The material dimension of religion: a case study of selected Neo-Pentecostal churches in Woodstock, Cape Town

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**Abstract**
The aim of the study was to establish why the sudden emergence of numerous storefront Neo-Pentecostal churches, in the suburb of Woodstock, Cape Town, were found to be attracting large numbers of members while mainstream churches were closing down or struggling to survive. Over and above the fact that the Neo-Pentecostal churches are flourishing, the sheer number of them, was a further cause for investigation into this phenomenon. The majority of these congregations proved to have sub-Saharan ties (Nigerian in particular) and attracted membership largely of a similar background. This study looks at this phenomenon from a thorough understanding of the history of liturgy and particularly Pentecostal customs and attempts to place these churches in their social and historical context. The main thrust of this thesis, however, is an analysis of the distinctive and very prominent material features of these churches and their worship services which not only sets them apart from other Pentecostal and mainstream churches, but may offer an explanation of their popularity in this community. This study is undertaken through the close analysis of the worship services of seven Neo-Pentecostal churches in Woodstock and application of Ninian Smart’s dimensions of religious practice, with specific reference to what he calls the Material Dimension. At least one worship service in each congregation was recorded on video and great sensitivity was exercised here in the physical recordings and in obtaining the written consent of the leaders of these respective congregations to use the data obtained.

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