

SBC stores pull warning labels from certain books

by [Richard Yeakley](#) in the [April 5, 2011](#) issue

Southern Baptist bookstores have quietly suspended a four-year-old program that warned customers to read with "discernment" works by several up-and-coming authors whose books "could be considered inconsistent with historical evangelical theology."

Chris Rodgers, the director of product standards and customer relations for Nashville-based LifeWay, said the warnings were discontinued because they were "irrelevant to our customers.

"There was little to no interest in it," Rodgers said. "No one asked about the authors."

The program flagged the writings of some emergent authors with labels advising readers to exercise caution and "extra discernment" in reading particular books. The labels provided the address to a website to learn more about the work or author; the website has since been disabled.

The program recently came under attack in a blog post from Christian musician Shaun Groves, who was upset that LifeWay was willing to warn customers about a book but still continued to sell it.

The label read: "Read with Discernment. This book may contain thoughts, ideas, or concepts that could be considered inconsistent with historical evangelical theology. Therefore we encourage you to read it with extra discernment."

LifeWay, the official publisher and bookstore of the Southern Baptist Convention, downplayed the program and the decision to end it, saying the labels were not warnings but rather an attempt to provide customers with more information.

"They were not warnings; there is no way at all you could read those as warnings," Rodgers said. "The program has been called controversial, [but] the only real controversy was the Groves blog."

Some authors of the marked books, including popular writers Rob Bell, Donald Miller, Brian McLaren and William Young, were pleased with the decision to terminate the program.

McLaren, a sometimes controversial emergent author whose books were flagged, said a decision to censor writings by another Christian went against the Baptist tradition of personal conscience. "I think it is concerning especially when a Baptist bookstore acts as if a central organization can make decisions on which books are accepted and rejected," McLaren said. "Yes, I am very pleased [to see it ended]."

Young, who wrote the *New York Times* best seller *The Shack*, said he wasn't bothered by the program but still thought that LifeWay made "a good move" in ending it. —RNS