# Reliability and validity of the REM Initial Christian Faith Scale

## Fiabilidad y validez de la Escala REM de la Fe Cristiana Inicial

Rómulo Esteban Montilla[1] ⊠, Edixon Chacón-Guerrero[2] ⊠, Rolando Eslava-Zapata[3] ⊠

[1]Saint's Mary's University, Department of Counseling and Human Services. San Antonio. United States.

[2]Universidad de Los Andes, Statistics Department. San Cristóbal. Venezuela.

[3]Universidad Libre Colombia, Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Accounting Sciences. Cúcuta. Colombia.

**Corresponding author:** Rómulo Esteban Montilla ⊠

**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** faith is a central dimension in the lives of millions of people and constitutes a significant component in their construction of meaning in life. From a psychological perspective, faith involves religious belief and a fundamental trust that shapes emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. In Christian contexts, faith has traditionally been understood as a personal relationship with God and an acceptance of biblical teachings as a guide for life.
**Objective:** evaluate the reliability and validity of a Christian faith scale in its initial phase.
**Method:** an Exploratory Factor Analysis and an item discrimination analysis were carried out. The scale is designed to capture the different dimensions of Christian faith and levels of spiritual evolution from a psychometric perspective. The sample is 65 people.
**Results:** the results evidence a high internal consistency (α = 0,974); likewise, 11 factors were identified that reflect dimensions such as biblical literalism, the power of prayer, worship, and the concept of evil.
**Conclusions:** based on the factors, four evolutionary levels of faith were proposed: early faith, fundamental faith, pragmatic faith, and intermediate faith. This instrument offers an empirical basis for studying spiritual development in Christian contexts.

**Keywords:** Christian Faith; Psychology of Religion; Early Faith; Intermediate Faith; Consolidated Faith; Biblical Literalism.

**RESUMEN**

**Introducción:** la fe es una dimensión central en la vida de millones de personas y constituye un componente significativo de su construcción del sentido de la vida. Desde una perspectiva psicológica, la fe implica una creencia religiosa y una confianza fundamental que moldea las emociones, pensamientos y comportamientos. En contextos cristianos, la fe se ha entendido tradicionalmente relación personal con Dios y la aceptación de las enseñanzas bíblicas como bíblicas como guía para la vida.
**Objetivo**: evaluar la fiabilidad y validez de una escala de fe cristiana en su fase inicial.
**Método:** se hace un Análisis Factorial Exploratorio y un análisis de discriminación de ítems. La escala se diseña para captar las distintas dimensiones de la fe cristiana y los niveles de evolución espiritual desde una perspectiva psicométrica. La muestra es de 65 personas.
**Resultados:** los resultados evidencian una alta consistencia interna (α = 0,974); asimismo, se identificaron 11 factores que reflejan dimensiones como el literalismo bíblico, el poder de la oración, la adoración, el concepto

de mal, entre otros.
**Conclusiones:** a partir de los factores, se propusieron cuatro niveles evolutivos de la fe: Fe temprana, fe fundamental, fe pragmática y fe intermedia. Este instrumento ofrece una base empírica para el estudio del desarrollo espiritual en contextos cristianos.

**Palabras clave:** Fe Cristiana; Psicología de la Religión; Fe Temprana; Fe Intermedia; Fe Consolidada; Literalismo Bíblico.

## INTRODUCTION

Faith is a central dimension in the lives of millions of people and constitutes a significant component in their construction of meaning in life.[1] From a psychological perspective, faith involves religious belief and a fundamental trust that shapes emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.[2] In Christian contexts, faith has traditionally been understood as a personal relationship with God and an acceptance of biblical teachings as a guide for life.[3]

Historically, the Christian faith has undergone various doctrinal and practical moments that have shaped its theological structure.[4] From its origins in the first century through the ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries to the Protestant Reformation, the conception of faith has oscillated between dogmatic, moral, and symbolic interpretations.[5,6] These changes have influenced how people live, understand, and develop their faith throughout life.

One of the most influential theories on the development of faith identifies six stages that describe how people evolve from an infantile faith, characterized by magical and literal thinking, to a mature faith that integrates experience, symbolism, and reflective criticism.[2] This model has been validated and extended by other researchers, who bring a more dialogical and contextualized approach to the development of religiosity.[7]

Despite its theoretical relevance, the empirical measurement of Christian faith remains a methodological challenge, especially in its initial stages.[8] Many existing instruments do not adequately capture the complexities of spiritual development nor the different levels of faith that can coexist in the same community of believers. Hence, there is a need to construct and validate scales that reflect the diversity of beliefs and practices in contemporary Christian contexts.[9]

A person's faith influences every aspect of their existence, including thinking, remembering, aspiring, feeling, and behaving.[1] Faith is a motivational force that is best not ignored, as the behavior patterns a human being exhibits may reflect the type of faith they embrace. Faith (pistis in Greek) has two dimensions: a personal and a collective one, but both have to do with the trust one has in a person, a deity, or a community based on the concrete behaviors that have been observed in the past.[10] Thus, by expressing that one trusts someone, one is saying that one can predict their behavior because one has seen how they have behaved in past circumstances.

Knowing a person or a community is then central to faith or trust. This knowledge is possible through communion experience, attentive listening, spending time together, careful observation of actions, and sharing in various existential contexts. In this sense, faith is trust, and trust requires knowing.[11] Faith, then, is not blind but starts with concrete facts. For example, one has faith in God because of the actions he has carried out in the past; one has faith in a person whom one knows because one has seen how he acts; one has faith in oneself insofar as there is a specific assessment of the competencies or qualities one possesses.[12]

Now, the collective dimension of faith is related to the trust one has in a community, from which theoretical frameworks or ways of understanding the universe, patterns of interaction with nature, premises for making sense of life, and perspectives for understanding human relations are derived.[13] This element of faith is connected to what is understood as a religion or faith group. Religion offers its members a structure that assists them in thinking, practices, or rituals through which they affirm their faith and a religious leadership that provides them with spiritual care. Thus, we speak of Christian faith, Jewish faith, Islamic faith, Hindu faith, Buddhist faith, Pagan faith, and other types of corporate faith.[14]

A healthy individual and collective faith can assist human beings in dealing with life's challenges, promote the development of their potential, guide them in making key decisions for good living, motivate them to establish stable social relationships and live together healthily.[15] It should be noted that this faith evolves throughout life thanks to personal experiences duly reflected upon, education, cultural immersions, new social relationships, religious encounters, and the proactive decision to grow spiritually.[2]

This study aimed to construct, analyze, and psychometrically validate a scale that measures Christian faith in its initial stages based on an evolutionary approach. Through the use of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and item discrimination analysis, we sought to identify the underlying dimensions of faith and establish a proposal for early faith, fundamental faith, pragmatic faith, and intermediate faith. This scale is intended to serve as a diagnostic and formative tool for researchers, educators, religious leaders, and spiritual health professionals.

## METHOD

The present study is framed within a quantitative, psychometric approach with a non-experimental and cross-sectional design. Its objective was to validate a scale for measuring Christian faith, exploring its internal structure, consistency, and underlying dimensions from an evolutionary approach.

The instrument was designed and developed based on a theoretical review of the main currents in systematic theology, psychology of religious development, and sociological studies on faith. The initial scale comprised 50 items formulated as statements, with response options in Likert format. The contents of the items sought to represent different dimensions of the Christian faith, including biblical literalism, prayer, worship, morality, the concept of sin, and the role of evil, among others. The construction was carried out according to content validity and semantic clarity criteria, with the advice of specialists in the psychology of religion.

The instrument was applied to 65 participants, representing a pilot sample of Christian adults selected by convenience. Denominational, age, and gender diversity were sought to capture a representative sample within the target religious context. Of the total, 35 complete responses were considered valid, meeting the minimum requirements for factor analysis[16] All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and gave their free and voluntary consent.

To evaluate the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated, which reached a value of ,974, indicating excellent internal consistency.[17] Complementarily, an item discrimination analysis was performed through the corrected item-total correlation, which made it possible to identify the items that contribute insufficiently to the instrument's consistency.[18]

Subsequently, an EFA was carried out using the principal component extraction method with Promax rotation. This procedure allowed us to identify the underlying factor structure of the items and guide the conceptual understanding of the scale.[19] Eleven factors grouping the religious beliefs assessed were extracted, which were interpreted and labeled based on their contents and factor loadings.

Based on the factors obtained, levels of evolution of Christian faith were established through a conceptual relationship between the empirical components and the theoretical models of faith development.[2,7] Thus, four levels were proposed: early faith, fundamental faith, pragmatic faith, and intermediate faith. This categorization allows us to articulate the factor analysis results with a processual and evolutionary vision of the religious phenomenon.

The study respected the international ethical principles established in the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants were informed about the research objectives, the confidentiality of data processing, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. All participants signed informed consent, and anonymity of responses was guaranteed.

## DEVELOPMENT

### Christian faith

The Christian faith emerged between 30-120 A.D., inspired by the life, teaching, and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, who began his work as a teacher, prophet, and healer in the northern region of Israel and, from there, spread to the south of that country and finally to the whole world. This new approach to faith relied on the reinterpretation of sacred Jewish texts known as the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, as well as Jewish apocalyptic writings such as the Book of Enoch, the Book of Adam and Eve, and the Jubilees, to construct its religious beliefs and practices.[5]

Thus, Jesus of Nazareth and later his disciples suggested an alternative faith with a belief system very different from the traditional Jewish faith, very particular rituals, and an organizational structure different from biblical Judaism. For example, this new faith initially suggested different beliefs, such as life after death through resurrection, the opportunity to continue living in a paradisiacal place found in heaven, the achievement of divine justice through a place of torment called hell, the explanation of evil in humanity driven by a divine being called the Devil and his retinue of demons, divine intervention to bring an end to this age, and the second coming of Jesus the Christ.

Novel ritual practices were added, such as baptism instead of circumcision, eating and drinking together or communion for the edification of all, meetings (churches) to encourage one another, foster a passion for service, and worship God through good deeds. In this new faith, there were no more animal sacrifices and no temples, and generosity moved by kindness was proposed as a substitute for a mandatory tithe. In the organizational structure, there were no priests (because there was no need for animal sacrifices), and the Pauline group suggested a leadership composed of disciples with the functions of apostles, deacons, presbyters, and bishops.[20,21,22,23] Later, the Johannine group proposed a more horizontal structure where the leadership was recognized as disciples.[24,25]

Diversity in beliefs was a reality from the very beginning of this movement created by Jesus of Nazareth, as after his death, various groups emerged that took diverse geographical and theological directions. This can be seen in the writings now known as the New Testament. However, the mission to make a difference in the world

by acting justly, practicing mercy, and presenting oneself without presumption before God and others was a common denominator in all these groups. "I want you to be compassionate".[26]

From its very beginnings, the Christian faith focused more on the practice or assistance of the neediest people than on simply intellectual discussions. "Avoid vain controversies and genealogies, discussions and quarrels about the Torah, for they are unprofitable and meaningless".[27,28] The central point of this faith was to act out of love for God to live compassionately and justly. Even the forerunner of this movement was asked, "What should we do? He who has two clothes, let him give one to him who has none, and he who has food, let him share it with him who has none... Master, what should we do? John said to them, "Do not charge more than you ought to charge. Some of the soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do? He said to them, 'Do not take anything from anyone, either by threats or by accusing him of anything he has not done, but be content with his wages'".[29]

*Evolution of the Christian faith*

The different Christian groups agreed that God is a supreme being characterized by love and justice, interested in human welfare and the care of his creation, a God who transcends but remains closely involved with his creation. "God is not far from each of us, for in God we live and move and exist; as also some of your poets said, 'We are God's offspring'".[30]

In this faith, we conceive of a God who longs for all his creatures to live in peace and have integral well-being. "But I will heal them, give them health, and cause them to enjoy peace and security with honor".[31] This conception of God reflects the religious and cultural flux of the Middle East region, including biblical Judaism, apocalyptic Judaism, and Greek, Egyptian, and Persian traditions, which nurtured Christian thought.

Christians started from the perception of a God who was powerful and at the same time friendly; a God attentive to human affairs but respectful of the decisions of individuals; a God centered on justice, but in essence, love.[32,33,34] God's mercy and compassion were at the heart of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and his closest disciples.[35,36,37,38] The starting point was the perception of a transcendent God but very close to human reality. A perspective of God from the Galilean and Samaritan angle where He was conceived as He or Elohim.

It is also important to note that the Christian faith went through several stages or historical moments where it incorporated new beliefs and practices that allowed it to respond to the needs of its followers and the cultural context in which it was developing. The Christian faith was finally defined in the fourth century, beginning with the Council of Nicaea I (325 A.D.). It was concretized in the Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.), from which emerged what is known as the Christian creed, which summarizes the Christian faith (Justo L. González, 2009).

This creed contains the beliefs adopted by most Christians at that time. God is presented as the creator of the universe, of nature and human beings; Jesus Christ as the only son of God in the exact nature as the father and sent to give salvation; Jesus, the son of God and son of the virgin Mary, dead by crucifixion, resurrected and ascended to heaven from where he will come in glory to judge the living and the dead and to reign forever; the Holy Spirit as the sustainer of life and the means of communication through the prophets; in the Church which is to be one, holy, inclusive and apostolic; in baptism for the forgiveness of sins; in the resurrection of the dead and in the life of the world to come (Creed of Constantinople, 381 A.D.C.).

In a gradual process, this faith gradually formed a set of Christian writings that included what today is known as the New Testament and other documents respected by various Christian communities, such as the Didache, the Letters of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians, the Seven Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, the Letter of Barnabas and the letter of the Shepherd of Hermas. From the fourth century of this era, the Christian faith, in addition to considering the Hebrew Bible as inspired and sacred, also extended the same consideration to the 27 writings that today make up the New Testament, thus incorporating the different perspectives and flavors of this faith.

It is essential to understand that the Christian faith was pluralistic and diverse from the beginning. Alongside the widely accepted Christian writings, a substantial body of Christian literature was held in high esteem by various minority groups. Among these writings are the Gospel of Thomas, the Protoevangelium of James, the Gospel of Peter, and other Gnostic documents unearthed in Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945.[39]

*The Christian Bible*

The creation of the Christian Bible occurred between 382 and 405 A.D., when Christians under the leadership of Jerome (c. 342-420 A.D.) organized the Bible known as the Latin Vulgate. They achieved this sacred text by "borrowing" the Hebrew Bible from the Jews, changing the order religion gave it, and adding the 27 books agreed upon as canonical by Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296-373 A.D.).

This reorganization of the Hebrew Bible allowed the Christian leaders of that time to place the Jewish text end in Malachi instead of Chronicles to give the impression of continuity with the Gospel, according to Matthew, who announces that John the Baptist was the new Elijah. "And, if you want to accept this, John is the prophet

Elijah who was to come".[40] In addition, the name change from Hebrew Bible or TaNaK to Old Testament allowed the suggestion that the New Testament (Christian Writings) was something new and fresh.

In one of these New Testament writings, faith is defined as "the assurance of receiving what is expected and being convinced of the reality that is not yet seen"[41] This text emphasizes the need to be sure that one will receive what one expects from someone because one knows him and has seen how he has behaved in the past. Thus, faith is intimately related to trust, and it is with knowledge.

These sacred writings—the New Testament—contain the main teachings of this faith from the angle of several schools or groups that were connected with the initial disciples or apostles. This Christian faith, in addition to the apocalyptic books, also decided to use the Jewish scriptures (Old Testament), but with a reinterpretation or reading very different from the traditional biblical Jewish one.

It is essential to remember that the Christian faith, as well as others, adapts and evolves. While it is true that most people end their lives within the same religion into which they are born (Rincon, 2018), a person's faith has the potential to move throughout life, depending on personal experiences, the informal or formal education to which they are exposed, cultural immersions, and the holistic development opportunities they access.

**The development and moments of a person's faith (Initial faith, integrated faith)**

Human beings are born in a geographical and socio-cultural context that significantly influences their understanding of the universe, human relationships, strategy for acquiring new knowledge, and religious appreciation. Thus, the evolution of faith in a person depends on several factors, including the type of religion of the parents or initial caregivers, conditioning biological aspects, personal experiences, the academic formation to which they are exposed, personality, the religious groups to which they are affiliated, the intercultural immersions experienced in life and, of course, the decisions made when faced with opportunities for expansion and human development[42,43,44,45]

A person's faith has a far-reaching influence on the vital issues of their existence, such as the choice of whom to live with as a couple, what kind of work or profession to choose, how to distribute goods, the ways of recreation, the political ideologies to which to affiliate, and how to contribute to the good of society. In this way, exploring one's type of faith is paramount. Once one is aware of the faith one embraces, strengthening, modifying, or changing it is easier.

Faith without due exploration tends to be very stable throughout life, as less energy is spent believing and doing the same thing. In this, the brain is very efficient in promoting a person's faith to be the same at birth as at death. However, a person can add to the initial faith new approaches and interpretations that go in the direction of an integrated faith. This latter type of faith revises the premises of life in the light of scientific and cultural advances. In this integrated faith, assumptions about life and the universe, coping strategies, ritual practices, and the way of relating to people in authority are more congruent, and the focus of this coherence is more aligned with justice and love.

*Personal development of the Christian faith*

The founders of the Christian religion understood that faith evolves and develops throughout life. The expectation was that people would advance from an initial faith to a more mature one. "When I was there, I could not address you as spiritually mature people but as children in the Christian faith." I gave them milk because they could not assimilate solid food, for they were not ready for anything more substantial. And they are not yet prepared; the immaturity can be seen in the jealousy and strife they exhibit in their behavior".[46]

**Initial faith**

A person's faith in infancy and childhood is usually the same as that held by their parents or caregivers.[47,48] This faith or trust in guardians or people in positions of authority is full, as naivety prevails where they are seen as agents of good and protective beings. At this age, the distinction between fantasy and reality is very tenuous; for example, fictional characters used in a narrative to teach a lesson about how to live and relate to other people can be seen as if they were real.

The "Tooth Fairy" or the "Tooth Fairy" went from being characters in a fairy tale to becoming real beings who exchange fallen teeth for money. Santa Claus, or Santa Claus, is that every December comes from the North Pole with gifts for children who have behaved well during the year and are initially seen as a real or historical character. However, the little ones later understood that their parents or primary caregivers had prepared those gifts. By the time they discovered the truth, they had already understood that it was a story that taught them the importance of adopting good behavior and living together in peace.

But it may happen that a person, upon hearing or reading a fable -or fictitious short story, continues to understand it as something real, thus preventing him from grasping the central teaching or moral behind the tale firsthand. At this moment of faith, if a cow speaks to a person, albeit with doubt, it is possible to believe

it is accurate. Hence, stories must be told repeatedly, but the explanation and application of the fable are necessary.

Different cultures, such as Greek, Egyptian, Persian, and Jewish, have used fables to promote good living and healthy coexistence. There is a well-known Greek fable called "The Lion and the Mouse," which relates that once a mouse, unknowingly walking on the back of a lion, was caught by the claws of the lion, who took it to his mouth to eat it. - "Don't eat me, please. I promise you, if you are ever in trouble, I will help you. -Ha ha ha! How can someone so small help me? -But the lion let him go this time.

A few days later, the mouse heard roaring near his den. It was the lion, which had been caught in a large net. Then, the mouse began to gnaw at the net until he made a hole the size of the lion. And from then on, the little mouse and the colossal lion were inseparable friends. At this rung of faith, the storyteller, in addition to telling the story, unfolds or points out the teachings that follow from the story. Although the storyteller tries to teach the listener or reader to think at this level of faith, the burden of reasoning rests more on the storyteller.

This initial faith is called intuitive-projective and mythical-literal, and it can remain static as people get used to others thinking for them and telling them what to do with their lives. [2] So, if they do not seek to grow in faith, people can remain stagnant, and their religious stances remain intact in adolescence, adulthood, and even older adulthood. Adults in this phase of faith can present themselves as very naïve, being easy prey for predators who, seeing these levels of credulity, take advantage of them to coerce and commit their frauds.

At this time of faith, religious practices are used to understand life, gain solace, achieve lasting social connections, develop self-mastery, entrench values, and adopt adaptive behaviors. These practices are motivated mainly by the desire to receive rewards from people in authority or deity or to avoid punishment.

Also, at this level of faith, we speak of obedience to the authorities to maintain God's blessing. Behaving well is associated with receiving a reward, while misbehavior relates to punishment or penalization. If the person behaves generously, he gets the blessing; if he misbehaves, he is cursed. This constitutes a moment of faith where life is viewed from a linear, dichotomous, and concrete perspective. Religious practices are merely extrinsic; that is, they are acted upon to please the person in authority, avoid punishment, receive a reward, or be accepted in a community. [43]

In this phase of faith, the Bible tends to be read as a book of history and science, making it difficult to discern between narratives or stories with facts. The author's intention can be lost when using literary figures such as fables, parables, metaphors, hyperbole or exaggeration, personification, irony, chiasms, and allegories. These literary figures provide further expressiveness to an event, capture listeners' attention, or persuade a group to change its mind; however, by not distinguishing between the literal and the symbolic, one risks not appreciating the moral or life lessons behind the writing.

Also, at this moment of faith, magical powers can be attributed to the Bible, and it can be considered an amulet. In addition, it can be confused that God's inspiration in this sacred book is seen as the product of dictation by God, thus leading to reading it without exercising the due analysis to decipher the intentions of the authors of these writings. The reading could be done without geographical, historical, and cultural contextualization.

The concept of God or Divinity, generally at this point, is understood as a being in authority whose orders must be followed or obeyed to receive his care, affection, and favor. This image of God can be likened to people in authority, such as the father, mother, teacher, religious leader, coach, or police, who provide the structure necessary to develop the social skills expected by the group. The God figure can be conceptualized as a being willing to bless if the person behaves well but ready to punish if the behavior is harmful. A commitment to "defend God" in the face of attacks from "heretical" people can be noted.

Prayers at this level tend to be limited to petitionary and ritual prayers. The person may be under the impression that if they say the appropriate words in the correct order, they can change God's will. Religious practices such as fasting and vigil are carried out to influence God's will as acts of submission and strategies of self-humiliation.

Worship is mainly understood as praising, revering, adoring, and surrendering to God's will. Attending religious gatherings concentrates on praising God to express how good He is, how grateful one is for the blessings received, and how willing one is to continue serving Him. This is done because it is believed that God is a being who likes his followers to exalt his goodness, his greatness, and his power.

This way of seeing God makes it easy for religious leaders to dominate because followers can transfer this culture of adulation to the one in authority. In this phase of faith, the meeting place or space is considered sacred because, in that place, God dwells; then, it is not the experience, the moment, or the time shared, but the space. Furthermore, worship can be connected to being present in a sacred place and showing the appropriate reverential attitude.

A person in this phase of early faith usually consults people in authority to increase his wisdom and be told what to do with his life. This is important in childhood because the capacity for discernment is not fully developed, and caregivers can more efficiently distinguish allies from rivals or enemies, thus protecting

children from predators.

However, this gullible characteristic, if carried into adulthood, can impede the development or progress of faith since people can adopt attitudes of submission that lead them to fall prey to oppression. The apostle Paul warns of this danger when he says: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I reasoned as a child; when I became an adult, I put away childish things".[49]

At this level of faith, one can face life in compartments where existential spaces do not communicate. For example, one can talk about loving one's neighbor but at the same time be ready to exclude people, not because of antisocial behaviors but because of their skin color, sexual identity, religious affiliation, ethnic group, political ideology, or nationality. "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and at the same time hates his fellow man, he is a liar. For if one does not love his brother whom he sees, neither can he love God whom he does not see".[50]

One can talk about dignified and peaceful coexistence, but on the other hand, debate, aggression, and even violence are promoted. In this phase of faith, it is easy to find people who demonize human beings who are part of other religious groups. The language can become very exclusionary, reflecting expressions such as: "If you are not part of this faith, you are wrong and lost." Illogical postulates, irrational premises, and inflexible attitudes are followed, which can lead to behavior that is not very prosocial.

In this moment of faith, events are interpreted from the cause-and-effect perspective. If something happens to a person, it is because they did not choose well and are reaping the results of their actions. God may see tragic events as opportunities for growth, expressions of "tough love," purification strategies, divine ways of achieving goals, purposes, or hidden plans. The person tries to fulfill behavioral expectations to enjoy protection from illness, receive God's blessings, and avoid life's tribulations.

Naivety and gullibility predominate in early faith. This can be seen in relationships with caregivers or parents and those in leadership positions, such as educators, counselors, religious ministers, coaches, mentors, and celebrities. At this stage, the desire to be free to think maybe noted; however, the weight of previous conditioning may overlay that yearning. In addition, early faith behaviors are generally driven by fear of punishment or the aspiration to be rewarded by authorities or by God.

## RESULTS

The reliability of a psychometric scale is a fundamental aspect of evaluating the internal consistency of the items that compose it. In this study, a reliability analysis was carried out using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, in addition to the analysis of the items' discrimination index, to determine the quality and consistency of the faith scale applied.

The descriptive analysis of the items' discrimination index (table 1) shows an average of 0,651, indicating a good general ability of the items to differentiate between participants. The minimum value obtained was 0,412, and the maximum was 0,787, reflecting considerable variability among the items.

In terms of quartiles, the first quartile (Q1) is 0,599, indicating that 25 % of the items have low or moderate discrimination. The median (Q2) is 0,667, suggesting that at least half of the items have good or excellent discrimination. Finally, the third quartile (Q3) reaches a value of 0,707, reflecting that 75 % of the items have discrimination indices above this value, which indicates a scale with a high level of differentiation in its items.

These results indicate that most of the items meet adequate psychometric standards, although the presence of some low values suggests the need to revise certain items to improve their discriminative ability and optimize the scale's internal consistency.

| Table 1. Discrimination Indexes | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Scale Mean if Item Deleted | Scale Variance if Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted |
| 1. God keeps me from all evil | 93,37 | 642,476 | 0,679 | 0,973 |
| 2.God blesses me when I behave well | 93,74 | 643,197 | 0,743 | 0,973 |
| 3.God punishes me when I stray from the good path. | 94,09 | 650,787 | 0,654 | 0,973 |
| 4.God listens to me if I do his will | 93,77 | 638,358 | 0,778 | 0,973 |
| 5.God created the world in seven literal days | 93,86 | 640,479 | 0,695 | 0,973 |
| 6.If God directs my life, all will be well | 93,46 | 640,373 | 0,787 | 0,973 |
| 7. Everything happens for a reason | 93,06 | 649,644 | 0,552 | 0,974 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8.God never gives us more than we can bear. | 93,51 | 647,022 | 0,642 | 0,974 |
| 9. God changes everything for the better | 93,40 | 648,718 | 0,675 | 0,973 |
| 10. Adam and Eve were historical character. | 93,83 | 645,499 | 0,622 | 0,974 |
| 11. The Universal Flood was a historical event | 93,80 | 644,576 | 0,611 | 0,974 |
| 12. Sin originated from Adam and Eve's disobedience. | 93,46 | 638,491 | 0,746 | 0,973 |
| 13. If we are in Christ, there is no sorrow | 94,00 | 645,529 | 0,715 | 0,973 |
| 14. The thorns on the plants are the result of Adam and Eve's sin. | 94,29 | 648,798 | 0,708 | 0,973 |
| 15. Dinosaurs existed at the same time as human beings. | 94,00 | 657,176 | 0,479 | 0,974 |
| 16. The Bible is a book of science | 94,06 | 646,644 | 0,701 | 0,973 |
| 17.The Bible is a historical book | 93,74 | 648,255 | 0,599 | 0,974 |
| 18. God dictated the Bible | 93,74 | 646,197 | 0,703 | 0,973 |
| 19.The Bible cannot contain errors | 93,94 | 647,173 | 0,698 | 0,973 |
| 20. God answers if more people pray for the same thing | 93,86 | 644,655 | 0,737 | 0,973 |
| 21.God can do what I ask if I pray a good prayer. | 94,17 | 652,146 | 0,721 | 0,973 |
| 22.God does what one declares | 94,29 | 659,269 | 0,573 | 0,974 |
| 23.When one declares something, things happen | 94,14 | 662,303 | 0,412 | 0,974 |
| If a person is sad, it is because they do not have Christ in their heart. | 94,31 | 655,751 | 0,695 | 0,973 |
| 25.Women are to be subject or subordinate to men. | 94,43 | 660,311 | 0,544 | 0,974 |
| 26.Fathers and mothers are to be honored unconditionally. | 93,71 | 650,916 | 0,552 | 0,974 |
| 27.The earth is cursed | 94,26 | 657,550 | 0,583 | 0,974 |
| 28.Satan rules the earth | 94,17 | 652,558 | 0,621 | 0,974 |
| 29. The earth is less than ten thousand years old | 94,26 | 655,255 | 0,609 | 0,974 |
| 30. Satan is the cause of the evils of the world | 94,03 | 645,676 | 0,702 | 0,973 |
| 31. This world is a conflict between God and Satan. | 93,91 | 646,492 | 0,730 | 0,973 |
| 32. Demons are the cause of many diseases | 94,31 | 655,104 | 0,658 | 0,974 |
| 33. Mental illnesses are demonic possessions. | 94,37 | 658,064 | 0,685 | 0,974 |
| 34. God has a purpose for every human being | 93,23 | 644,946 | 0,653 | 0,973 |
| Death came because of Adam and Eve's disobedience.35. | 93,83 | 645,617 | 0,668 | 0,973 |
| 36.Human beings are incapable of choosing what is right by themselves. | 94,00 | 654,412 | 0,524 | 0,974 |
| 37. Humanity is perverse | 94,09 | 656,434 | 0,616 | 0,974 |
| 38. Everything was created to prepare the environment for human beings. | 93,46 | 647,726 | 0,594 | 0,974 |
| 39. God has blessed me if I am doing well in life. | 93,69 | 644,457 | 0,720 | 0,973 |
| 40.God dwells in the sacred place or temples | 94,00 | 657,765 | 0,440 | 0,974 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Worship to God consists of singing praises to Him. | 94,06 | 657,350 | 0,599 | 0,974 |
| 42. Worship of God consists in singing solemn sacred hymns. | 94,11 | 651,398 | 0,667 | 0,973 |
| 43. Worship of God consists in prostrating oneself. | 94,00 | 652,000 | 0,654 | 0,973 |
| Worship of God consists in surrendering to God. | 93,69 | 647,751 | 0,672 | 0,973 |
| 45. Worship of God occurs when one goes to church. | 94,17 | 660,087 | 0,567 | 0,974 |
| 46. ithes are an obligation for Christians | 94,03 | 654,911 | 0,598 | 0,974 |
| 47. The serpent literally spoke to human beings. | 94,23 | 647,299 | 0,755 | 0,973 |
| 48. If Christ is in the family, all will be well. | 93,74 | 647,726 | 0,698 | 0,973 |
| 49. Satan causes the wars in this world | 94,09 | 646,669 | 0,766 | 0,973 |
| 50. The people in the world before the Universal Flood lived more than 300 years. | 93,86 | 640,950 | 0,762 | 0,973 |

## Overall Reliability Analysis

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient obtained was 0,974, indicating excellent reliability according to psychometric standards[17] This value suggests that the scale items present high internal consistency and that the measurement is stable and accurate.

However, it is important to complement this analysis with an individual assessment of each item to ensure that all contribute significantly to the scale and to rule out possible redundancies or items with low discriminative power.[51]

## Item discrimination analysis

As part of the scale's reliability analysis, each item's discrimination index was evaluated using the corrected item-total correlation, a common procedure in psychometric studies that allows determining to what extent each item discriminates between participants with high and low scores on the total scale.[18] The following criteria were used to interpret these indices: values above ,70 were classified as excellent, values between ,50 and ,70 as good, and values below ,50 as poor.

The results showed that most of the items presented adequate levels of discrimination, falling in the "excellent" or "good" categories, which supports the overall internal consistency of the scale. However, three items showed indices below the threshold of ,50, indicating low discriminative ability and suggesting the need for revision or reformulation.

As for the items that presented a low discrimination index, three items were specifically identified and that did not reach the minimum recommended value of 0,50. Item 15 ("Dinosaurs existed at the same time as human beings") obtained a coefficient of 0,479, item 23 ("When one declares something, things happen") reached a value of 0,412, and item 40 ("God dwells in sacred places or temples") presented an index of 0,440. These values were classified as poor, given that they failed to adequately discriminate between participants with high and low levels of faith on the total scale.

In order to improve the psychometric quality of these items, several actions are proposed. First, it is recommended that the statements be clarified since some of them could present conceptual ambiguities that make it difficult for participants to interpret them accurately. Secondly, we suggest adjusting the difficulty level of the items, especially those that receive very homogeneous responses, incorporating a greater degree of nuance or context in their formulation. It is also essential to carry out a content validity analysis by consulting experts in theology, sociology, or psychology of religion, who will be able to assess the relevance and theoretical representativeness of the items. Finally, it is advisable to conduct an empirical review of the problematic items, applying revised versions in a pilot sample to re-evaluate their psychometric performance before their definitive inclusion in the scale.

Overall, the reliability analysis confirms that the scale presents a very high internal consistency ($\alpha$ = ,974), supporting its robustness as an assessment tool. However, the items with low discriminative power require methodological adjustments to optimize performance.

This study contributes to the field of religious psychometrics by providing a rigorous assessment of item quality and proposing concrete recommendations to strengthen the scale's validity in future studies applied to

Christian contexts.

## Exploratory Factor Analysis

The present study analyzes the factorial structure of religious beliefs using an EFA to identify the levels of faith in a population sample. The research is based on previous theories of faith development,[2,7] allowing a comparison between existing models and the results obtained.

Before performing the AFE, the adequacy of the data matrix was evaluated. The commonalities of the items were high (greater than ,7), suggesting an adequate shared variance. The total variance explained by the extracted factors amounted to 83,53 %, indicating a solid factorial structure.

Using the Principal Components Method with Promax rotation, 11 factors grouping different aspects of religious faith were extracted. They were categorized into four levels of faith. From the AFE, 11 key factors were identified in the conceptualization of faith within the sample analyzed (table 2). The table 2 summarizes the factors obtained, the percentage of variance explained by each one, the number of associated items, and their conceptualization.

The factor analysis results show a multidimensional structure of faith, highlighting the diversity of beliefs within the sample analyzed. Factor 1 (Forms of Worship) obtained the highest percentage of variance explained (14,94 %), reflecting the centrality of acts of worship within the religious experience. This factor groups beliefs about the expression of faith through singing, prostration, and attendance at places of worship, suggesting a strong ritualistic component in religious practice.

Factor 2 (Prosperity and Divine Blessings) and Factor 3 (Creationism and Biblical Literalism), with explained variances of 14,7 % and 14,13 %, respectively, indicate that a significant part of the sample associate faith with material well-being and the literal interpretation of biblical stories. These findings are consistent with previous studies on prosperity theology and creationism, which have demonstrated their presence in various contemporary religious contexts.[52]

Other notable factors include Factor 5 (Prayer and Power of Declaration) and Factor 6 (Satan and Evil in the World), which show an active belief in divine intervention and the cosmic struggle between good and evil. The former emphasizes prayer as a mechanism for changing reality. At the same time, the latter reinforces the view of Satan as the source of human suffering, which aligns with dualistic perspectives of religion.[53]

Finally, Factor 11 (Biblical Literalism and Doctrinal Dogma) represents a broad set of beliefs centered on the absolute authority of the Bible. With 13 items, this factor suggests that a significant portion of the sample holds a fundamentalist stance regarding religion, supporting the idea that biblical literalism remains mainstream in specific religious sectors.[9] The AFE results allow us to identify four distinct levels of faith in the analyzed sample. These findings reinforce the existing literature and provide a structured model for future research in the psychology of religion.

| Table 2. AFE Summary | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Factor** | **% Var** | **N** | **Ítems** | **Conceptualization** |
| 1. Forms of worship | 14,94 | 5 | 41, 42, 43, 44, 45 | Beliefs about the correct ways to worship God, including music, body posture, and church attendance. |
| 2. Prosperity and divine blessings | 14,7 | 4 | 2, 6, 39, 48 | Beliefs about the relationship between faith, prosperity, and divine protection. |
| 3. Creationism and biblical literalism | 14,13 | 6 | 5, 10, 11, 15, 17,29 | Literal interpretation of the Bible in historical and scientific aspects. |
| 4. Morals and divine authority | 11,15 | 3 | 3, 25, 26 | The view of morality is dictated by God and structured in social and religious hierarchies. |
| 5. Prayer and the power of the declaration | 10,97 | 4 | 20, 21, 22, 23 | Belief in prayer and declaration of faith as mechanisms to influence reality. |
| 6. Satan and evil in the world | 9,63 | 3 | 28, 30, 49 | Satan as responsible for the suffering and conflict in the world. |
| 7. Sin and human nature | 7,16 | 3 | 35, 36, 37 | Humanity's sinful nature and inability to act rightly without God. |
| 8. Divine determinism | 3,09 | 4 | 7, 8, 9, 34 | God has a purpose for each person, and everything happens under his control. |
| 9. Influence of spiritual forces | 2,12 | 2 | 32, 33 | Spiritualistic view of health and disease, attributing some illnesses to demonic forces. |
| 10. Times and final judgment | 3,16 | 3 | 27, 31, 50 | Beliefs about the age of the Earth, the curse of the world, and the struggle between good and evil in human history. |
| 11. Biblical Literalism and Doctrinal Dogma | 4,5 | 13 | 1, 4, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 24, 38, 40, 46, 47 | Biblical literalism and doctrinal dogma emphasize the absolute authority of the Bible and religious doctrine in science, history, and morality. |

**Levels of Faith**

The factors can be grouped into levels of faith following a structure of religious belief development. A four-level structure is proposed, from a more literal and normative faith to a more mature and consolidated faith. This classification is inspired by psychological models of faith development, but adapted to the factors identified in the analysis.[2,7]

The present research proposes an evolutionary structure of the levels of faith based on the factor analysis of the religious beliefs evaluated. Each level represents a coherent set of religious attitudes, interpretations, and practices organized according to how believers understand and live their spiritual experience. This categorization is based on the fact that faith is not static but a construct that evolves throughout human development in interaction with experiences, traditions, and social contexts.[2,7]

*Early Faith (literal and dogmatic)*

This level is characterized by a literal interpretation of sacred texts and strict adherence to religious dogmas. Faith is conceived as an absolute system of truths that does not admit contradictions or questioning. A supernaturalistic worldview predominates, explaining reality based on spiritual entities and biblical events interpreted historically and concretely.[54]

Factors associated with this level include creationism and biblical literalism (e.g., "The Flood was a historical event"), the perception of Satan as the dominant evil actor in the world ("Satan rules the Earth"), the influence of spiritual forces ("Mental illness is demonic possession"), doctrinal literalism ("The Bible cannot contain errors") and eschatological beliefs about the end times. A believer at this level usually holds that everything in the Bible must be understood literally and admits no tension between faith and reason.[55]

*Fundamental faith (moral and legalistic)*

This second level is oriented towards the relationship between moral conduct and divine consequences. The person perceives God intervenes directly in human life, rewarding good behavior and punishing deviation. Faith is experienced as a form of ethical regulation and the search for personal well-being within a normative religious framework.[56]

Factors reflecting this stage include beliefs in prosperity as a sign of divine blessing (e.g., "God blesses me if I do well in life"), moral authority imposed by traditional religious principles ("Women should be subject to men"), and declarative prayer as a means to achieve effects in reality ("God does what one declares"). A representative example of this level would be a person who believes that righteous behavior guarantees God's positive intervention in daily life.[57]

*Pragmatic faith (relational and teleological)*

Faith at this level is centered on the personal relationship with God and on the experiential dimension of spirituality. It disdainfully rejects mechanistic or punitive interpretations and places greater value on bonds, religious symbols, and the emotional experience of faith. Religion is understood as a guide for spiritual growth and connection with the transcendent.

Among the associated factors are the forms of worship ("Worship of God occurs when one goes to church"), the anthropological view of sin ("Human beings are incapable of choosing the right thing for themselves"), and divine determinism ("God has a purpose for each person"). At this level, faith is more flexible and is interpreted from a perspective that relates more than simply strict compliance with norms.[58,59]

*Intermediate faith (reflective and contextual)*

This level represents a reflective and contextualized faith that integrates rational, symbolic, and critical elements. The believer can sustain their spirituality without depending on absolute certainties or literal readings of sacred texts. The complexity of the religious phenomenon is recognized, and there is a need to dialogue with science, ethics, and diversity of beliefs.

Unlike the previous levels, intermediate faith is not restricted to a specific set of factors but offers an integrative view of the different aspects of religiosity. This stage supposes a synthesis that allows the person to inhabit their faith autonomously and consciously, open to revision and reinterpretation in changing contexts.[60]

## DISCUSSION

The results obtained in this research confirm that Christian faith can be understood as a multidimensional and evolutionary construct, as suggested by classical theories of religious development.[2,7] Through EFA, eleven factors representing different dimensions of religious experience were identified, which allowed for the structuring of a typology of levels of faith in four stages: early, intermediate, advanced, and consolidated faith. This proposal has empirical support and finds theoretical correspondence with widely recognized models in the psychology of religion.

One of the main theoretical contrasting frameworks is the six-stage theory of faith development.[2] In particular, stage 3, termed "synthetic-conventional faith," is characterized by accepting religious norms without critical analysis and a firm reliance on authority figures. This stage is conceptually aligned with what this research calls "normative and rewarding faith," where moral behavior is directly associated with divine favor or punishment. On the other hand, the "relational and symbolic faith" proposed in this study corresponds to Fowler's stage 4, called "individual-reflective faith," where the individual begins to question inherited beliefs and develops a personal and critical relationship with the sacred. Finally, "reflective and contextualized faith" is similar to stage 5, called "conjunctive faith," in which integrates paradoxes, religious symbols are valued, and the complexity of the spiritual phenomenon is recognized without the need for absolute certainties.[61,62]

## CONCLUSIONS

From the perspective of the psychology and sociology of religion, it is recognized that faith plays a central role in shaping morality, self-concept, and interpersonal relationships. In this sense, the classification of "dogmatic and literal faith" reflects how a rigid interpretation of sacred texts can significantly condition the believer's moral and social worldview. This view coincides with authors distinguishing between extrinsic religiosity, centered on normative compliance, and intrinsic religiosity, based on a more profound and integrated spiritual experience.

For its part, the psychology of religion has also emphasized that faith is not only belief but also trust and practice. Faith is manifested through rituals, prayer, community participation, and symbolic acts that consolidate the relationship with the divine. This view is consistent with the "relational and symbolic faith" category, which emphasizes spirituality as a personal experience expressed in worship practices and recognition of the divine purpose in daily life.

The findings of this study offer significant contributions in the academic context. First, they allow for a theoretical deepening of faith development, showing how faith can evolve from literal and dogmatic interpretations to a more reflective, symbolic, and contextual understanding. This classification of levels of faith provides a more nuanced model that contributes to the field of spiritual development study, overcoming unidimensional and linear approaches.

Secondly, this research has multiple practical applications. In the educational field, the results can be used to design religious formation programs adapted to students' different levels of faith, facilitating more effective pedagogical processes that respect spiritual diversity. [58] In the field of pastoral or clinical psychology, the identification of these levels allows for a better understanding of how faith influences emotional well-being and coping strategies, which favors more contextualized and culturally sensitive interventions.

From a sociological perspective, the levels of faith described allow us to analyze how different forms of religiosity influence social behavior, community cohesion, and the construction of shared ethical systems. This has implications for studying religious fundamentalism, spiritual plurality, and the transformation of religious identities in multicultural contexts.

Among the most relevant limitations of this study are the size and type of sample. The sample used was pilot and convenience, with 65 participants. Although this allowed for EFA and reliability testing, the results should be interpreted cautiously and not generalized to other Christian populations without additional validation.

Another limitation lies in the specific sociocultural context in which the scale was applied, which could influence the interpretation of some items. Religious beliefs tend to be deeply influenced by tradition, education, and culture, so it is recommended to apply this scale to larger, diverse, and cross-national samples to explore its cross-cultural validity and relevance in other denominational or religious settings.

Several paths are proposed to advance this line of research. First, it is recommended that a confirmatory validation (CFA) of the proposed factor structure be carried out using larger and more representative samples. This will make it possible to assess whether the 11 identified factors remain stable and whether the four-level evolutionary structure of faith holds empirically.

Finally, this study represents an original contribution to psychometric measurement in religious contexts. The scale developed has shown high internal consistency ($\alpha = ,974$) and has also allowed us to empirically map the diversity of beliefs within Christianity, integrating theoretical, symbolic, and behavioral dimensions. Its initial validation opens the way for future research with larger samples and cross-cultural comparisons and for developing complementary instruments that assess spiritual development from other religious traditions.

In conclusion, this work validates a scale with high internal coherence and a solid conceptual structure. It proposes a developmental approach to the Christian faith that is useful in educational, clinical, and pastoral contexts. Future studies could expand this research with more extensive and diverse samples and contrast this proposal with international scales and other theoretical models of spiritual development.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

*Conceptualization:* Rómulo Esteban Montilla, Edixon Chacón-Guerrero.
*Formal analysis:* Rómulo Esteban Montilla, Edixon Chacón-Guerrero.
*Research*: Rómulo Esteban Montilla, Edixon Chacón-Guerrero, Rolando Eslava-Zapata.
*Methodology*: Rómulo Esteban Montilla, Edixon Chacón-Guerrero.
*Project management*: Rómulo Esteban Montilla, Edixon Chacón-Guerrero, Rolando Eslava-zapata.
*Resources*: Rómulo Esteban Montilla, Edixon Chacón-Guerrero, Rolando Eslava-zapata.
*Software:* Rómulo Esteban Montilla, Edixon Chacón-Guerrero.
*Supervision:* Rómulo Esteban Montilla, Edixon Chacón-Guerrero, Rolando Eslava-zapata.
*Validation:* Rómulo Esteban Montilla, Edixon Chacón-Guerrero, Rolando Eslava-zapata.
*Drafting - original draft:* Rómulo Esteban Montilla, Edixon Chacón-Guerrero.
*Writing - proofreading and editing:* Rómulo Esteban Montilla, Edixon Chacón-Guerrero, Rolando Eslava-zapata.