

Reasons to Believe
Facing the Mystery of Life

Gaston de Mézerville

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Among the younger generations, many young people are abandoning religious practice and distancing themselves from the faith, considering that religiosity makes little sense in today's world. When facing the mystery of life, reason and faith can come together to ground those truths we recite in the Apostles' Creed, which reaffirm the call to be a Christian believer and a practicing Catholic. This reading invites reflection and dialogue with family and friends about their concerns regarding faith and religious experience.

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DEDICATION

To my children, grandchildren,
and loved ones, whom I invite to reflect
on the origins and meaning
of the astonishing mystery
of life on Earth.

FOREWORD

The experience of being the catechist for Santiago, the last of my grandchildren to make their First Communion, preparing for it in weekly meetings for six months after turning twelve and being named the best student in his class, allowed me to enjoy very enriching conversations about the truths of life.

This has led me to want to engage in dialogue, in a context of trust and mutual respect, with each of my children and grandchildren, friends, and close associates who wish to do so, about certain important truths in which I believe and reflect often. Because the search for truth is what unites reason with faith, in an attempt to understand the elemental realities of our existence, in the face of this astonishing universe in which we receive the priceless gift of life, in order to live it fully during our time on earth.

This purpose is what has motivated me to write about the important reasons underlying my reality as a Christian believer and practicing Catholic, now in my eighth decade of journeying through this wonderful world that God created out of love for us.

Likewise, this entails accepting my limitations in understanding existence and facing those troubling doubts that arise in the face of evil, pain, and death, as part of our reality in the world. Therefore, I do not intend to boast of wisdom, knowledge, or erudition in presenting my reasons, but rather to describe them in the most concrete way possible. Therefore, my purpose is to motivate a deep reflection in each of us, as well as a stimulating dialogue while sharing these thoughts together, always with great openness to mutual listening and an attitude of respectful questioning of these ideas.

I then present the reasons underlying my efforts, not always successful, to be a Christian believer and a practicing Catholic.

REASONS TO BE A BELIEVER

“I believe in one God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.”

- **The existence of the universe**

Astronomers agree that the diameter of the observable universe can be estimated at about 90 billion light-years. It contains more than 170 billion galaxies, with as many stars and planets as the grains of sand on all the beaches on Earth. This prodigious reality of matter and energy in the universe, which has existed for almost 13.8 billion years, is governed by the force of gravity and is contained within the coordinates of space and time. Thus, gravity is the driving force that allowed the construction of stars and planets, keeping everything in place within the universe.

Due to gravity, our planet rotates on its axis and revolves around the sun, while our solar system rotates around the center of our galaxy, and all galaxies move in an orchestrated movement around one another.

In this astonishing way, the forces of gravity, the translation and rotation of the planets in planetary systems like ours, cause us to move at unimaginable speeds in a stellar order that infinitely surpasses our ability to understand, let alone control.

Given such unique realities in universal history, I consider it most reasonable to believe in an intelligent design, created by a supreme being we call God.

- **The formation of the Earth**

The sun of our solar system emerged 4.6 billion years ago. Although it is just another star within the Milky Way, our galaxy, made up of billions of other stars, without the light and heat of this sun, life would not exist.

Furthermore, I have found that an extraordinary sequence of events occurred over millennia to create the conditions that allowed life on Earth. Among these, two cosmic events stand out and fill me with awe.

About 4.5 billion years ago, Earth was still a fiery ball of molten rock, destined to become an arid planet, as there was almost no water in the solar system. However, water crystals formed on the surface of dust particles millions of kilometers away.

Over time, these dust grains coalesced to form millions of asteroids, eventually forming an enormous asteroid belt, like a vast expanse of icy rocks between Mars and Jupiter. After a gigantic collision of asteroids with the planet Jupiter, many of them were thrown towards Earth, impacting it during its formation.

Thus, they penetrated the planet's molten core in the form of crystals, beneath a sea of magma that cooled and hardened until a thick crust formed on the surface. The boiling interior then caused large volcanoes to expel gases and steam into the sky, releasing the water molecules frozen in the rocks, eventually producing copious clouds. When the temperature dropped sufficiently, rain fell for thousands of years until the great oceans formed on Earth's surface.

Earth was still just one of the newly formed planets orbiting the sun. Then, about 4.4 billion years ago, another cosmic event occurred when a younger planet collided with it, and the orbiting debris resulting from this collision was pulled together by gravity to form the Moon.

The impact of that collision had deflected the Earth to one side, which determined the changing of the seasons from then on, and caused it to spin on its axis in a whirlwind. Over the course of thousands of years, the gravitational force now exerted by the moon on Earth slowed its rotation. This allowed the days to become longer and the oceans to enjoy more continuous hours of sunlight, creating the conditions for the development of life.

▪ **The emergence of life on planet Earth**

Humans exist on a habitable planet, where an outpouring of life has sprung up in marvelously beautiful, creative, and diverse forms, with some eight million living organisms in a biosphere perhaps unique in the universe.

Therefore, it is necessary to expand the aforementioned reasons for the intelligent design of creation by considering how, under a unique model, this enormous diversity of life that exists on our planet was created.

For life to emerge on Earth, in the midst of a universe made up of inert matter and energy, the emergence of a highly complex unicellular organism was necessary. That first living cell must have contained some 300 types of proteins, each with 20 kinds of amino acids, all linked in correctly sequenced chains. In addition to these

amino acid molecules, this cell had a protective membrane and included within it a DNA molecule with the genetic information responsible for the development and functioning of the organism, and an RNA molecule, essential for protein synthesis.

The mystery of the emergence of this first living cell, capable of reproduction, which gave rise to all forms of plant, animal, and human life on Earth, has not been elucidated by science. Some modern evolutionary biologists, after performing complex probabilistic calculations, consider it impossible for chance to be the cause of the origin of life. They assert that, in the known universe, the most efficient entity for storing and processing information is the DNA molecule. Thus, when analyzing a DNA molecule, it is found that its chemical characteristics appear in a specific order that allows detailed instructions or information to be transmitted, just as letters do in a grammatical sentence with logical meaning or binary digits in computer code.

This analysis of biology, carried out in the current information age, leads us to conclude that any information-rich system can only arise from a type of design inherently intelligent. Therefore, the DNA molecule, which appeared from the first cell, could only be the fruit of higher intelligence.

This reflection on the beginning of life takes us on a journey from the emergence of the first living cell, with that original DNA that reproduced over millions of years to form the entire plant and animal world of our planet, to the emergence of human DNA, whose complete sequence contains some 3 billion individual characters.

After this important journey, we can better understand how the human race emerged on Earth, composed of beings conscious of their own existence, with the freedom to choose between good and evil, and to love to the point of holiness.

▪ **A hymn of Lauds in the Liturgy of the Hours**

The Liturgy of the Hours is the set of official prayers practiced daily by the faithful of the Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican Churches outside of Mass.

It is organized around the canonical hours of morning (Lauds), afternoon (Vespers), and evening (Compline). These prayers always begin with a poetic hymn of praise to God, such as the following:

*And the Lord God said in the beginning: "Let there be light!"
And there was the first light!
And the Lord saw that it was good. Hallelujah!*

*And God said, "Let there be the firmament!"
And heaven opened its perfect vault.
And the Lord saw that it was good. Hallelujah!*

*And God said, "Let the sky be illuminated
and let the sun, the moon, and the stars be born!"
And the Lord saw that it was good. Hallelujah!*

*And God said, "Let the oceans exist,
and let the foundations of the earth appear!"
And the Lord saw that it was good. Hallelujah!*

*And God said, "Let the grass sprout,
and the field yield seeds and crops!"
And the Lord saw that it was good. Hallelujah!*

*And God said: "Let the sea be filled with fish,
and the air of the planet with birds!"
And the Lord saw that it was good. Hallelujah!*

*And God said, "Let there be wild and domestic
animals throughout the earth!"
And the Lord saw that it was good. Hallelujah!*

*And God said, "Let us make man this day,
in our likeness, in our image!"
And the Lord saw that it was good. Hallelujah!*

*And the Lord rested on the seventh day,
and the man continued his work.
And the Lord saw that it was good. Hallelujah!*

REASONS TO BE A CHRISTIAN

“I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, who was born, died, and rose again to save us.”

- **The Word of God revealed in the Bible**

Although the authors of the sacred writings contained in the Bible were human beings, who were not exempt from making mistakes in writing their works, believers recognize an eternal wisdom contained in these revealed truths.

This divine pedagogy, for example, is seen when God does not allow Abraham to sacrifice his own son, Isaac, but instead substitutes his sacrifice with that of a lamb. About five centuries later, the Israelites are instructed, before leaving Egypt, that they must celebrate Passover by sacrificing a lamb, in order to be protected from the destroying angel. Approximately another fifteen centuries later, Jesus celebrates his last Passover with his disciples and recognizes himself as the Lamb of God, called to sacrifice himself on the cross to redeem the world.

In other words, at the beginning of the messianic people, God taught Abraham the meaning of sacrificing a son, something that would occur two millennia later, when God permitted the sacrifice of his beloved Son for our salvation.

Furthermore, starting with Genesis and continuing throughout the books of the Old Testament, the coming of the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, who is the only Son of God, is announced and prepared for. His very name identifies him as Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ or Messiah, the anointed of God, who was foretold since centuries before by the prophets of Israel. He is incarnated in history to share our human nature, without renouncing his divine nature; just as the light of the sun reaches us, without ceasing to be essentially part of the sun. At that time, Jesus also said of himself: “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12).

- **The self-proclamation of Jesus Christ as God incarnate**

Jesus Christ is not only recognized throughout history as a great sage, whose teachings constitute a rich legacy for humanity, but his message of good news, proclaiming God as a loving Father, and his miraculous works bore witness that he was the Son of the supreme God.

His disciples and the people who followed him marveled at seeing him heal the sick and even raise the dead, as happened with the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus of Bethany. He also calmed the waters of a storm on the Sea of Galilee, transformed water into wine during a wedding in the small town of Cana, and multiplied loaves and fish to feed multitudes. Once, while in prayer with his disciples, he spoke to God the Father, saying: "Glorify me, Father, with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:5).

Given these facts, conveyed to us in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, there are only two options: either to consider Jesus a brilliant but deranged man who believed himself to be a god and manipulated his followers with his eloquence and charms; or to consider him truly God incarnate, declaring himself as "the way, the truth, and the life" (cf. John 14:6).

- **The resurrection of Jesus Christ, a unique event in human history**

All major figures in history died, just like all other mortals who have inhabited this planet. The only exception is Jesus Christ, who, even before his passion and death, had already predicted that he would be resurrected three days after his death. The apostle John, an eyewitness to these events, recounts in his Gospel that when Jesus was confronted at the Temple in Jerusalem for acting harshly in driving out the merchants, he replied: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews said to him, "Forty-six years have been worked on building it, and you are going to raise it up in three days?" But the temple to which Jesus was referring was his own body. So when he was resurrected, his disciples remembered what he had said, and they believed the Scripture and the words of Jesus" (John 2:18-21).

For his part, Saint Paul, who originally persecuted Christians to put them to death, after his conversion affirmed "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; that they buried him, and that he rose again on the third day... And that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), and then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. After that he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles. Finally he appeared to me" (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

The most impressive thing is that eleven of the twelve apostles, like Paul and many other Christians, were martyred for proclaiming these truths and never retracted their claim to have seen the resurrected Jesus. Faced with imminent death

for being Christians, none of them claimed to be a fable they had invented. On the contrary, Paul himself affirmed: “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and our faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14).

▪ **A prophecy and an angelic song announcing the coming of the Lord**

The prophet Micah lived near the city of Jerusalem about 700 years before Christ, at the time of the prophet Isaiah, and prophesied the coming of the Messiah.

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
too small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me one who will be ruler in Israel.
whose origins are from ancient times,
from everlasting.”*

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of King David, an angel of the Lord appeared to a group of shepherds, who were tending their flock, to say to them:

*“Do not be afraid, for I bring you good news
that will be a cause of great joy for all.
Today in the town of David a Savior
has been born to you, who is the Messiah, the Lord.
As a sign, you will find
the child wrapped in swaddling clothes and
lying in a manger.*

*Then many other angels appeared with the angel
from heaven, praising God and saying:
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace
to those on whom his favor rests!*

(Luke 2:10-14)

REASONS TO BE CATHOLIC

“I believe in the Holy Spirit and in the Holy Catholic Church.”

- **The coming of the Holy Spirit empowers the life of the Church**

When Jesus established his Church he did it on the rock of Peter and affirmed that the forces of evil would not prevail against it (Cf. Matthew 16:18). However, during the time of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection, the frightened apostles remained hidden for fear of being condemned to death as well. It was not until the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descends from Heaven, that they were invaded by a powerful force, which compelled them to expose themselves publicly to fulfill the mission entrusted to them: to proclaim the gospel throughout the earth.

Jesus said that the presence of the Holy Spirit is like that of the wind, whose force we feel without knowing where it comes from or where it goes (Cf. John 3:8). Likewise, we experience the heat of the sun, even though we cannot see it, for this heat is part of that same sun, which reaches us to warm us. Thus, the presence of the Holy Spirit, whom we also cannot see, provides warmth to our souls.

Thanks to the action of the Spirit, the Church has prevailed for twenty centuries, exerting a global influence, longer than other empires, governments, or institutions that once governed the destinies of peoples.

This fact does not imply that the Church's journey has always been according to God's will, in perfect charity and union among Christians. On the contrary, in the history of the Church there have been great schisms and divisions, such as those that still separate the Christian churches today, which are a source of scandal for many in the world. Before his Passion, Jesus had prayed to the Father, saying: "I pray that they all may be one; that as you, Father, are in me and I in you, they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17:21-23).

Nonetheless, since the mid-twentieth century the Holy Spirit has inspired new ways of encounter among many Christian denominations, focusing on what unites them in the face of a de-Christianized world that attacks their beliefs and values. As Saint John XXIII said, at the time of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, "by seeing how little separates us, we fail to see how much unites us."

Thus, the Lord continues to manifest himself to the communities of Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox faithful, who share their faith in the same Triune God and in the basic truths contained in the Creed of the Apostles. Consequently, a fresh air of reconciliation is already being felt, and efforts are being made to promote unity among the various Christian denominations. In this way, the Lord desires that his Church be authentically "catholic," in its full meaning of "universal," and that all Christians come to affirm their faith in one Church, catholic and apostolic.

▪ **Thousands of martyrs and saints enrich the history of the Church**

Despite the regrettable errors and divisions that have occurred within the Church, the edifying testimonies of those who suffered martyrdom or those who dedicated their lives to the Lord on paths of holiness stand out even more. For, in every age, the witness of martyrs has borne fruit in a greater extension of the Kingdom of God. Likewise, the existence of thousands of saints—think of Saint Francis of Assisi or Mother Teresa of Calcutta—so venerated in the Church, along with millions of people who lived hidden lives of holiness, constitute outstanding examples which leave an indelible mark on the history of Christianity.

Furthermore, the Church recognizes that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, as well as her husband Saint Joseph, Saint John the Baptist, the holy apostles, and all the saints throughout history already participate in the divine presence and intercede for us in our needs, asking God for his grace and blessings on our earthly journey. Moreover, the angels of Heaven, who are celestial beings that serve the Lord and also help us and intercede for us, continually appear in the Bible.

Although the Holy Spirit has not ceased to be present, the Church is made up of sinful human beings whose behavior so often demeans its Christian vocation. It is undeniable that there have been cruel and aberrant popes, bishops, and pastors, kings and religious rulers, and ecclesiastical institutions, such as the so-called Holy Inquisition, who have stained themselves with the blood of innocents to impose their beliefs or their ambition for power. Religion has also been used to promote wars, structures of injustice, and abuses of all kinds against the most vulnerable people.

In this sense, the Church has recently become more aware of the abuse of minors perpetrated by pastors or other pastoral workers, which has led to the establishment of abuse prevention and "zero tolerance" policies to denounce and bring to justice those who commit these abominable acts. Jesus said that for such

people it would be better if a millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea (cf. Luke 17:2-3). Likewise, Saint Paul affirms that God will severely punish those who do evil, "...for the Scripture says: It is mine to do justice, I will repay, says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

However, it is impossible to deny that evil in the world is a patent fact and represents a tormenting trial for those who suffer it. Pain is one of life's great mysteries, which leads many to question the existence or goodness of God, given this cruel reality. Because the Almighty Lord allows evil and has not eradicated it entirely throughout the history of our planet.

Faced with this terrible decision, the Lord guarantees in the Holy Scriptures that "everything works for the good of those who love God and are called as part of his plan," and that "nothing will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:28, 31-39). Because of this, and faced with this painful reality, God did not remain distant, but sent his Son to take our place, even in pain and death, to guarantee us that, after his glorious resurrection, his beloved children will also obtain a full life. Saint Paul himself, in his Letter to the Romans, expresses it this way: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are nothing compared with the glory that will come to us" (Romans 8:18).

▪ **The wisdom of the Scriptures and the Magisterium of the Church**

Before his departure, Jesus made it clear to his disciples that "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26).

Trusting in the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Magisterium of the Catholic Church draws on the sources of Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the Liturgy itself, under the authority of the Supreme Pontiff, to teach the faithful the faith, which includes sound doctrine and the practices of morals and customs. Catholic doctrine is a living heritage that is enriched by new contributions, based on the interpretation of the Gospel, in response to the challenges of new current social situations.

This has been made evident in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, as well as in the encyclicals of the recent popes and their apostolic exhortations, based on the synods of bishops over the past fifty years, culminating in the Synod on Synodality, which was joined by priests and lay people.

However, it is throughout the history of the Church that the truths of our faith have been consolidated by the doctrinal teaching through the Magisterium. In this sense, brilliant minds like those of Popes Saint Leo the Great and Saint Gregory the Great, as well as those of Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Saint Teresa of Avila, recognized as "doctors of the Church," and the minds of so many others assure us, the faithful, to continue following the path forged by them all.

▪ **A song from the Tree of Life community to praise the saints**

In the ecumenical community of Árbol de Vida in Costa Rica, among many other songs, we have one titled "*Days of Elijah*," composed by Robin Mark, a Protestant author, which was translated from English into Spanish by David Mijares, a Catholic, with an adaptation that includes a couple of saints in the life of the Church.

*These are the days of Elijah declaring the word of the Lord:
And these are the days of Your servant, Moses,
righteousness being restored.
And though these are days of great trial, of famine and darkness
and sword, still, we are the voice in the desert crying
‘Prepare ye the way of the Lord!’*

Chorus:
*Behold He comes, riding on the clouds,
shining like the sun, at the trumpet call!
Lift your voice, it’s the year of jubilee
and out of Zion’s hill salvation comes!*

*These are the days of Ezekiel, the dry bones becoming as flesh.
And these are the days of your servant, David,
rebuilding a temple of praise.
These are the days of the harvest, the fields are as white in Your world!
And we are the laborers in Your vineyard,
declaring the word of the Lord!*

*These are the days of St. Bernard, surrendering fully to God;
and these are the days of your Servant, Francis,
austerity and poverty.
These are the days of great struggle, of urgent and spiritual fight,
though God offers us both His strength and His grace
and He calls us to holiness.*

REASONS TO BE A PRACTICING CATHOLIC

“I believe in the communion of Saints and in the forgiveness of sins”.

- **The practice of the sacraments in the communion of the Church**

Since the Church is the people of God who journey through history, we are all invited to be part of it. What began with God's original call to Abraham, some four thousand years ago, to be the father of a chosen people in a specific ethnic group, Jesus Christ extended it to all humanity through the New Covenant, sealed by his death and resurrection, thus giving rise to the life of the Church.

Through the baptism, Christians are integrated into the people of God, thus becoming part of the communion of saints. In this communion, which begins during our earthly journey, we form the so-called "militant church," aspiring one day to become part of the "triumphant church" in Heaven.

In order to live all this, Catholics are offered the practice of seven sacraments as means of life to strengthen us in our journey. These are baptism and confirmation, in which the faith of the Church is affirmed; reconciliation and the Eucharist, in order to be in ecclesial communion with Christ; marriage and priestly ordination as two options for life; and the anointing of the sick, to obtain healing from suffering and, also, in preparation for an imminent death.

When children receive catechism for First Communion --or during the catechumenate of adults converted to the faith-- Catholics learn that the sacraments are those visible and effective signs of God's grace, instituted by Jesus Christ and entrusted to the Church, through which divine life is dispensed to us.

The Eucharistic celebration, which is understood as a celebration of thanksgiving, especially at Sunday Mass, represents for Catholics the culmination of their Christian life, as a memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection and, therefore, the center of our faith. It includes two fundamental parts celebrated in community: the Liturgy of the Word, when the Word revealed by God is heard and explained, and the Eucharistic Liturgy, in which Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples is actualized, as he offers his Body and Blood to be eaten as the food of salvation.

Therefore, between the time of openness to the Word of God and the beginning of the Eucharistic Liturgy, in preparation for sacramentally receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, the celebrant says: "Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father." And the faithful, participating in the Mass, respond: "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands, for the praise and glory of his name, for our good, and the good of all his holy Church. Amen."

Thus, in the practice of the faith, lived in ecclesial communion, all the truths contained in the Apostles' Creed are reaffirmed.

Although there are discrepancies among different Christian denominations regarding the ways in which Catholic believers understand these sacramental practices, a healthy ecumenism leads us to respect one another in our ecclesial experience of faith, seeking greater unity among Christians.

Essentially, what we seek is to respond authentically to Jesus' call to his followers: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). Consequently, the main reason for being a practitioner is to follow Jesus Christ, as the one sent by God the Father, when he says: "If anyone wants to be my disciple, let him forget himself, take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

- **The itinerary of formation in the faith, shared in a context of fraternity**

The practice of Christian life requires a formative process, which never ends during our earthly journey. At the Fifth Episcopal Conference held in Aparecida, Brazil, in 2007, the Latin American and Caribbean bishops invited all Christians to be disciples and missionaries, walking in communion, so that our peoples may find life in Jesus Christ. The president of the drafting commission of that document, Argentine Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, later elevated to Supreme Pontiff as Pope Francis, extended this message to the entire Church in his first apostolic exhortation, "Evangelii Gaudium" (The Joy of the Gospel), in November 2013, following the close of the Year of Faith.

In this context, five fundamental elements are proposed for the formative itinerary of Christians, which should be considered throughout their lives:

Encounter with Jesus Christ: For all those who journey in search of truth, the Lord God takes the initiative to go out to meet them and say: Follow me! It is necessary to discover the profound meaning of this search, which fosters the encounter with Jesus Christ and gives rise to Christian initiation. This encounter must be constantly renewed through the sharing of personal witness, the proclamation of the "Good News," and the missionary action of the community.

Conversion: Conversion is the response of one who has listened to the Lord with admiration, believes in Him through the action of the Spirit, and decides to walk in His footsteps. This implies a radical change in one's way of thinking and living, accepting the cross of Christ and dying to sin, in order to attain true life. For the converted Christian, the sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation contain the sources of grace to experience the redemption of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship: Christians constantly mature in their knowledge, love, and following of Jesus as their Master and Lord. Thus, they deepen day by day in the mystery of his person, imitating his example and learning his doctrine. At the beginning stages of discipleship, ongoing catechesis and sacramental life are essential. They strengthen the initial conversion and encourage missionary disciples to persevere in Christian life and in the call of mission, amidst a world that challenges these convictions and values.

Communion: There can be no true Christian life without community, for it must be lived in families and parishes, in communities of consecrated life, in the life-sharing groups of apostolic movements, and in the new lay communities. Like the first Christians, who met in community, disciples participate in the life of the Church and in the encounter with their brothers and sisters, living out the love of Christ in fraternity and solidarity.

Mission: As the disciple comes to know and love his Lord, he experiences the need to share with others his joy of being sent, of going into the world to proclaim Jesus Christ, dead and risen, to make love and service a reality for all people, especially those most in need, that is, to build the Kingdom of God. Mission is inseparable from discipleship, and therefore is part of the disciple's life, even from the first moments of his encounter with Christ and his conversion.

Based on my own many years of experience in fraternity groups, I have promoted a Fraternal Life Sharing Groups Program at the National Seminary of Costa Rica since 1990, proposing certain common elements that characterize these small cells of fraternal sharing in any ecclesial context.

In fact, over the last decades, I have found that these same basic elements apply to a wide variety of groups, each consisting of four to ten members, who meet regularly to support one another, whether they are family groups, fellowship groups, or groups gathered to achieve common goals. The famous psychologist Carl Rogers called them "encounter groups," declaring them to be the most remarkable invention to emerge in the twentieth century, as opposed to overly massified societies. He was referring to groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, senior citizen groups, shared hobby groups, and so on. However, when these groups are formed within Church environments, such as married life groups, consecrated or priestly life groups, youth groups, or service groups, it is important to establish certain basic areas of common life that their members may share when communicating between them: prayer life as an essential part of their faith, their most significant relationships of affection, the daily activities they engage in, and the service to others as a Christian duty. Likewise, from the very beginning of the establishment of any fraternal group, it must be ensured that their commitments to confidentiality, openness, and solidarity, as well as the practice of spiritual, relational, and recreational activities when they gather together, guarantee greater authenticity and perseverance over time.

In this way, the formative itinerary of any Christian can be summarized as an experience of discipleship, lived in fraternal communion within an ecclesial context, and projected in a missionary commitment to the service of the Kingdom of God.

- **Good personal balance for dedication to the mission**

It is an interesting fact that these three pillars on which the process of human maturation is based, from adolescence to full adulthood, proposed by psychologist Erik Erikson in his book "Childhood and Society" (1950), are the search for identity, intimacy, and generativity. Other psychologists define them as the senses of identity (who am I?), belonging (with whom am I?), and mission (what am I for?), essential to personal life. Furthermore, in the apostolic exhortations of Saint John Paul II to the laity (1988), to priests (1992), and to consecrated persons (1996), he proposes as the three great elements in the life of Christians, their sense of identity in the mystery of God, their sense of communion in fraternal life, and their sense of mission as an ecclesial projection. On his part, Jesuit psychologist George Aschenbrenner offers the same three elements, based on Erikson's theory, for achieving a healthy personal balance, referring to pleasant solitude, affectionate interaction, and a fulfilling mission in service to others. Because the quality of experiences of solitude and affection constitute the energetic sources for dedication to the mission.

Another Catholic author, the Spanish Franciscan and spiritual teacher Father Javier Garrido, summarizes it more precisely as a bipolarity manifested in the appropriate integration and balance, grounded in mature love, of the opposing extremes between "interiority" and "exteriority" in personal experiences.

Once, after Jesus's disciples returned from a missionary trip, he saw them so pressed by the crowd around them that he said: "Let us go off to a solitary place where we can be by ourselves and rest" (Mark 6:31). However, when they boarded the boat to cross the Lake of Galilee to the other side, the crowd once again was waiting for them over there. He then patiently devoted himself to caring for them, and even though it was late, he even multiplied loaves and fish so they could eat. His apostles were so exhausted that Jesus sent them back to the boat and stayed alone, dismissing the crowd. He then took advantage of this time to pray in solitude. While still on the mountain, he saw them struggling due to a great storm on the lake, so he walked over the water until he reached them. Upon reuniting with them, he calmed the storm, and they probably headed for the resting place they had been seeking.

So, only those who live love with maturity remain integrated, even when the balance between 'interiority' and 'exteriority' has been disrupted for a certain period of time. Garrido affirms: "We see this in Jesus and in the final stages of Christian maturity... When, in search of solitude, he is assailed by the needy masses, he calmly dedicates himself to instructing, caring for, and feeding them. In the 'seventh mansion,' says Saint Teresa, Martha and Mary are united" (Garrido, 1987, p. 145).

In conclusion, this healthy balance between 'interiority' and 'exteriority,' which summarizes the mature elements of solitude, affection, and mission, is only possible through the mature experience of love. This explains the integrated experiences shown in the missionary intercession of Thérèse of the Child Jesus, a contemplative saint, and the prayerful devotion of a Jesuit saint, Francis Xavier, so active that he preached the Gospel throughout Asia, both considered patrons of the missions.

▪ **The song “De colores” by the Cursillos de Cristiandad Movement**

In the 1960s and 1970s, I participated in the Palestra Movement, the high school branch of the Christian Cursillos Movement for adults in Latin America. Based on the song "De colores," widely recognized throughout the Spanish-speaking world, this expression came to signify the colorful grace of God in the lives of Christians.

De Colores – In Colors

*In colors, in colors
the fields are dressed each year in spring.
In colors, in colors
the birds come flying away from here.
In colors, in colors
is the brilliant rainbow that shines as we see.
And that's why the great love stories
with so many colors are pleasing to me.*

*(De colores, de colores
se visten los campos en la primavera.
De colores, de colores
son los pajaritos que vienen de afuera.
De colores, de colores
es el arcoíris que vemos lucir.
Y por eso los grandes amores
de muchos colores me gustan a mí.)*

*The Church, the Church
is the Body of Christ that dwells in history.
Of the Church, of the Church
I am an integral part, and it's my greatest glory.
To the Church, I entered the Church
through baptism that Christ gave me.
And that's why my pride is exalted
and shouts to the sky: The Church is me!*

*(La Iglesia, la Iglesia
es el Cuerpo de Cristo que vive en la historia.
De la Iglesia, de la Iglesia
soy parte integrante y es mi mayor gloria.
A la Iglesia, a la Iglesia
entré por el bautismo que Cristo me dio.
Y por eso mi orgullo se exalta
y grita en voz alta: ¡La Iglesia soy yo!)*

EPILOGUE

“I believe in the resurrection of the dead and in eternal life.”

▪ **Final conclusion**

All the reasons presented here on which my Christian faith is based lead me to the conviction that there is an eternal reality, because Jesus Christ affirmed it so.

When Jesus appeared before Pontius Pilate, accused of having proclaimed himself king of the Jews, Pilate questioned him, asking: “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Pilate then asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus replied, “You have said it: I am a king. I was born and came into the world to speak the truth. And all who belong to the truth listen to me” (John 18:35-37).

Having ruled out the possibility that only a deranged mind could affirm the things Jesus said about himself, I am convinced that in his words we find the path and the truth that lead us to life, on this earth and into eternity. Before raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus assured his sisters Martha and Mary: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even if they die, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26).

Furthermore, during the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples, he announced to them that he was about to depart from this world, telling them: “Do not worry. Trust in God and trust also in me. There is room for everyone in my Father's house. If it were not true, I would not have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you. After this, I will come back to take you to myself. Then we will be together where I am going” (John 14:1-3).

When Saint Paul, already a prisoner in Rome for his preaching of Jesus Christ and before being condemned to death, wrote a letter to his disciple Timothy, he insisted, “I know in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return” (2 Timothy 1:12).

▪ **A psalm by Friar Mamerto Menapace written in plain language**

After this review of the many reasons on which my faith is based, I wish to conclude with Psalm 23, in a plain poetic version written by my friend, the Argentine Benedictine monk, Friar Mamerto Menapace, a psalm that admirably summarizes everything I have reflected on as a Christian believer and practicing Catholic.

*The Lord is my shepherd, I will not be distressed,
for in green pastures he leads me to rest,
and my thirst I'll go to quench at his refreshing well.*

*He guides me along his path and places his honor in it.
I shall not be afraid, even if I get lost,
for hearing his whistle calling my heart rejoices in him.*

*He invites me to his banquet and treats me as a friend.
And when my enemy rages at seeing me close to him,
he shows me great courtesy and shares his drink with me.*

*Like the birds follow the plow, his goodness will follow me,
until the joyful day comes when he'll take me to his residence,
to live in full abundance for all eternity.*

*(El Señor es mi pastor, no sufriré la apretura,
porque en la verde llanura él me lleva a descansar
y mi sed iré a calmar al pozo de su frescura.*

*Él mi guía por su senda y en ello pone su honor.
Yo no sentiré temor, aunque me encuentre perdido,
porque al oír su silbido se me alegra el corazón.*

*Él me invita a su banquete y me trata como amigo;
y aunque rabie mi enemigo al verme en tal compañía,
él me muestra cortesía y me hace beber consigo.*

*Como gaviota al arado me seguirá su bondad,
hasta el día en que vendrá, para llevarme a su estancia,
a vivir en la abundancia por toda la eternidad.)*

And, according to one of the formulas used in the Catholic liturgy of the Mass, after the celebrant asks about the essential truths of the Apostles' Creed, the assembly answers in unison, as we also invite everyone to respond at the conclusion of this book:

*This is our faith,
this is the faith of the Church
we are proud to profess,
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*