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SURVEY RESEARCH AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNICATION AND EVANGELISM

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INTRODUCTION

How can faith and learning interact freely in a conceptual understanding and teaching of research methodology? This is a general question this essay attempts to answer. Another intention will be to explore the practical application of survey research as a tool for communication and evangelism. According to James Sire (1990:18), "Survey research works on the mind. It probes the attitude of human beings towards God and ourselves". The belief here is that the human mind is in motion, always in both formation and reformation. Certain basic concepts that are to be used in this essay need to be clarified. These include, research, research process, survey research, and communication. We shall also discuss the uses and limitations as well as instruments of survey research. The rest of the essay will then focus on how survey research can help in internal church communication and during preparation for Adventist evangelism.

To achieve the foregoing, the overall objective shall be to establish that survey research in its conceptual and applied aspects integrates faith and learning. The specific objectives come in two ways. One, is to affirm that developing a discipled mind (James Sire, 1990: thematic) guided by the holy spirit in search of facts is a crucial task for Christian scholars. Two, is to establish that when properly conducted, survey research is capable of ensuring that specific evangelical needs of the churches and their prospects are discovered (revealed) and met. The profit of this will be the furtherance of the gospel in line with the injunction of Matthew 28: 19-20.

RESEARCH

Research is any organized enquiry that aims at providing information for solving identified problems. In other words, it is the systematic recording and analysis of controlled observations that may lead to the development of generalization, principles, or theories, resulting in prediction and possibly ultimate control of events (Akuezuilo, 1993: 1). From the foregoing, four characteristics of research are evident - research aims at solving problems, it is conducted in a systematic manner, it is based upon observable experience and descriptions, and lastly, it emphasises the development of generalisations.

We can also glean from this clarification that students must be well trained in research methodology in order to cope with the demands of research. They must be:
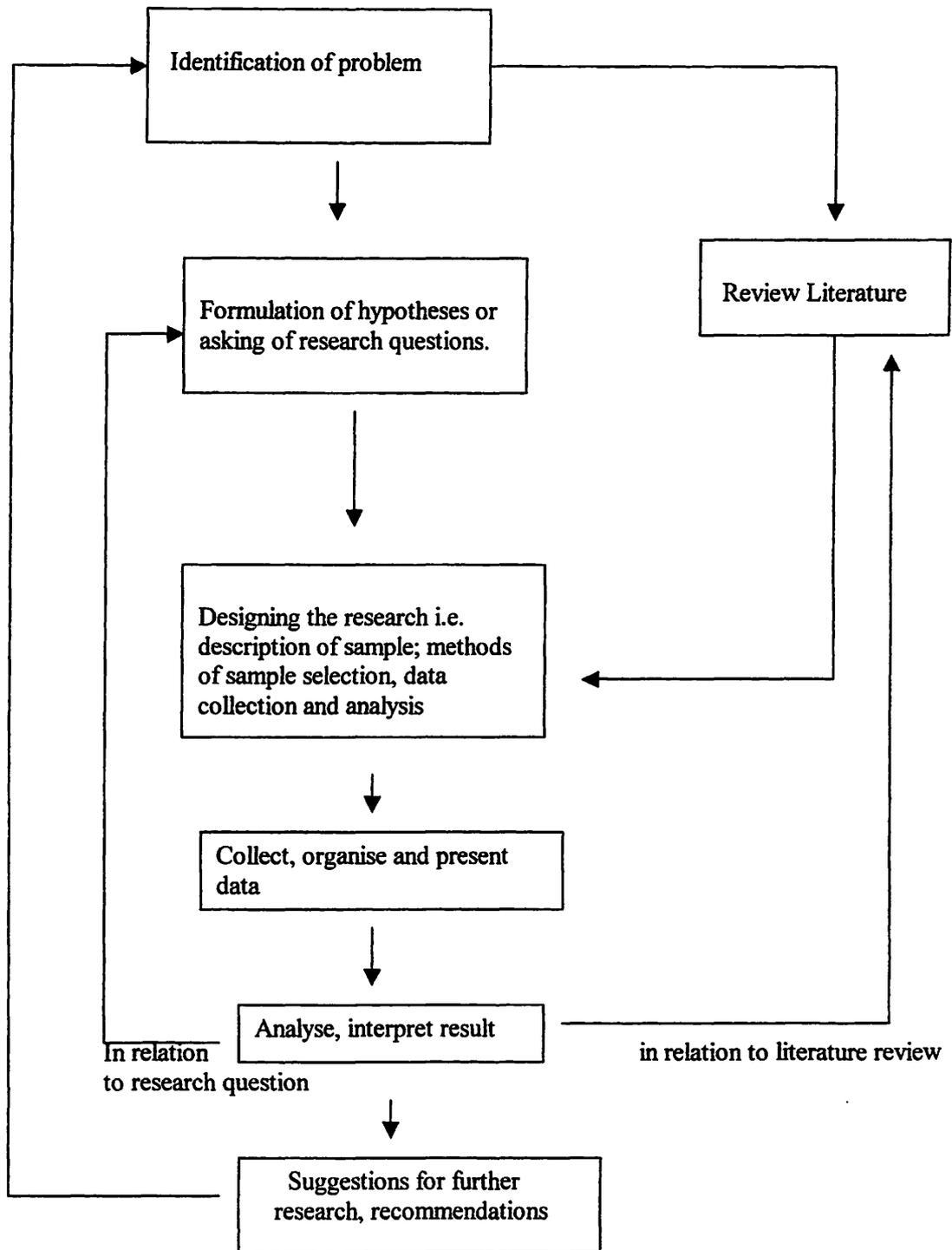
a. painstaking and imaginative

b. men and women of integrity

c. willing to spend long hours,

d. seeking to solve their research problems.

RESEARCH PROCESS

This is the steps to be followed in carrying out a research. It provides a systematic plan or procedure for the researcher. The major steps according to Jean Nancy Vyhmeister (2001) and Akuezuilo (ibid:13) include:

a. Identification of research problem(s)

b. Review of Literature

c. Statement of hypotheses or asking of research questions

d. Plotting the research design

e. Collection and organization of data

f. Analysis of data

g. Recommendations.

These steps can be illustrates as follows:

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
              ┌────▶│ Identification of problem│──────────────────────┐
              │     └─────────────────────────┘                       │
              │                  │                                     │
              │                  ▼                                     ▼
              │     ┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────┐
              │     │ Formulation of hypotheses or│     │    Review Literature    │
              │  ┌─▶│ asking of research questions.│    └─────────────────────────┘
              │  │  └─────────────────────────┘                       │
              │  │               │                                    │
              │  │               ▼                                    │
              │  │  ┌─────────────────────────┐                       │
              │  │  │ Designing the research i.e.│                     │
              │  │  │ description of sample; methods│◀─────────────────┘
              │  │  │ of sample selection, data│
              │  │  │ collection and analysis │
              │  │  └─────────────────────────┘
              │  │               │
              │  │               ▼
              │  │  ┌─────────────────────────┐
              │  │  │ Collect, organise and present│
              │  │  │ data                    │
              │  │  └─────────────────────────┘
              │  │               │
              │  │               ▼
              │  │  ┌─────────────────────────┐
              │  └──│ Analyse, interpret result│──────────────────────┐
              │     └─────────────────────────┘                       │
              │  In relation                          in relation to literature review
              │  to research question                                 │
              │                  │                                    ▲
              │                  ▼
              │     ┌─────────────────────────┐
              └─────│ Suggestions for further │
                    │ research, recommendations│
                    └─────────────────────────┘
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In relation
to research question

in relation to literature review

SURVEY RESEARCH

Survey research is a component of descriptive research. Descriptive research itself is a typology of educational research. The clarification of this concept would be patterned along these groupings for better understanding. Broadly speaking, education research is one targetted at improving the efficiency of educational process and, or providing guide for positive change in educational practice. It has three typologies - historical, experimental and descriptive. Our emphasis will be on the descritive typology. But then, we can have a quick look at the other two typologies.

While historical research seeks to discover generalisations that may be helpful in understanding the past and the present, and to an extent in anticipating the future; experimental research on other hand attempts to answer the question - if this is done under carefully controlled conditions, what will happen? Experimental research is generally believed to find greater utility in the laboratory.

Descriptive research as it were, incorporates survey research, correlation studies, case studies, *ex-post-facto* studies. Essentially, it describes and interprets what is, by seeking to find out the conditions or relationship that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, effects that are evident or trends that are developing. While correlation study seeks to establish what relationship exists between two or more variables; case study singles out individuals, group of individuals, institutions or communities for study. Also while *ex-post-facto* research seeks to find out the factors that are associated with certain occurrences, outcomes, conditions, or types of behaviour by analysis of past events or already existing conditions; development studies involve investigation of patterns and sequences of growth and changes that take place as a function of

time.

Survey research is one in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analysing data from only a few people or items considered to be representation of the entire group. The researcher uses such instruments like the questionnaire, interviews, observations to collect data.
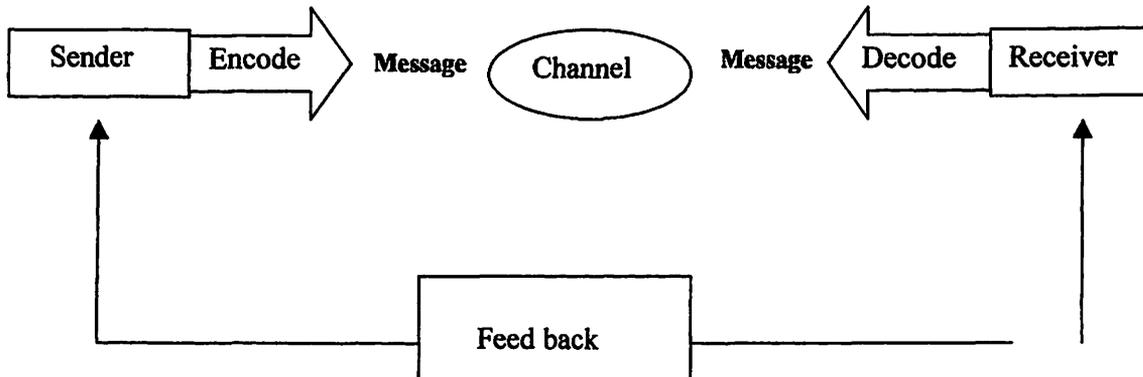
COMMUNICATION

The basic question to ask here is - what is communication? For our purpose, communication can be taken to mean a deliberate act in which someone (source) passes (transmits) information to another (receiver). (Wilcox and Agee, 1986:160). Basically five components of communication exist. These are

    (a)   The source

    (b)   The message

    (c)   The channel or medium

    (d)   The receiver, and

    (e)   Feedback

According to Adekunle Salu (1994:160), the following diagram, which represents a

communication model, provides in graphic details the processes of communication.

Communication will be effective (ibid,161) if the medium e.g language or gesture is clearly

understood by both the sender and the receiver, the understanding being underscored by

appropriate feedback signals. According to Amadon Mahtor, communication maintains and

animates life. Communication is at the heart of social intercourse. It enhances the possibilities of

bringing people together and the prospects of reducing tension and of settling conflicts. The

major barriers to effective communication can be identified as follows:

(a)   Lack of reciprocal respect or mutual understanding

(b)   Where the sender and, or the receiver are not interested in the message

(c)   Difference in levels of intelligence

(d)   Difference in world view of sender and receiver and inability to seek to genuinely

       use the tool of persuasion.

(e)   Social differences between sender and receiver for example age, sex, ethnicity

       income etc when not properly manage.

The researcher who is interested in effective (good) communication must be able to answer certain basic questions. Some of these include:

1. What is the purpose of communication? Is it to inform, change attitude or stimulate an action?

2. What is the source of communication?

3. What is the subject of the information to be communicated?

4. Who are the audience? Who is to be influenced?

5. What is the time allowed?

TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Achieving effective communication does not come by chance. It is a planned, deliberate and sustained action anchored, for our purpose, on the guidance of Holy Spirit. Two groups of factors/attributes are essential to understanding effective communication. These are personality and education factors.

The personality factor is very essential. It is important to establish that effective communication requires submission to the divine wisdom in addition to the qualities of being tactful, patient, curious, resilient, energetic, courageous, responsible, time conscious, imaginative enthusiastic and so on.

The second factor is that the sender must posses certain level of education - formal or informal. This is guided by the saying "what yo do not have, you cannot give". The 21st century illiterate will simply not be the one who cannot read or write. He or she will be one who cannot learn relearn and unlearn.

USES OF SURVEY RESEARCH

A major advantage of survey research is that it allows the researcher to be able to make inferences about a population using a selected number usually referred to as sample. The idea behind sample surveys (survey research) is the law of statistical regularity. This states that a small group of objects taken randomly from a larger group tend to replicate or resemble the characteristics of the larger group. For example, five members taken randomly from a large class of 50 people.

A further advantage is the possibility of eliminating biases. To ensure that the five members are representatives of the whole group of 50, they have to be selected in a certain way to reflect the characteristics of the whole class. This can be done by using table of random numbers, tossing of coin between two options, dividing the population into groups (based on personal attributes such as age, education, sex, religion, tribe or ethnic affiliation) before samples are drawn etc. Where the samples are drawn using conventional criteria, every member of the population is given equal chance of being selected or dropped.

LIMITATIONS OF SURVEY RESEARCH

The survey research is not without its fair share of limitations. Especially in developing countries, the researcher is open to biases in the choice of method to be used to select samples. Respondents sometimes too refuse to provide accurate information. The instrument used to gather data from the units or group of units of the population sample could be faulty or put to faulty use. Either way, the best information may be very difficult to get thereby affecting the accuracy of results and authenticity of research recommendations. Sometimes the data gathered may not reflect the facts on ground. However, as we shall discover, many of the known weaknesses of survey research can be overcome if the researcher is guided by the desire to be

thorough and search after facts without any form of prejudice.

INSTRUMENTS OF SURVEY RESEARCH

Three major instruments of survey research are of interest to this essay. These are the Questionnaire, Personal interviews and Observations.

QUESTIONNAIRE

A questionnaire is one major instrument of survey research. It consists of a set of questions designed to gather information/data for analysis, the results of which are used to answer research questions or used to test relevant hypotheses. The researcher must bear in mind that questionnaires are not just constructed aimlessly. To construct a meaningful questionnaire, the researcher must allow the questions to be logically structured. Also, the language used must take cognisance of the audience; simple rather than difficult or leading questions must be asked. It is of no use requesting a respondent with no idea of what you want to respond. It should be noted also that adequate instructions must be given on the way and manner responses are to be filled. Most questionnaires carry a promise of confidentiality as well as anonymity.

PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

This is a survey method of research involving a person seeking the information called the interviewer and another giving the information, called the respondent. The interviewer is armed with a schedule, meets the respondents, asks questions and complete the interview schedule by himself. In effect, personal interview uses questionnaire which is completed by the interviewer. The interviewer reserves the right to limit himself to the schedule or go beyond what is contained therein by seeking further clarifications in order to enrich the response. In carrying out his assignment, the researcher must create a congenial atmosphere of mutual respect, trust and

understanding. He does this by giving the respondent the feeling that the experience to be gained is worthwhile; that he is reliable, responsible and trustworthy, and that the respondents viewpoints are valuable and worthwhile.

OBSERVATIONS

Observations are used in some research situations where the researcher can gather his data only by watching and recording information. Observation include monitoring behavioural and non-behavioural activities and the conditions of sampled (survey) subjects. Observations can be viewed from three perspectives - by participating in the events under study (this is also called participant observation); structured observation (as in experimental designs or settings); as well as direct or indirect observations.

SURVEY RESEARCH AND INTERNAL CHURCH COMMUNICATION

We have said that communication is at the heart of all social interaction. The same can be said of religious interaction. Whenever men and women have come to establish regular relations like the ones we normally have under church settings, the nature of communication between members, and the measure of effectiveness they have attained will, to a large extent determine the achievement of collective goals. It will also go a long way in reducing tensions, settling conflicts where they have arisen and promote social and religious harmony.

As the work of God advances, the need for internal cohesion among the lightbearers have become, very crucial. In the search for internal cohesion, the role of communication becomes even more fundamental. Communication maintains and animates life. It is the motor and expression of social activity and civilisation; it leads people and peoples from instinct to inspiration through variegated processes and systems of enquiry, command and control; it creates a common pool of ideas, strengthen the feeling of togetherness through exchange of messages and

translates thought into action. Communication integrates faith and knowledge and runs like a thread linking church workers together in their noblest aspirations and unites them in community and communion, solidarity and understanding. Two illustrations of these will help in this regard. At the West and South-West Nigerian Conferences of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria, dwindling returns of tithe and offerings in the early 1990s led to a survey research conducted by the leadership of the church in its bid to find out what can be done. A survey of public opinion using the questionnaire and interview methods was conducted. Part of the comments from respondents led to the redesigning of the tithe card. The card now carries not only more detailed explanation of the breakdown of tithe and offerings but printed copies in English and the local language (Yoruba). This has resulted in clearer understanding and positive response. Of course the response can be explained by other factors like continued education/promotion by treasury staff at regular intervals. These in themselves are part of the suggestions that emanated from the survey research.

A survey of public opinion at regular interval on various issues including leadership style, attitude to visitors, prospects and new converts, the pattern of evangelical outreaches etc have been carried out in certain local churches within Ogba district of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, south-west Nigeria. This study has equally been informed of the tremendous impact that opinion survey are having in the enhancement of the gospel in some other divisions of our work across the globe especially in North America. Particularly in Nigeria (South-west), leadership styles have benefitted a great deal from constructive comments gleaned from a survey of members' opinion.

SURVEY RESEARCH AND ADVENTIST EVANGELISM

The task of evangelism is one that cannot be trivialised. It is the cornerstone of all church

doctrines (Revelation 14:6-12; Matthew 28:19-10). It is not enough to integrate faith and

learning in the teaching of research methodology. It is most profitable if its practical application

to the spread of the gospel can be explored. This section explores the support survey research

can offer to evangelical outreaches. Ellen White counsels that we must take every justifiable

means of bringing the light before the people (Testimonies, vol.6 p.36); means must be devised to

reach hearts. Some of the methods used in this work will be different from the methods used in

the past (Evangelism, p. 105)

Equally reassuring in the application of survey research to further evangelism effort is item 27 on

the outline of church doctrinal beliefs which reads:

> Every church member is under sacred command
>
> from Jesus to use his talents in personal soul-
>
> winning work in helping to give the gospel to all the
>
> world. When this work is finished, (then)
>
> Jesus will come. (Matt. 25:14-29; 28:18-20; Rev.
>
> 22:17; Isa. 43: 10-12; 2Cor. 5:17-20; Rom. 10:13-
>
> 15; Matt. 24:14).

A good example of opinion survey can even be identified in the account of Jesus' encounter with his

disciples recorded in Matthew 16:13-16.

> When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi,

13

he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of

man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist;

other say Elijah; and still others say Jeremiah or one of

the prophets". "But what about you?" he asked. "Who

do you say I am?". Simon Peter answered, "You are

the Christ, the son of the living God.

It is noteworthy that this confession at Caesarea Philippi fulfilled certain basic steps in the research

process identified earlier.

1. Jesus had identified the problem which was unbelief among men and women of that

   period in history.

2. In prophecy, there is abundance of literature to confirm unbelief as a major

   characteristics of the sinful world.

3. The research questions had been posed.

4. For the research design, the use of personal interview as a major method of data

   collection had been preferred by the Master.

5. The data were collected by asking those who should know.

6. They were sorted out into the common belief and the apostolic belief.

7. Verse 17-10 contained recommendations including the charge not to tell anyone

   (v.20).

The benefit to be derived from this is that as lightbearers, the Christian (Adventist) researcher is

better-off if he is acquainted with the spiritual and other needs of his prospects which can be made

available through a survey of public opinion in any designated area of population. A practical example

of this can be demonstrated with the use of questionnaire, a principal instrument of survey research,

in gauging public opinion before any major outreach is carried out. A local church in the district hosting the Nigerian Union Mission (NUM) in the 1990s, (Ogba SDA church) found this approach useful(sample of questionaire attached as appendix). As revealed by members, including this writer, messages were easily tailored to meet the specific needs of the audience.The local church discovered that even in Lagos where the NUM headquarters is located, many residents have not heard about the advent message and what adventists believe. Many who have heard confessed they thought the church was a form of cult. It was strange for them to accept that some people worship on Saturday who are Christians. Some of the questions administered in form of direct interview for the illiterate respondents showed that large number of respondents were keen to listen to our health messages. It will be interesting if this exercise that was done innocuously some years ago could be re-introduced. Survey research can lead to new insights in determining the best way to reach thousands of people yet unreached in our localities. A growing fear in this regard has being the feeling that the survey of those hitherto unreached could generate data or views that are at variance with the true belief. A simple answer to this is that it is not unexpected. When Jesus surveyed his apostles to have a feel of public opinion, the aggregate of the public perception of him was misplaced. As it was His responsibility to convince humanity to follow the right path, so we owe it a duty today to guide those who hold contrary views to those contained in the Bible. "Then you(they) will know the truth, and the truth will set you(them) free," (John 8:32).

CONCLUSION.

We have discovered that survey research gives the church worker the much needed access to public arena through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Despite its limitations, this method of research offers unique opportunities in the search for improved internal church communication and during preparation for adventist evangelism. This essay will conclude with a reminder that the Christian

(Adventist) researcher must master the correct perspective of research methodology, especially survey research; he or she must be committed, tolerant and painstaking in carrying out assigned duties; like Solomon, he or she must ask God to open new pages in the world of knowledge so that wisdom can be given.

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Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is designed to help our group to know how to plan a three-week program on Bible and Health talks in your locality. We solicit your sincere response. Your anonymity is fully guaranteed.

INSTRUCTION: Please mark X of fill the appropriate space.

(1)   Do you believe that there is God?   Yes ☐   No ☐

(2)   Has He (God) any role in the affairs of men?   Yes ☐   No ☐

(3)   Your idea of God is based on which faith: Christianity ☐   Islam ☐

Traditional Religion ☐   Others (Specify) ....

(4)   If you are a Christian, do yo believe in Jesus? Yes ☐   No ☐

(5)   Is Jesus the son of God? Yes ☐   No ☐   I don't know ☐

(6)   Is Jesus essential in the plan of salvation? Yes ☐   No ☐ I don't know ☐

(7)   Mention any other Bible personality without which salvation is not guaranteed? ....

(8)   Do you accept the Bible as a complete document? Yes ☐ No ☐

(9)   If yes, would you be ready to follow it, come what may? Yes ☐   No ☐

(10)   Does it matter which day we worship God - Friday, Saturday or Sunday Yes ☐ No ☐

(11)   What day do you observe your weekly worship. Friday ☐   Saturday ☐ Sunday ☐

Others ((Specify) ....

(12)   Have you discovered Bible proofs for this action? Yes ☐ No ☐   No need ☐

(13)   Will you be ready to share it with others? Yes ☐ No ☐ I have not thought about it ☐

(14)   Will you be ready to listen to others too. Yes ☐   No ☐

(15)   If you are a Muslim. do you read the Holy Koran very well? Yes ☐ No ☐

(16)   Would you like to study it with other people? Yes ☐ No ☐

(17)   Tick the most prevalent healthcare problem(s) in your locality? Malaria ☐

Typhoid Fever ☐ Cholera ☐ Tuberculosis ☐ Other (Specify) ....

(18)   Would like to listen to expert discuss how to prevent the above with you? Yes ☐ No ☐

(19)   Do you desire personal visit on all or any of items above? Yes ☐ No ☐

(20)   Feel free to tick and fill any option(s) as applicable

(a)   Male ☐   Female ☐

(b)   State of Origin ----------------------------- Nationality ----------------------------

(c)   Education: Koranic ☐ Pry & Sec ☐ College, University etc ☐

Other (specify) ....

(d)   Name --- Address-------------------------------

NB: This is a sample of the questionnaire used to survey prospects prior to

evangelistic outreaches at Akiode and Ogba churches in the 1990s