

Why the Theological Issues With 'The Shack' Go Beyond the Film

When *The Shack* hit theaters this weekend, the movie adaptation of the book met with its own firestorm of critics.

Some decried the depiction of the Trinity as heresy and said the message promoted universalism: the belief that no one shall be sent to hell.

But for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Albert Mohler, the questions stirred by the script go much deeper than the words on the page.

“Even as Wayne Jacobson and others complain of those who identify heresy within *The Shack*, the fact is that the Christian church has explicitly identified these teachings as just that—heresy. The obvious question is this: How is it that so many evangelical Christians seem to be drawn not only to this story, but to the theology presented in the narrative—a theology at so many points in conflict with evangelical convictions?” Mohler writes in a recent blog.

Mohler doesn't ask a question without answers, though.

The problem with the narrative, Mohler argues, is that few believers evaluate the story through discernment.

“In evaluating the book, it must be kept in mind that *The Shack* is a work of fiction. But it is also a sustained theological argument, and this simply cannot be denied. Any number of notable novels and works of literature have contained aberrant theology and even heresy. The crucial question is whether the aberrant doctrines are features of the story or the message of the work. When it comes to *The Shack*,

the really troubling fact is that so many readers are drawn to the theological message of the book and fail to see how it conflicts with the Bible at so many crucial points," Mohler writes.

"All this reveals a disastrous failure of evangelical discernment. It is hard not to conclude that theological discernment is now a lost art among American evangelicals—and this loss can only lead to theological catastrophe," he continues.

Should Christians boycott *The Shack*? Not necessarily, the scholar says.

Instead, believers should rise to the challenge of deepening their understanding of theology.

"*The Shack* is a wake-up call for evangelical Christianity. An assessment like that offered by Timothy Beal is telling. The popularity of this book among evangelicals can only be explained by a lack of basic theological knowledge among us—a failure even to understand the gospel of Christ. The tragedy that evangelicals have lost the art of biblical discernment must be traced to a disastrous loss of biblical knowledge. Discernment cannot survive without doctrine," Mohler concludes.

Do you agree? Sound off! {eoa}