

# Developing a Theology of Discernment in Response to the Abuse of Religion by Some Pentecostal Churches in Postcolonial South Africa

Mookgo Solomon Kgatle

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9556-6597>

## Abstract

The focus of this article is on the current abuse of religion by some pastors of some Pentecostal churches in South Africa. These pastors have been involved in controversial, criminal and fake miracles practices that point to the abuse of religion. While these acts might be acceptable among some, in some contexts, the generic South African religious context perceive them as taboo. Thus, the main problem on this score is that many South Africans have become gullible to the abuse of religion, given their poor economic circumstances, gender injustices and, for many, their uninformed theological understandings, while, in some cases, there are psychological reasons. In response to these forms of gullibility, the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (the CRL Rights Commission) has come up with a proposal that the government should regulate churches through an umbrella organization that will oversee the administration of churches, and the affiliation of churches to a mother church, which prescribes a minimum qualification for pastors, and addresses doctrinal issues and related matters. However, there are scholars and some sectors of society that argue against the regulation of religion. What then is the solution? This article argues that a theology of discernment, as found in the Bible in 1 John 4:1-3, can assist, 1) to deal with the abuse of religion; and 2) to deal with the gullibility of society in respect of the abuse of religion in South Africa.

**Keywords:** Pentecostal, Discernment, Religion, Theology, Post-colonialism

## **Introduction**

The abuse of religion in South Africa is demonstrated by outrageous, criminal and fake miracle acts of some pastors of some Pentecostal churches. Kgatle (2017) mentions some of the acts, calling them ‘unusual practices’. In 2014, Pastor Daniel Lesego fed his congregants with grass and made others to gulp petrol as symbols of accessing God. Lesego said that these symbols could be used in similar ways as bread and wine in the Holy Communion (Kgatle 2019:129). In 2016, a protégé of Lesego, Pastor Penuel Mnguni, fed his followers with snakes and walked on top of the bodies of others. In the same year, the so-called ‘Doom pastor’, Thabang Rabalago, sprayed Doom on his congregants. Rabalago said that ‘he has been laying hands on the sick’, but this time around, ‘God told him to use Doom’ (Kgatle 2019:131). He reiterated that prayer makes dangerous insect killers such as Doom to become harmless. Motsoeneng claimed to have gone to heaven and taken selfies with God. Lately, the trial of Tim Omotoso (2018), on allegations of rape, revealed that ‘men of God’ often wants to access power by sleeping with young girls (cf. Kobo 2019; Ramantswana 2019). Another outrageous act is a miracle of walking on air by Prophet Shepherd Bushiri. Bushiri, also known as ‘Major one’ was also accused of transporting R15 million to his home country (cf. Dube 2020). Most recently, Pastor Alph Lukau took the #resurrection challenge by claiming that he has resurrected a dead body (Banda 2020).

The surprising thing is that the society is gullible and unsuspecting of these outrageous acts. One congregant of Lesego’s church, Rabonni Center Ministries, was quoted as saying, ‘I believe in Pastor Lesego and everything he does’ (cf. Kgatle 2017). The supporters of Rabalago wore T-shirts written ‘Do not touch my anointed ones’ (Psalms 105:15, New International Version 1978). This scripture is often quoted out of context to intimidate those who are critical of these outrageous acts in order for the followers to remain silent. Following the arrest of prophet Shepherd Bushiri, his supporters said ‘No Bushiri, no vote’ (Pijoo 2019). Utterances such as this demonstrate that not only are people gullible, but they are also ignorant; hence, the scripture, ‘My people perish because they lack knowledge’ (Hosea 4:6). During the #resurrection challenge week in South Africa, one listener, during a TT show on Power FM (26 February 2019), said that, ‘As much as you believed that Jesus was resurrected more than 2000 years ago so you must believe that Alph Lukau can resurrect a dead body’ (Tema 2019). These examples demonstrate

that people are susceptible to the abuse of religion in South Africa. At times congregants remain loyal, even when such practices pose danger to their health. They shout, 'I receive', even when a prophet says, 'You shall die'.

The reasons for this gullibility are well captured by Kgatle (2017) as socio-economic, psychological, theological and patriarchal; socio-economic, because many people in South Africa still have to endure the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality. Thus, religion, even when it is abusive, gives them some form of hope. The desperation of the people of South Africa makes them accept anything as long as it is done with the promise of a job, car, house, promotion, etc. However, socio-economic challenges cannot be the only reason for this gullibility, because even the rich attend these kinds of churches. Thus, it might be possible that some congregants are brainwashed, such that they cannot apply their minds. It is theological because of the failure of orthodox churches that remain traditional and not offer an alternative liturgy to solve the challenges that people are going through in postcolonial Africa; patriarchal, because when one observes the pastors involved in outrageous acts, most of them are male and the victims are female. Alternatively, it might be that society cannot make a distinction between what is true and false. In the words of Quayesi-Amakye (2011), 'people are gullible because they have not as yet learned to delineate what is spiritual from mundane'. One of the spiritual tools that society can use to make that distinction is the theology of discernment. Therefore, this paper proposes the theology of discernment in response to the gullibility of society regarding the abuse of religion.

## **Methodology**

This article is located in missiology. Missiology as one of the disciplines of theology and as a scholarly or academic enterprise has an ability to do critical reflection on the practice of mission. In this context, this paper is a critical reflection on the abuse of religion in South Africa. In addition, missiology is the study of missions by a specific church in a specific context. Hence, this paper studies the way mission is practised by some Pentecostal churches in South Africa. The methodology for this paper is contextual Bible study. The Contextual Bible Study method, according to West (2007), is one Bible study method that is able to make the synergy between various disciplines in theology. This paper starts with the problem of the abuse of religion in some Pentecostal churches in South Africa and how such challenges can be solved

by 1 John 4:1-3. The paper is a contextual study of the theology of discernment in 1 John 4:1-3 applied to the context of the abuse of religion and the gullibility of society in South Africa.

## **The Definition of Discernment**

The word, 'discern' comes from the Latin word *discernere*, which refers to separation or distinction (Evers-Hood 2016:179). It means to test in a crisis in order to make the difference between right or wrong and the difference between good and evil. Discernment works in difficult circumstances, especially where one is faced with uncertainty or indecision. In spiritual matters, discernment means to look at a situation with spiritual lenses. It means to look at a situation from a divine point of view. Discernment, according to Kiesel (2015:9), refers to looking at circumstances from the angle of God and beyond the imaginations of humanity. Discernment in simple terms is to see things the way God sees them (cf. Kiesel 2015:9). The activities of discernment include among others investigation, a vetting process, and probing through the process of sanctification. Consequently, discernment will involve the process of separation. This process ensures that the best decision or the right person is chosen or appointed. Discernment comes with the best in life and its probing results in authentication of the truth. Thus, discernment does not take truth as the obvious, but checks the significant part to ensure that indeed the truth is concrete. In the end, discernment does not deal with the surface or the abstract but it is contextual (Sciberras 2013:176).

Discernment should not be misconstrued as judgement, but as a means of making the correct decision. Discernment is the need for one to follow the correct direction in making choices in life. Therefore, discernment in spirituality, according to Waaijman (2013:3), should be 'placed within the context of spiritual direction, conscience, personal experience, choice and feelings'. Discernment is the connection between humanity and divinity in order to seek for divine will upon one's life. When a particular person is aligned to that divine will, he or she will be able to make the right decisions on key matters and other day-to-day important matters. Such decisions will ultimately play an important role in the life of an individual in much a bigger way in life. The individual's ability to make good personal choices will have an impact on the whole society (cf. Lombaard 2012:67). Hence, there is individual discernment and group discernment. Group discernment is made up of the individuals

in that group who are able to discern their destiny and affect the group in a positive way (Waaïjman 2013:4). In the end, both the individual and their group will be able to fulfil the vision of God for their lives through the Holy Spirit (Lavalée 2016:208). Therefore, discernment is the ability to make correct choices in relation to God's vision and direction so that the divine has an impact on the individual's life and their group.

## **The Development of the Theology of Discernment**

### ***Ignatius of Loyola***

Reflection on the theology of discernment cannot ignore the prominent figure and place of Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatius was a Spanish Basque Catholic priest and theologian, who co-founded the religious order called the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and became its first Superior General at Paris in 1541 (Idígoras & Ídigoras 1994). Ignatius taught that for discernment to take place, the participant should reflect on the real life each time they engage in prayer. The participant should in the time of comfort and discomfort be able to discern the will of God (cf. Barry 1989:137). Ignatius taught three levels of reflection that the participant must go through before making a decision in life. The first one is the inquisition of a contextual life, secondly, the hermeneutic of that context with the help of the Holy Spirit, and the last is the reflection on the mission that God has for his people that will inform the practices of religion (Lavalée 2016:210). Other figures that taught and reflected on discernment are Origen, Cassian, Benedict, Evagrius of Pontus, Bernard of Clairveaux, Clara of Assisi, Bridget of Sweden, Catharine of Siena, Gerson, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Jonathan Edward, Pierre Favre, and others. It is important to note Elisabeth Hensen, who discussed discernment in a wider range of early Christian texts in New Testament writings (Paul and the Synoptics), Elisabeth paid special attention to 1 John 4 and 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 (cf. Waaïjman 2013:4).

### ***Roman Catholic***

The Roman Catholic Church, in relation to discernment, has a strict approach. The church seeks to enhance the work of Jesus Christ through the leadership of the Holy Spirit. In order for this goal to be possible, the church envisages to examine what is happening in this time and interpret every action with the lenses of the Good News. For example, De Villiers (2013:133) speaks of the

communal discernment which has been linked to,

... the actions of an individual who, in consultation with a spiritual companion and in line with his/her conscience, examines and tests the way forward in the light of deeper considerations, desires, motivations and drives.

The goal of their examination is to ensure that the work is orderly and represent the church in a good manner. The approach of the Roman Catholic Church has been consistent with what the scriptures are saying about discernment, i.e. examination of religious experiences in light of the gospel (Lavalley 2016: 210). In addition, discernment has been a practice of the Roman Catholic Church over a long period. In essence, to Catholics, discernment is a process that makes people to take proper decision in order for them to fulfil the will of God in their lives. An individual discernment is a personal endeavour that de-sires to align one's plans with the will and the divine calling of God. Therefore, no personal choice that one makes should be based on emotions and feelings but in keeping with the will of God, which will be able to affect society positively.

### **4.3 Protestantism**

In Protestantism, the approach on discernment depends on the group within the movement. Some movements within Protestantism that perceive discernment as a distinction between right or wrong. Discernment among Protestants help them to judge between something that is correct and the other that is erroneous. The titles of their scholarly works say it all: *A call for discernment: Distinguishing truth from error in today's church* (Adams 1998); *Exposing witchcraft in the church* (Godwin 1997), and *God's trademarks: How to determine whether a message, ministry, or strategy is truly from God* (Otis 2000). In these studies, the goal is to make the difference between right and wrong. The main reason to seek discernment in these instances is that people are not sure about their decisions. In other instances, the goal of seeking discernment is based on the judgement upon other people's religious practices. In the latter, there exists some element of prejudice whereby people already know the results of their discernment. Discernment should be about helping the church to reflect on their past and present actions in order to prepare for the future (Waijman 2013:8). In this paper, discernment is about helping the new Pentecostal

churches to make the right decision in order to avoid the abuse of religion.

### **The Context of 1 John 4:1-3**

In the text, John teaches his Beloved not to believe every spirit that passes by; even if such a spirit seems like the Spirit of God, it should not be believed until such a time when it is tried and is proven the real spirit of God. The main reason for the trying of the spirits is that many false prophets exist in the world to mislead the people of God. In order for the testing of the spirits to be successful, believers ought to know the real Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God through discernment because without this knowledge they will mistake other spirits as the Holy Spirit. In other words, for John the Holy Spirit is a distinguishing factor, because without him other spirits cannot be identified in the spirit world. The function of the Holy Spirit is to assist an individual to make choices. In addition, the Spirit of God is the one that confirms the works of Jesus Christ in the believer. Any spirit that does not profess Jesus Christ as the incarnated image of God is not the Spirit of God. The spirit that does not make this confession is the spirit of the antichrist that has come into the world. The opposite is also true; every spirit that attests to Jesus coming to the flesh on earth is the Spirit of God.

### **The Theology of Discernment in 1 John 4:1-3**

#### ***The Role of the Holy Spirit***

The Holy Spirit has a role in actually revealing Himself to the believer. In this way, the believer will know who the Holy Spirit is and be able to manifest the gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This is regarded as an inspiration in view and in function of the common good. The Holy Spirit gives the believer an ability to live a holy life, not in a legalistic way, but in the right standing with God. The Holy Spirit helps the believer not only to fulfil his or her life purpose but also to fulfil the will of God in his or her life (Sciberras 2013:176). While discernment seeks to evaluate life experiences with a critical mind, it cannot happen without the Holy Spirit. In addition, an endeavour to know God and serve him diligently is also not possible without the help of the Holy Spirit. The reason is that the desire to know God is not only informed by the study about God, but also about knowledge about the Holy Spirit. In the end, the Holy Spirit is the centre of Christian life, because in order for believers to know

God, they have to be in a relationship with the Holy Spirit (Lavalley 2016:208).

The Spirit of God that was present in the ministry of Jesus Christ is in action in the life of the believer. He is doing the same work in the believers as he has done when Christ was on earth. In this way, discernment is possible, because anyone who does not act as Christ has acted means that the Holy Spirit does not lead him or her. To know that someone is doing the work of the Holy Spirit is to compare such work with the work of Christ. Thus, the pastor who practises religion under Christianity is actually engaged in the continuation of the work of Christ while He was still on earth. Therefore, the real acts of the Holy Spirit are well understood through the Holy Spirit by the acts of Jesus Christ (Medina 2011:150). Moreover, the Holy Spirit has order and anyone who is led by the Holy Spirit is an orderly individual. Anything that causes disorder in the practice of religion is not of God and does not follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Where the Holy Spirit is, there is order and people are sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Although people are allowed to move in ecstasy, it must be done with order. Hence, spiritual ecstasy needs to be balanced with order and structure in Pentecostalism (Albrecht 1997:6).

### ***The Role of the Bible***

The Bible as the inspired word of God is important in discernment. This does not mean that certain texts of the Bible cannot be criticized as it is done in biblical criticism, but it means that the word of the modern prophet cannot exceed the word of the Bible. Hence, the Bible has a major role to play in discernment. It means that preachers cannot preach out of context, but need to select a relevant scripture in their presentation of the word. The role of the Bible also means that every believer should be open to the truth presented in the Bible, even when that truth makes one uncomfortable. Thus, prophets in Pentecostalism should not be economical with the truth, but embrace it even when it does not suit them. Although there some contradictions in the biblical texts, the Bible remains an unquestionable truth and answers to every life question that believers have in their lives (cf. Lombaard 2012:69). However, the same word in the Bible should be discussed among believers in order to find the essence of what the scriptures are saying to the believers. There is a need therefore for fellowship of the saints in the examination of the scriptures to find the real message in specific texts, so that they guard against the use of scriptures by their leader be used to drive a certain agenda.

### ***Testing the Spirits***

Testing the spirits in discernment involves the testing of the work of believers (Rom. 14:22; 1 Cor. 11:28; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 6:4). In addition, it is testing all things that believers are engaged in their lives (1 Thess. 5:21). Testing the spirits is the discovery of the things that are pivotal in the eyes of God (Rom. 2:18; 12:2; Phil. 1:10; cf. also Eph. 5:10). Like discussed before, testing the spirits is the examination of the spirits (1 Cor. 11:28; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 6:4; 1 Thess. 5:21). The result of such an examination is equally pivotal in the process of examination (Rom. 1:28; 14:22); hence both the examination of spirits and the results thereof are important in the process of discernment (Rom. 2:18; 12:2; Phil. 1:10). In addition, testing the spirit is an important tool available to test supernatural and spiritual entities. In Testing of Spirits, the types of spirits to be tested include the spirit of God, the spirit of a good angel, the spirit of an evil angel, and the human spirit. A list of questions that should be answered: Who has the revelation? What does the revelation mean? Why is it said to have taken place? To whom did the witness look for advice? What kind of life does the visionary lead? Whence does the revelation originate (Edwards 2015: 85)?

What matters in the process of testing is that God's gifts of perceiving differences, of discernment, of profound perception and insight into what is to be discerned, together with the ability to interpret what has been discerned, are used correctly. This testing takes place in this life, for God reveals God-self as the tester of hearts (1 Thess. 2:4). Although discernment is located in concrete situations, Paul also understands discernment from an eschatological perspective when he declares that people will be tested in the final judgement (1 Cor 3:13; cf. Jas. 1:12). Consequently, the whole of Christian life is subject to God's scrutiny. All depends on being 'approved in Christ' (Rom. 16:10). This requires a serious effort to know God's will, which is regarded as gift of the Spirit (Rom. 12:2; cf. Sciberras 2013:172). Of course, in the process of testing the spirits, many in Pentecostalism will quickly respond 'do not judge'. The only time one is not allowed to judge is when one is suffering the same weakness. As long as one does not have motes in his or her eyes, then is able to advise others about their motes in their eyes.

### ***Identification of the anti-Christ***

Discernment is a tool to identify the antichrist. In 1 John 4:3 anyone who does

not profess that Jesus is Lord is an antichrist. How we should also guard against those who profess the name of Jesus in vain or in pretence. But who is the antichrist? The antichrist will be disguised as someone who is very intelligent (Dan. 8:23). In addition, the antichrist will be known by amassing much wealth and material possessions (Dan. 11:43; Rev. 13:16-17). The antichrist will be known by its involved in war (Rev. 6:2), its speech (Dan. 11:36), and politics (Rev. 17:11-12). The antichrist has actually studied what Jesus Christ has done while on earth and copies everything as if he is Christ or better than Christ is. Christ did miracles (Matt. 9:32-33; Mark 6:2); the antichrist will mimic such miracles (Matt. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9). Christ is crowned with many crowns (Rev. 19:12); the antichrist is crowned with ten crowns (Rev. 13:1). Christ rides a white horse (Rev. 19:11), as does the antichrist (Rev. 6:2). Christ was resurrected (Matt. 28:6); the antichrist will appear to be resurrected (Rev. 13:3-14). Christ is a member of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14), but the antichrist is a member of an unholy trinity – Satan, the antichrist, and the false prophet (Rev. 13). Other than copying what Christ has done, the antichrist will actually claim to be God (2 Thess. 2:4).

### **Theology of Discernment in the Context of Abuse of Religion**

In the context of the abuse of religion in South Africa, discernment can assist to differentiate between the Spirit of God and other spirits. In the words of Yong (2000:185), ‘the charismatic gift of discernment plays an important role to enable believers to determine where and when, or whether, the Holy Spirit (or other spirits) is present and active’. The Holy Spirit is not like other spirits in Africa or anywhere else in the world. He is the one sent by the Father to be the comforter, teacher, guider and leader. When one is baptised in the Holy Spirit, the person will be able to make a distinction between the Holy Spirit and other spirits. Through the gift of discernment, one will know if a spirit operating in a pastor is the Holy Spirit or other evil spirits. Not every spirit operating in a person is the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Holy Spirit, unlike other spirits, should be understood as the one sent by the Father through the son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit should be known as the divine agent that brings the total liberation of believers, as stated in 2 Corinthians 3:17, namely that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Since the Father sends the Holy Spirit, he is the one to fulfil the mission of Christ on earth, since Jesus is now at the right hand of the Father. Thus, any mission that is not Holy Spirit led is

from other spirits.

Discernment can assist to make a distinction between a real prophecy and divination. Divination, foretelling, forecasting or prediction is very common or rather popular in Africa. Diviners try their best to reveal one's future through foretelling. Some members of society in South Africa fail to make a distinction between biblical prophecy and divination that is normally done by *sangomas* in African traditional religions. Believers do not really care about the source of the word delivered by the prophets as long as the word makes sense about their real-life situation. The reality is that the word could be coming from an unreliable source or even be a word of deception. In the words of Chimuka (2016), 'some prophets claim to be used by the Holy Spirit of God, while they have the same pneumatological status as witchdoctors ministering under the influence of the ancestral spirit'. Consequently, someone can come to church and act as if he or she is prophesying but is actually being led by the spirit of divination. Discernment is an ability to differentiate the real word by the real prophet and divination by the diviner. Real prophecy does not only excite the one listening but is delivered according to the word of God.

Discernment distinguishes between a genuine prophet and a false prophet. In the words of Sciberras (2013:172), 'Truth and falsity are disentangled by the process of discernment so as to preserve what is true' (Sciberras 2013:172). The text in Matthew calls on believers to watch out for false prophets who come disguised like sheep but inside they wolves. They will be known by what they do because they cannot bear good fruit if they are not good trees (Matt. 7:15-20). If the prophecy does not represent what God is saying to His people, it cannot be true, because God cannot contradict himself. He cannot say one thing in His way and say the other through the mouth of the prophet (Albrecht 1997:10). However, some members of societies in South Africa failing to draw a distinction between what is true and what is false. Such society receives everything without examination of the source (Deke 2015:12). In order to make that distinction, discernment is required (Meyer 2010:7). In addition, when the prophecy is given, the leaders of the church should authenticate such a prophecy, especially if such involves a nation. The word should be established in the witness of two or three matured believers (Omenyo 2011).

The theology of discernment will assist to make a distinction between the antic-Christ preaching and the pro-Christ preaching. Many preachers in new Pentecostal Churches today will never mention the name of Christ from the beginning of their sermon until the end. Their preaching is mainly about

their own personal achievements. They will also highlight the fact that the reason others do not have what they have is because they are not as prayerful or they are not as anointed as they are. Is this not the sign of being an antichrist? Many churches have removed Christ out of the church and it is all about the church itself. A preacher or a pastor who is pro-Christ, according to Asemoah-Gyadu (2013), should be able to acknowledge (1) the authority of the Bible; the Bible is not just another book, but is the inspired word of God as stated in 2 Timothy 3:16, namely that 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness'. (2) The centrality of the cross; the cross of Jesus is the main reason why Christianity is in existence; hence Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:2, 'For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified'. (3) Regeneration as the way to Christian salvation; and (4) a call to holiness.

### **Theology of Discernment in the Context of Gullibility of Society**

The society will not be gullible when the Holy Spirit leads them. Discernment in this context is more than personal choices, feelings and emotions. The work of the Holy Spirit guides the work of discernment. In Romans 8:16, the scripture says that the Spirit of God bears witness that we are the sons of God. Another scripture says that as many as are led by the Holy Spirit, are the sons of God (Romans 8:14). In other words, in the life of the believer the Holy Spirit will be able to bear witness if something goes in the right direction and even when it goes in the wrong direction. When an individual is properly guided, then the whole society will change for the better. When outrageous acts happen in our society an individual will be able to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will help believers not to react to the outrageous acts of pastors, but rather to respond to them. Instead of supporting any man of God who pitches a tent to preach, believers will now have to sense in their spirit by the Holy Spirit if the one preaching is sent by God. In this way, pastors will have to think twice about feeding people with snakes, dog meat, etc. Hence the importance of discernment.

A society will not be gullible when they know the will of God in their lives. One of the goals of discernment is to seek the will of God in one's life. This means that an individual does not have to follow everything in life but to

discern the will of God. The urgent thing in a person's life is not a job, car, house or promotion, but to know the will and the purpose of God that can be discerned; to be someone who always yearns to please God instead of pleasing men. It is the desire of God to see individuals and the whole community of believers walking in the will and purposes of God. However, it starts with an individual who can sense the will of God in his or her life. If congregants can walk in discernment, they will save themselves from pastors, some of whom do not even have the calling of God in their lives, but only take chances to rob people of God of their possessions. Discernment will let the society guard against the work of the enemy who is out there to destroy the authentic work of God (cf. Kiesel 2015:12).

## **The Theology of Discernment in the Context of the Regulation of Religion**

CRL commission does not have to regulate religion. Such a regulation will have a negative impact on the religious practice and the society. Banda (2019) cites three reasons why religion should not be regulated: disempowering of the poor and the powerlessness; creating conditions for religious persecution; and forcing religious movements to operate underground. All these reasons shared by Banda are valid, especially the first reason, because many in South Africa rely on religion for survival. They may not have bread on their dinner table, but as long as they have faith life goes on. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with religion but for the bad practices of religion; hence a need to be aware of such bad practices. Many South Africans do not willingly support wrong acts, but do so because they have hope that a 'man of God' will bring about change in their lives. To some, religion is their last hope, given the failure of neo-liberal policies and capitalism that define the postcolonial Africa. However, the question remains; what is the solution or alternative to the regulation of religion? What can be done to solve the abuse of religion and the gullibility of society? This paper suggests the theology of discernment as a tool that will go a long way towards helping every member of society to choose for themselves which religion is on the right track and which is swaying to the negative.

## **Conclusion**

The current abuses of religion by some pastors of some Pentecostal Churches

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in South Africa pose a danger not only to the practitioners of religion but also to society as a whole. The reason of this assertion is that society has become gullible regarding the abuse of religion, given their economic reasons, gender injustices reasons, theological reasons, and psychological reasons. The regulation of religion is not a solution to the challenge of the abuse of religion and the gullibility of society thereof. On the contrary, it reverses the much-fought freedom of South Africa that ensured freedom of religion and association. This paper suggests that instead of regulating religion, the theology of discernment can assist individual believers to make the right decisions about which religion to follow in their lives. No matter what a government does, it remains the prerogative of individuals to make such choices. Therefore, in embracing the theology of discernment, believers will be able, 1) to differentiate between the Spirit of God and other spirits; 2) to make a distinction between a real prophecy and divination; 3) To differentiate between a genuine prophet and a false prophet; and 4) to identify the antichrist. Believers can do so when they read and understand the Bible on their own without relying much on the interpretation of the prophet. In addition, believers should organise themselves into Bible study groups for an in-depth biblical exposition and discussions. Lastly, the work of the Holy Spirit is pivotal in helping the believer to discern wrong or evil spirits and even discerning the antichrist and the false prophets.

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Mookgo Solomon Kgatle  
Professor of Missiology  
Department of Christian Spirituality, Church  
History and Missiology University of South Africa  
UNISA  
[kgatls@unisa.ac.za](mailto:kgatls@unisa.ac.za)