

## Creative Writing and Language in Defence of Christian Faith: Insights from William Craig's *Reasonable Faith*

Nkereuwem, Ogonna Nchekwube

Language and Communication, Education Department, School of General Studies, Federal College of Education Technical, Asaba, Delta, Nigeria.

Corresponding author: [ofonimen2015@gmail.com](mailto:ofonimen2015@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Creative writing and language are viable means of defending the Christian Faith as well as other religions. The viability and the place of these mechanisms in Christian apologetics are yet to gain scholastic attention and appraisal. This paper is an attempt to that end. Data are gathered from observation, William Craig's *Reasonable Faith*, and textual internet and library materials. Qualitative method, text-content analysis and objective approach are employed. The analysis proves that language and creative writing are obviously used positively, technically and defensively to historicise, propagate, project, promote, defend and sustain the Christian Faith. Besides, they are used in the same ways to expose ills perverted by many Christians, which prove them to be exhibiting unreasonable faith rather than exemplary reasonable faith that they ought to practice. The study concludes that Craig offers valuable insights to understanding and practising reasonable faith and the courage to defend one's faith, as an apologetic believer. It recommends that believers of all faiths should be reasonable in the practice of their respective faith, so as to avoid hatching out religious ills that threaten society. Also, individuals should engage in sustained positive use of language and creative writing in defence of their faith, as they are non-violent mechanisms for defending and practising one's faith in truth and honesty.

**Keywords:** Creative Writing, Language, Defence, Reasonable Faith, Insights.

### Introduction

Regardless of religious-based issues confronting society, the importance of religion cannot be over-emphasised. Faith is the base of religion. Thus, defending a faith implies defending a religion. Obinya (2017, p. 107) rightly notes that 'a religious understanding of the universe makes every man to be deeply related to others in a form of universal brotherhood.' Despite the opposition posed by moral and religious beliefs to science, both theists and atheists agree that science unites human beings and 'enables them to conceive the earth as a planet orbiting the sun and to travel by airplane or communicate by telephone' (Alan, 2014, p. 86). Thus, both faith and science are unification mechanisms. The focus of this study is on faith, not science. Thus, it leaves out further engagement with science. Language is the binding force of, and instrument of functionality for faith, reason and science. As Uche (1994, p. 101) has rightly observed, 'without language, science cannot strive; this shows that effective communication in science involves [the] ability to use and understand the technical terms as well as interpret information encoded in symbolic form into another non-symbolic form of language.'

William Lane Craig, a Christian apologist, is bent on defending the Christian Faith beyond reasonable doubt at all times through creative writing and critical discourse in verbal speeches. His apologetic teachings about the Christian Faith, which largely involve creative writing, are directed to both Christians and non-Christians alike. Craig is critical about all that concerns the Christian Faith. The departure point of his apologetic teachings and defence is his book, entitled *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, first published in 1984. His apologetic defence and teachings are worthy of emulation. Given his appreciable defence of the Christian Faith, this study seeks to show that creative writing and language are viable means of defending the Christian Faith as well as other Faiths, drawing insights from Craig's creative writing and positive use of language in his sustained defence of the Christian Faith.

### Statement of Problem

Religious issues in contemporary time pose some serious challenges to religions vis-à-vis their realities, viability and continuity. Besides questioning the essence of religion, they serve as fertile grounds for heretics and atheists to push harder their claims and teachings against God's existence and religious practices, and for them to seemingly convince, distract and convert some religious faithful. Against the foregoing backdrop, religious apologists in the theological field of apologetics have risen overtime to taking up the task of defending their faiths (religions) wholesomely and reasonably. Interestingly, William Craig is one of the most influential among them. His enormous contribution to the defence of Christian Faith is why this study draws insights from him on his notion of reasonable faith and defence of the Faith. The problem with faith, in contrast to reason, is that the revelation on which most religions are based is usually described and interpreted in sacred pronouncements, either in an oral tradition or canonical writings, backed by one kind of divine authority or the other.

Religious writings and oral traditions are immune to critique and rational evaluation. Both of them are products of creative writing and positive and technical use of language. For being immune as such, Copleston (1952) has observed that to give a religious belief a rational consideration is a kind of categorical mistake. William Craig, like Søren Kierkegaard and several others, clarify that faith prevails and perpetually takes over certain things in life, including certain truths and knowledge of God and existence (Shedrack, 2023). Like John Locke, who proposes the reasonableness of faith to such an extent (Alston, 1998, p. 238), William Craig uses his notion of 'reasonable faith' to evidently argue for the existence of God, and defensively explain the reliability of the Bible, the historical evidence for Jesus along with all He did on earth, the problem of evil, and Christian truths, such as the Kalam cosmological argument and the moral argument for the existence of God.

### Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- i. Show that creative writing and language are viable means of defending Christian Faith as well as any other religion, as done by William Lane Craig;
- ii. Describe how creative writing and language serve as mechanisms for defending a faith;
- iii. Make an exposition of what reasonable faith entails, as taught by William Craig;
- iv. Discuss the remedial role of reasonable faith in mitigating religious ills.

### Methodology

Following the nature and the preoccupation of the study, the descriptive survey and qualitative methods are employed. Data are drawn from participant and non-participant observation and William Lane Craig's book, *Reasonable faith: Christian truth and apologetics*, which was first published in 1984. The secondary data, which supplement the primary data, are drawn from library and internet print materials. Text-content analysis, descriptive and interpretive techniques and critical skills are employed in the analysis of data. These techniques and skills make the textual analysis apt.

### Literature Review

Faith, the simplest or wholesome meaning of religion, serves as a means of understanding the world in unison. That is, faith is the base of the religious understanding of the world. It is 'associated with divinity-humanity, vision, virtue, godliness and blessings from God' (Cushman, 1950, p. 273). Faith is said to be 'understood ordinarily as an act of will or a commitment on the part of the believer' (Alston, 1998, p. 238). This means that faith involves willingness and self-commitment to beliefs. These are done in both written and oral forms, with language being used all through. According to Alston (1998, p. 238), Soren Kierkegaard is of the opinion that faith prevails and perpetually takes over everything up to the point of being positively irrational, while John Locke proposes the reasonableness of faith to such an extent (Alston, 1998, p. 238). That is, for some thinkers, faith is reasonable; for others, it is not. In the words of Alston (1998, p. 238), 'faith involves a stance towards some claim that is not, at least presently, demonstrable by reason.' That means Alston, like Locke and Craig, faith is reasonable. Craig aptly demonstrates this reality. His wholesome teachings about Christianity capture the foregoing points.

Faith, Shedrack (2023) notes, is a subtle but critically important aspect of the Christian experience, which is hard to adequately define in its entire nuance, but immensely powerful and life changing. This means that even if faith is not rational (reasonable), it has impactful, powerful and transformative forces. The foregoing points are given credence by Kopic (2012), who holds that faith is a powerful force in the life of the believer, because it is a subtle and elusive inclination of the mind, hard to adequately quantify and articulate in all of its nuances and the places where it touches the behaviour and lifestyle of the adherent, but has profound effects on the adherent. Quoting the scriptural Proverbs, Kopic (2012, p. 27) notes that 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' is not understood from the Latin linguistic construction of it or the inherent mathematical complexity, but from self-

submission to a Supreme Being that holds all things together. McKaughan (2013, p. 109) states that belief, what concerns a state of mind and disposition to assent to a set of propositions, has a lot to do with love, loyalty and commitment akin to pledging one's allegiance to a person as Lord or to a cause. The point made by McKaughan (2013) also affirms commitment and willingness to essential attributes of faith. These are said to be made manifest through mental formulation and disposition tied to love, loyalty and commitment to serving the Supreme Being.

Again, faith is said to have been described by Thomas Aquinas as the internal thought about truth, which is commended by will (Aquinas, 1945). The definition links faith to will and mental cognition of truths. In the right sense of it, faith is what rests in and comes from the mind, and a person does it willingly. It involves and comes from within– the mind. Faith concerns believed truths rooted in the mind or heart of the individual. Similarly, Tillich (1957) has defined faith as an 'act of the total personality'. This definition regards faith as a personal thing as well as internal quality that manifests in practice or physical reality. For Locke (1867), faith refers to the 'absence to a proposition'. This implies that faith entails confirming or accepting what one never saw to be real– believing without doubt. The absence of proposition implies the absence of doubt. The definition also implies that faith has no element of logic, since there is no any proposition.

Faith implies religion. It is the simplest definition of religion, as a belief. Believing requires faith. It takes faith to believe, particularly what is said to be or have been given through revelation. Shedrack (2023, p. 6) lends credence to the foregoing propositions, as he states, 'Faith is the base of religion. Put simply, faith is religion and vice versa.' Religion is a practice that individuals have right and obligation to do at will without compulsion. James (1896) has defined religion as what we all have the right to develop an attitude of believing religious matters. The definition does not capture religion in practice. It does not point at worship, the relationship between a Supreme Being and humans on one hand and humans and other deities on the other. The use of 'religious matters' is ambiguous.

Peterson et al. (2001) point out that while Kant argued religion within the context of reason alone, Kierkegaard called for reason with the limits of religion alone. For Kierkegaard, faith requires a leap and a risk. The authors also note that all arguments that reason derives for a proof of God are in fact viciously circular; one can only reason about the existence of an object that only one assumes to have existed (Peterson et al., 2001). In addition, they mention that unlike Hegel who claims that faith could have been elevated to a status of objective certainty, Kierkegaard argues that what is needed is a radical trust (Peterson et al., 2001). In other words, the radical trust of faith is the highest virtue one can reach. Premised on that, Kierkegaard claims that all essential knowledge intrinsically relates to an existing individual, involving aesthetic, ethical and religious stages (Peterson et al., 2001). Ogabo and Linus (2022, pp. 83-104) discuss the implications of interreligious dialogue in Nigeria, stressing the need for the faithful of different religions to embrace and engage in peaceful dialogue in order to have peaceful intergroup relations, social cohesion, and interreligious co-operation, tolerance and integration. They note that interreligious

dialogue is important, because it: is an expression of man's humanity; creates tolerance and mutual understanding between/among groups, as they get enlightened; promotes peace and unity; and reduces violence, terrorism and warfare (Ogabo and Linus, 2022, pp. 93-4). According to them, there are four types of interreligious dialogue: 'experiential, relational, informational, confessional and practical dialogue' (Ogabo and Linus, 2022, p. 94). They submit that even though successive Nigerian governments have attempted to attain interreligious dialogue since 1986 to 2004, it is a dire necessity to surmount the constraints to the efforts, which include religious fanaticism, ignorance, poverty, pessimism, social discrimination and religious relativism/indifferentism.

Ogbonnaya and Besong (2019, pp. 81-9) decry the problems religions bring upon Nigeria, emphasising that the faithful of each of the main religions in Nigeria consistently tend to promote and glorify their religion over others. The sustained religious conflict between Muslims and Christians has traces to the tendency. The conflict has untold effects on people and society. They recommend religious harmony as the panacea. Similarly, Gabriel (2019, pp. 160-171) explains how successive Nigerian governments have made Nigeria a religious nation that battles with religious-based issues among Christian and Muslim faithful. Since independence to date, Muslim and Christian politicians have consistently taken to religion as a means of mobilising mass support and victory for themselves at the detriment of their opponents (Gabriel, 2019, p. 162). Obviously, Nigerian politicians and other elites manipulate the masses using religions (Gabriel, 2019, p. 161).

Regardless of being mentioned as the third major religion in Nigeria, the African Traditional Religion has been silenced by the faithful of Christianity and Islam. That follows the (mis)deeds of politicians and the other elites (Gabriel, 2019). Gabriel (2019, p. 168-9) advises that religion, as a very powerful tool for social mobilisation and cohesion, should be used rightly and positively without any elitist manipulation so as to attain and foster development. A cleric elite, David Oyedepo states, 'I have not found any reason why anybody in the church I pastor should be richer than me, because it was Jesus who rode on the colt; the disciples were following Him on foot' (Oyedepo, 2003, p. 83). These words, which are relegating, oppressive and dehumanising to the non-cleric or elitist faithful, highlight the religious manipulation of the masses by the elite for their own gains, even at the expense of those faithful under them.

In what captures reasonable faith in the real sense and obviously highlights insights from Craig, Shedrack (2023, p. 9) emphasises that Christians, who are reasonable, can hardly be misled by their clerics. His examples read,

Reasonable Christians would not: commit atrocities and still pretend to be Puritans; tempt God and get into lion dens to demonstrate being a contemporary Daniel; eat underwear's, scorpions, snakes, sand, etc.; do crazy things to impress; pursue prosperity, miracles, signs and wonders, and worldly things at the expense of religious things, etc. (Shedrack, 2023, p. 9).

**William Lane Craig and the Centrality of his Reasonable Faith**

A committed Christian since the age of sixteen at a junior high school, WL Craig is a Professor of Philosophy at the Talbot School of Theology, La Mirada, California (Reasonable Faith, n.d., p. 2). He is married to Jan and their union is blessed with two children. He had his undergraduate studies at Wheaton College and obtained a BA in 1971. He obtained two MAs from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 1974 and 1975 respectively. He got a PhD from University of Birmingham, England in 1977 (Reasonable Faith, n.d., p. 2). In 1984, Craig obtained D. Theol. from the University of Munich, Germany. He taught Philosophy of Religion at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School between 1980 and 1986 (Reasonable Faith, n.d., p. 2). Craig is an orator and a renowned erudite international scholar, lecturer, public speaker and debater, having audiences in North America, Europe and Asia. He has many scholarly creative write-ups, in which he uses language appropriately to defend God's existence and the Christian Faith with all its cores. His books include *The Kalam Cosmological Argument; Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus; Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom; Theism, Atheism and Big Bang Cosmology; and God, Time and Eternity* (Reasonable Faith, n.d., pp. 2-3).

In his preface to the third edition of *Reasonable Faith*, William Lane Craig writes, 'Reasonable Faith has become, I suppose, my signature book, and we're grateful for the way the Lord has used it in the lives of many' (Craig, 2008, p. 11). This implies that his creative writing and language use have been exerting significant impact on his audiences (readers and listeners). The phrase 'Reasonable Faith' has become his signature in that other than his book entitled so, he discusses reasonable faith in his other creative write-ups and in the verbal speeches he delivers at different public places, including school lectures. It is his signature, because he has become associated with the notion of reasonable faith. With reasonable faith having become his carved niche, Craig remains bent on developing it conceptually, theoretically and empirically in writing and speeches.

In his *Reasonable Faith*, Craig (1984, p. 29) argues in defence of the truism of Christianity. In it, he shows how absurd life can be without God (Craig, 1984, p. 65). He proves the existence of God and faults the otherwise claims by atheists and heretics (Craig, 1984, pp. 97-157). Craig also explains and resolves the problem of historical knowledge (Craig, 1984, p. 207). He discusses and warns against the problem of miracles (Craig, 1984, p. 247). He also makes illustrative arguments that justify the self-understanding of Jesus (Craig, 1984, p. 248). The resurrection of Jesus Christ and the salvation implications of His resurrection are also dissected by him. Craig (1984, p. 11) informs the readers of his *Reasonable Faith* that 'apologetics (from the Greek word 'apologia' – a defence) is that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.' He voluntarily engages with faith, beliefs, truths, ideas, events, arguments, doctrines, norms and values, questions (problems) and answers (solutions) in theology. For him, theology is 'an expression of loving God with all our minds' (Craig, 1984, p. 11).

He is of the opinion that 'apologetics specifically serves to show to unbelievers the truth of the Christian faith, to confirm that faith to believers, and to reveal and explore the

connections between Christian doctrine and other truths' (Craig, 1984, p. 11). He informs that apologetics plays three major functions, which are shaping culture (Craig, 1984, pp. 16-9), strengthening believers (Craig, 1984, pp. 19-21) and evangelising unbelievers (Craig, 1984, pp. 21-3). Apologetics, according to him, is of two major categories. These are offensive (or positive) apologetics and defensive (or negative) apologetics (Craig, 1984, p. 23). Offensive apologetics seeks to present a positive case for Christian truth claims. Defensive apologetics seeks to nullify objections to those claims (Craig, 1984, p. 23).

Offensive apologetics is of two categories: natural theology and Christian evidences. The burden of natural theology is to provide arguments and evidence in support of theism independent of authoritative divine revelation. The ontological, cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments for the existence of God are classical examples of the arguments of natural theology (Craig, 1984, p. 23-4). The goal of Christian evidences is to show why a specifically Christian theism is true. Typical Christian evidences include fulfilled prophecy, the radical personal claims of Christ, the historical reliability of the Gospels, and so on. A similar sub-division exists within defensive apologetics (Craig, 1984, p. 24). In the division corresponding to natural theology, defensive apologetics addresses objections to theism. The alleged incoherence of the concept of God and the problem of evil are the paramount issues here. Corresponding to Christian evidences would be a defence against objections to biblical theism. The objections posed by modern biblical criticism and by contemporary science to the biblical record dominate this field (Craig, 1984, p. 23).

William Craig explains that in actual practice, the two basic approaches, offensive and defensive, can blend together. For example, one way to offer a defence against the problem of evil would be to offer a positive moral argument for the existence of God, precisely on the basis of moral evil in the world. Or again, in offering a positive case for the resurrection of Jesus, one may have to answer objections raised by biblical criticism to the historical credibility of the resurrection narratives. Nonetheless, the overall thrust of these two approaches remains quite distinct: the goal of offensive apologetics is to show that there is some good reason to think that Christianity is true, while the goal of defensive apologetics is to show that no good reason has been given to think that Christianity is false (Craig, 1984, p. 24). In his *Reasonable Faith*, Craig takes up the task of offensive apologetics alone, leaving out the task of the defensive apologetics. Nevertheless, he expresses hope to delve into defensive apologetics in prose someday (Craig, 1984, p. 24).

Craig thinks that the atheist or any other person, who thinks that the traditional arguments for God's existence are behind the times and need no further rejection, is naïve (Craig, 2016, p. 5). In his *Five Arguments for God: The New Atheism and the Case for the Existence of God*, Craig (2016, p. 5) wonders why 'the so-called New Atheists' are unable to sufficiently show that the arguments for God's existence are not good. He also wonders why 'the so-called New Atheists' have nothing (tangible) to say about the arguments for the existence of God (Craig, 2016, p. 5). According to him, the New Atheists rather focus on the social effects of religion as what question the good sides of religion. Such persons are concerned almost exclusively with the social effects of religion as a system and/or an idea. He points out that



while the good or bad impact of an idea is an adequate measure for its truth, such consideration alone is not a sufficient parameter for determining the adequacy of the idea, system or practice (Craig, 2016, p. 5). That is true. This present writer argues that the fact that religious ills abound cannot negate the reality that religion is not a problem in itself and does offer huge prospects to humans and society.

### **Reasonable Faith, Creative Writing and Language**

Reasonable faith is one that is committed. That is why Shedrack (2023, p. 6) says 'committed faith in the truth claims and critical aspects of Christian dogma is the uniting factor for all Christians worldwide.' The propagation and sustenance of the Christian Faith has been made possible by creative writing and effective language use, among other mechanisms. Language has been used verbally and in writing to propagate Christianity, disseminate and carry out its teachings and all that concerns it from time being up to this time. It is also used to defend the Christian Faith and all about it. The creativity in writing is made manifest in the highest way possible in scriptural writing. Creative writing, like all other endeavours involve the use of language. All human activities involve the use of language (Emeka-Nwobia, 2015; Uche, 1994). Language is used for performing various activities, communication, knowledge impartation, and expression of feelings, thoughts, ideas, etc. It is used in the same vein to teach about God and all that concerns religion. Believers of all religions make use of language in carrying out various religious activities. As such, in defending any faith, language is used. When used positively, technically, creatively and appropriately, language plays a great deal of role in the defence of any faith. When used for the otherwise purpose, religious issues arise. So, the way language is used for the purpose of apologetics determines the results it produces in explaining and defending a faith. The biblical writers show unequal creative writing in defence of the Faith. Their write-ups are not just expository, revealing and educative, but also defensive. They stand out above all other write-ups by virtue of their influence. Thus, for this study, creative writing in defence of the Christian Faith had begun with the creative writing of the Holy Bible. All the biblical writers wrote creatively, critically, technically, tactically, expressively and inspiringly. For example, the biblical writer to the Hebrews expresses the idea of faith beautifully by likening it to a physical substance and explaining how it (faith) can serve as evidence of the ultimately scientifically unverifiable (Hebrew 11:1).

Nutt (2018, p. 46) implicitly explains how Soren Kierkegaard used creative writing and language to defend the Christian Faith, while creating awareness about it and contributing his quota to ensuring Christians' commitment to their Faith. Nutt explains that 'human reason is interested, finite, and limited by sin, but it has a role in leading to genuine faith' (Nutt, 2018, p. 46). He further notes that 'although human reason submits to the object of faith, it continues on in a nuanced, revitalised form, serving the individual's God-relationship for self-knowledge (Nutt, 2018, p. 46). According to Nutt (2018, p. 46), 'Christian faith may be viewed as rational through this subjectivity inasmuch as subjective experiences may be a reasonable option and objectively true, if stemming from a universal



structure of human existence.’ Thus, Christian Faith is unveiled by Derek Nutt, just as Kierkegaard did, through creating writing and language. These mechanisms make it possible for both Christians and non-Christians to be aware of the nitty-gritty of Christianity.

With creative writing and effective language use, ‘the core foundational beliefs encompassed by Christianity are cognitively coherent and are uniform and monolithic across the breadth of the faith’ (McKaughan, 2013, p. 109; Shedrack, 2023, p. 7). The Christian Faith has been made so through creative writing and language, the means of communication. There is no gainsaying the fact that these two mechanisms are powerful tools that had made Christians to ultimately commit their lives to the doctrines and dogmas of their Faith. The Christian dogma is a collection of clearly defined and widely held beliefs about various aspects of physical and spiritual realities, and human conditions (McKaughan, 2013, p. 109; Shedrack, 2023, p. 7). These beliefs are what Christians have ‘faith’ in. There are subtle variations about the exact meanings of some of the doctrines of different Christian denominations.

Craig (1984) presents an overview of Christian apologetics, defending the Christian faith through the use of reason and evidence. While defending the Faith, he teaches a lot about it at the same time. He argues against heretic and atheistic teachings and claims against God’s existence, and apologetically proves the truths of the human and divine persons, evangelism, performed miracles, teachings, death, resurrection and assumption of Jesus Christ, the Bible, Christian truths, ethics, morality and teachings, and history, dynamics and practices of and trends in Christianity. He consistently warns against fake religious practices, fake miracles and immoral acts that negate reasonable faith. Doing so involves creative writing and language, which he used effectively in constructing, presenting and disseminating his defence of the Christian Faith.

Chinedu (2019) is of the view that religious fanatics do not show reasonable faith, as they violate core or classical religious precepts and trample on the rights of other citizens. He argues that Locke’s perspective on violent religious sect across the globe should be imbibed to tackle religious uprising. Doing so entails that the society has to stop tolerating threats from religious fanatics and militant sect members (e.g. the Boko Haram in North-East region of Nigeria). Chinedu (2019, pp. 79, 82-4) holds that the government’s failure to quell Boko Haram implies that it tolerates the sect and its applied measures to address the violence unleashed on Nigeria by the sect members remain deficient. He suggests that John Locke’s idea should be nuanced with other viable ideologies to attain workable measures (Chinedu, 2019, p. 87-8). Craig’s idea of reasonable faith is undoubtedly one of those other viable ideologies for resolving and averting religious issues. Thus, it has to be imbibed individually and collectively to attain that goal.

## Conclusion

Given the descriptive analysis done, it is quite obvious that language and creative writing are viable means of propagating, projecting, promoting, sustaining and defending religion

and any other practices. All holy writs are products of language and creative writing, done to defend the various religions having written holy writs. Being a Christian apologist implies being reasonably faithful. One who is reasonably faithful practises and exhibits true religiosity, and defends their faith at all times without violence. Thus, it is quite interesting that Craig offers both Christians and non-Christians valuable insights to understanding and practising their religions reasonably. He also offers his audiences the courage to defend their faith apologetically rather than fanatically.

## Recommendations

This study recommends that:

- i. Believers of all faiths should be reasonable in practising their respective faith, so as to avoid creating religious ills that threaten society.
- ii. Individuals should engage in sustained positive use of language and creative writing in defence of their faith, as they are non-violent mechanisms for defending and practising one's faith in truth and honesty.

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