

Southern Baptist and Assemblies of God stores yanked the book The God Chasers off shelves because of doctrinal disputes

Evangelist Tommy Tenney has seen tangible evidence of the impact of his newest book, *The God Catchers*. During a recent promotional tour, several people handed him their copy before bursting into tears and saying, "This has changed my life."

Sales of the book have taken off like a runaway train, with eight printings in the two months after its mid-January release. Sales of *The God Chasers*, the 1998 book that kicked off Tenney's prolific writing career, were expected to surpass the 1 million mark during May.

"That doesn't mean Tommy Tenney is a good writer," said the Louisiana-based evangelist, who conducted 250 meetings last year. "It just means there's a whole lot of hungry people out there."

But not everyone is pleased with the 45-year-old revivalist. In recent months the Assemblies of God (AG) and a major Christian retail chain removed his material from their stores over separate doctrinal disputes.

While other AG stores reportedly still carry Tenney's books, the Radiant Book and Music Store in Springfield, Mo., no longer stocks them. In a brief statement, public relations

director Juleen Turnage said the books were not in doctrinal harmony with the AG.

AG General Superintendent Thomas Trask declined to discuss a conversation he had with the author over his views. But Tenney said the decision stemmed from Tenney's unwillingness to turn his back on his roots in the United Pentecostal Church (UPC).

The UPC split from the AG in 1916 over its "Oneness" theology, which promotes baptizing people only in Jesus' name. Though his father is a UPC superintendent, Tenney left the denomination during the 1980s and says he doesn't adhere to its views.

Radiant still stocks a couple of books by T.D. Jakes, whose past ties with the Oneness camp have sparked controversy.

"What I wound up telling [Trask] is I can't turn my back on my heritage," Tenney told Charisma. "I don't deny the salvation experience of the people who birthed me. But neither do I deny the salvation of the Assemblies of God. Sometimes I get rocks thrown at me from both sides.

"I have friends from both sides, and I'm sticking with my friends," he joked. "I think there's been a lot of mischaracterization on both sides." Tenney feels a misinterpretation of his beliefs also is at the heart of a decision by LifeWay Christian Resources to drop God Chasers and not stock his latest release, The God Catchers.

Chris Rodgers, director of merchandising for the Southern Baptist Convention-owned bookstore chain, said it is not normal practice to discuss the reasoning behind product-

selection decisions.

However, Charisma obtained a copy of a message sent by a LifeWay store manager to a customer who asked about the removal of *The God Chasers*. In it, the manager said that Tenney promoted unbiblical theology. The manager's objections centered on several points:

Tenney's description of the Bible as "old love letters," which Rodgers said implies the Scripture contains past truth and that there is a present truth.

A statement in *The God Chasers* that "a man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with an argument." Though Muhammed, Joseph Smith and the Rev. Sun Yung Moon had experiences, they weren't compatible with Scripture, Rodgers said.

Tenney's belief in "presence evangelism," based on a statement he makes that "there's no need for me to preach if God shows up in His glory." Yet, the New Testament model for evangelism is preaching, Rodgers said.

"On average, I speak six days a week," he said. "There are times in the middle of my preaching when I feel it's time for the altar call. There are times when worship is preferable. But that's in every church. I'm not trying to de-emphasize preaching."

Despite the disagreement, Tenney said he holds no animosity for LifeWay or Trask, who shared the podium with him at a pro-unity meeting in Atlanta in March. "I honor the pursuit of God in whatever tradition a person follows," he said. "If they

call Christ Lord, I call them 'brother.'"