REASONABLE FAITH: CHRISTIAN TRUTH AND APOLOGETICS

A Book Review

Presented to

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for 28500

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by

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May 25, 2026

*I affirm the honor code.

Craig, William Lane. *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.

World-famous scholar, theologian, and philosopher, William Lane Craig, invites readers to explore natural theology and the foundations of apologetics. Craig earned a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Birmingham and a doctorate in theology from the University of Munich. As a research professor at Biola University, he has published more than 40 books and 150 peer-reviewed articles. He is perhaps most widely known for his academic debates with skeptics. In 2007, prompted by his academic success, he launched a new media-based platform called Reasonable Faith, allowing him to reach a larger audience in his defense of the Christian faith. In his work, *Reasonable Faith*, Craig's analytic-philosophical commitments afford the reader an easy-to-follow, premise-by-premise approach to arguments for God's existence. The real strength of this book is Craig's systematic organization of topics, arguments, premises, criticisms, and responses. His content is original yet does not neglect key historical figures and insights—an indication of strong argumentation. Both the style's comprehensibility and the content's complexity appeal to academic and popular audiences alike, establishing *Reasonable Faith* as a landmark work in contemporary apologetics. It will continue to be a significant reference for Christian apologists to learn from and a provocative book for non-Christians to interact with. Craig's *Reasonable Faith* is, by all accounts, a timeless work in the field of Christian philosophy.

Summary

As the title suggests, Craig sets out to demonstrate the *reasonableness* of the Christian faith. According to his thesis, he will lay out a positive case for the Christian faith for the purposes of confirming and commending the reader's faith (25). To show a positive case means

to provide good reasons to believe in a view rather than merely refuting objections. Craig's arguments, therefore, will be evaluated not just in how they *defend* Christianity as a system of beliefs, but also in how well they deliver positive reasons to believe in Christ. It is evident from his introduction that Craig appeals strongly to believers. Lest this book be taken primarily for what it is not, his primary aim is to offer a timeless resource for all Christians. This material is meant to inspire interest in Christian academics, to foster confidence in one's faith, and to encourage critical thinking.

To summarize the content's structure, Craig begins by explicating key definitions and concepts. The introduction defines apologetics along with its various types and objectives. Building on this background, his first section, *De Fide* (or "of the faith"), examines the epistemological question of how we can know the truthfulness of Christianity. Several historical thinkers are discussed; the role of the Holy Spirit in apologetics and justified Christian belief is examined, along with the role of arguments and evidence in faith. He offers a brief introduction to logic by explaining deductive and inductive arguments, validity, soundness, and plausibility. Followed by his section, *De Homine* (or "concerning man"). Here he points out the absurdity of life without God by answering the question of how humans can consistently exist in a hypothetical universe where God does not exist. Again he discusses the views of historical thinkers, including Pascal, Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, and Schaeffer. The case is made that Atheism lacks a framework for morality, immortality, and ultimate value and meaning, leading to the conclusion that it is impossible for Atheism to be truly lived out in accordance with its own merits and the human predicament.

The third and longest section, *De Deo* (or "about God"), is where Craig establishes the bulk of his positive case for the Christian faith. Craig introduces the four key arguments that demonstrate Christian theism with their respective historical roots. These four fall under the branches of ontological, cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments. Each is subsequently assessed. The Leibnizian version of the cosmological argument holds that God is the best explanation for the existence of the universe (106). Craig explains this argument from the

Principle of Sufficient Reason and modal logic. Craig's own rendition, which he defends, is called the Kalam cosmological argument, in which he logically deduces the cause of the universe from the evidence of its beginning. This argument is supported and defended at great length using philosophical and scientific insights. Competing models of the universe that attempt to avoid the beginning of the universe are critiqued. Secondly, Craig explains the teleological argument from the fine-tuning of the universe and then refutes three alternatives to fine-tuning: physical necessity, chance, and the multiverse. Thirdly, the moral argument sets out to ground God as the only objective basis for moral values and duties. Lastly, the Plantingian version of the ontological argument argues a priori for a maximally great being with maximally great properties (184).

The next section, *De Creatione* (or "concerning creation") introduces the philosophy of history and its impact on apologetics. Is historical knowledge objective and warranted, thus counted as evidence? Specific views of historicism, relativism, and postmodernism are discussed. The aim here is to lay the groundwork for arguments from miracles and prophecy, which Craig assesses in the following chapter. Significant historical figures include Spinoza and Hume, whose views are critiqued accordingly. This section is for all purposes a prelude to his final chapter, *De Christo* (or "of Christ"). It begins with the person and nature of Jesus Christ. Craig defends Jesus's self-understanding, Jewish heritage, and divine claims. This leads to his final argument in his work *Reasonable Faith*: the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Craig makes the bold claim that contemporary apologetics for the resurrection is inept at dealing with the backdrop of modern criticisms (333). A traditional apologetic (or evidentialist) case for the resurrection from the authenticity and reliability of the Gospels is outlined. To explain the claim of ineptitude, he presents a brief survey of historical criticisms and compares them to contemporary criticisms from Ehrman, Meier, and Allison. Following this, Craig presents his case for the resurrection by utilizing a minimal facts methodology, whereby well-established historical facts are appealed to as a way to demonstrate the truthfulness of a hypothesis—namely, that "God raised Jesus from the dead" (397).

First is the fact of the empty tomb discovered by a group of Jesus's female followers (361). He details the historical credibility of this event and contrasts its plausibility with competing theories, which he concludes are less plausible, such as the conspiracy and apparent death hypotheses. Second is the fact that there were several individuals who claimed to have had postmortem experiences of the resurrected Christ, including Paul, Peter, James, and the five hundred. He defends this fact against other explanations of the resurrection appearances. Third is the fact of the origin of the Christian faith. The nature of the Christian origin is unique and unlikely, Craig argues. The concept of a resurrected Christ redeeming mankind as such shows no prior influences from Jewish or pagan sources (391-392). The criteria Craig uses to assess these facts against the historical resurrection hypothesis are as follows: multiple attestation, dissimilarity, embarrassment, context and expectation, semitic traces, effect, principles of embellishment, coherence, and historical congruence. Ultimately, the resurrection hypothesis satisfies all of these criteria, and according to Craig, these facts are best explained by this hypothesis.

Critical Evaluation

As a reminder, the objective of his book was to present a positive case for Christian theism. Has he accomplished such? A resounding "yes." The book outlined at least five formal arguments for Christian theism. All of which were well-constructed and supported. He included detailed interactions, critiques, and responses to them. For a contemporary work in apologetics, there is no doubt that Craig displayed the reasonableness of faith in Christ. The second aspect of his thesis is more personal. It is up to each believer whether or not their faith is strengthened as a result of Craig's work. Judging by the engagement with this book since its release, it is safe to say that it has achieved this.

There seems to be little question that Craig laid out a reasonable case for the Christian faith, but to what extent? For this question, the answer is not so obvious because individuals, believers and unbelievers, disagree over its effectiveness. Perhaps some unbelievers have been

deeply moved and perhaps moved closer to faith in Christ as a result. Perhaps some believers feel emboldened by these arguments. I can attest to the latter. But Craig's work does not come without objection, as one would expect with any academic work. Personally, I find the arguments, particularly regarding the Kalam cosmological and Leibnizian cosmological arguments, persuasive. That is likely due to Craig's extensive research on the former as well as the simplicity of both arguments. The evidence seems uncontroversial from my perspective. There is no explanation that is more sound or plausible than the God hypothesis. However, let me say a bit more about the weaknesses of this book.

First, the four formal arguments for God's existence could have been introduced earlier in the text. Craig likely chose the layout based on the clear succession from one topic to the next. His transitions from one point to the next are seamless. Rather than introducing the arguments and returning to them later, Craig addresses the arguments only after the relevant context and prior topics have been discussed. The downside of this structure is that the arguments feel more integrated into a broader apologetic, rather than highlighted. Introducing the arguments towards the beginning would have made it clear to the reader that these select arguments are the focal point of his case. This may have been more beneficial than diving into a historical survey early on.

Second, Craig clearly favors the Kalam cosmological argument because of its disproportionate content relative to the other arguments. I do not mean to suggest that this reality is erroneous in any sense. However, for the sake of the reader, having such a long excursus on the kalam cosmological argument and very minimal interaction with the moral and ontological arguments by comparison lost the element of lucidity. In a positive case for Christian theism, I suggest a more balanced approach.

Third, Craig presupposes a classical method of apologetics. That is, he begins with natural theology and ends with Christian particularism. In other words, Craig argues for and establishes first the existence of God (theism) in order to then argue for and establish the existence of the triune God (*Christian* theism). This methodology is in high contrast to more

reformed apologetics. It is not obvious that this method is biblical, let alone effective. Besides briefly mentioning cultural apologetics and a traditional case for the resurrection, Craig does not engage much with the other apologetic methodologies. Seeing as Craig aims to benefit the reader, one could argue that it is essential to defend the apologetic methodology one is reinforcing rather than simply presupposing it. Thus, it may have been more beneficial and less controversial for Christian readers to first elaborate on the apologetic method corresponding to the case to be presented.

Fourth, although somewhat inherent in the classical methodology Craig employs, it remains relevant to the case as presented. Craig offers a less comprehensive argument for the specific claims of Christian theism. The primary aim of his discourse is to establish positive reasons in support of Christian theism. It may be more advantageous to his overall argument to engage in a more detailed examination of the positive reasons for Christian truths, rather than a focusing so much attention on a discussion of general theism.

Conclusion

Craig invites readers to distinguish between knowing Christianity is true and showing its truth. We know Christianity through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, while we show its truth with logical arguments and evidence (405). What Craig uniquely contributes in his case for Christian theism is a detailed survey of historical views, his inclusion of various versions of particular arguments, and his practical application to close out each section—a reminder of his commitment to reach Christian audiences. As I stated in the introduction to this review, Craig's background in analytic philosophy guides his argumentation with structure, organization, and clarity. Although much of the content may be initially challenging for laypersons to comprehend, the manner in which he has presented his case fosters greater understanding. Despite these potential weaknesses, *Reasonable Faith* remains a wonderful contribution to the Church.

*Honor Code: I have written this paper exclusively for 28500. If I received any editing or proofreading advice, I have made all such corrections myself. I have also documented each paraphrase, direct quotation, and borrowed idea in compliance with the Turabian and SBTS style manuals.