

“In his first major Christian book, Mark Lanier brings to Christian publishing the same expertise, communication skills and pure, enthusiastic joy for the subject that he has brought to courtrooms and TV-network interviews across America for decades. But most folks don’t know that Mark is as good a theologian and Christian communicator as he is a trial attorney. In some ways this book is a modern *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. It is an excellent read for anyone who wants to see the evidence for the basic objective truths of Christian faith.”

John Michael Talbot, author of *The Jesus Prayer*

“Historians, scientists and lawyers are after the same thing: to discover what really happened. Mark Lanier, one of America’s best lawyers, introduces us to history’s expert witnesses regarding our most profound questions and tells a compelling story sure to convince any jury.”

David B. Capes, Thomas Nelson Research Professor, Houston Baptist University

“Because Mark Lanier is my Sunday school teacher, I have the joy of following his teaching week by week no matter where I am in the world. I eventually print out every lesson for my own reference because he is the quintessential teacher, using every means to invest his discerning exposition and wonderful insights into those of us who follow his teaching. I look forward to this volume not only for my personal edification but also as a book that I can place in the hands of those seeking to know Christ in a personal way and to grow in the Christian faith.”

Dorothy Kelley Patterson, professor of theology in women’s studies, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas

“Mark Lanier, a noted lawyer and Bible scholar, deftly takes the reader through a carefully argued case for Christianity. Presenting testimony of key witnesses for and cross-examining opponents of the Christian faith, he makes a compelling case. The fair-minded reader will be persuaded that the preponderance of evidence supports the claims of the New Testament about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.”

James K. Hoffmeier, professor of Old Testament and Near Eastern archaeology, Trinity International University

“Mark Lanier is uniquely qualified to give God a fair hearing today. His skills as a trial lawyer are renowned. So too is his apologetical persuasiveness and winsome delivery. When you combine these gifts you hear a lawyer’s examination of the claims of Christianity and an evangelist’s appeal for a decision. *Christianity on Trial* is a great read for any wishing to examine the compelling evidence about Jesus Christ and reach a verdict about his claim on people’s lives.”

Simon Vibert, vice principal, Wycliffe Hall, Oxford

“Trial lawyers are often noted for incisive analysis, broad knowledge and the ability to spot the weakness in the opposition’s argument. Mark Lanier demonstrates every one of these instincts in *Christianity on Trial*. His expertise in using the biblical languages uniquely qualifies him to ask—and answer—all the really tough questions. As a fresh assessment of the intellectual validity of the Christian, this book will delight pastors, theologians, church members and even critics.”

Paige Patterson, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas

“Mark Lanier has probably read more about the Bible than many biblical scholars and combines this with his experience as a leading trial lawyer. The result is a gripping read and a compelling case for Christianity. He touches on so many different kinds of argument that there is something for everyone in this feast.”

Peter Williams, warden, Tyndale House, Cambridge, United Kingdom

“Authored by one of the nation’s leading trial lawyers, *Christianity on Trial* brilliantly employs the truth-finding methods of the legal process to produce an eminently readable, highly persuasive work of Christian apologetics. This is an extraordinary trial lawyer’s version of *Mere Christianity*. In his inimitable fashion, Mark Lanier combines his superb expertise as a courtroom lawyer with profound knowledge of biblical scholarship and thoughtful reflection on daily life. Fearless in tackling the most difficult matters of belief, this engaging book speaks to all those interested in seeking truth—whether in the courtroom, in the library or in everyday life.”

Ken Starr, president, Baylor University

CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL

A LAWYER EXAMINES *the* CHRISTIAN FAITH



W. MARK LANIER


IVP Books

An imprint of InterVarsity Press
Downers Grove, Illinois

InterVarsity Press
P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426
www.ivpress.com
email@ivpress.com

©2014 by W. Mark Lanier

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from InterVarsity Press.

InterVarsity Press® is the book-publishing division of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA®, a movement of students and faculty active on campus at hundreds of universities, colleges and schools of nursing in the United States of America, and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. For information about local and regional activities, write Public Relations Dept., InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA, 6400 Schroeder Rd., P.O. Box 7895, Madison, WI 53707-7895, or visit the IVCF website at www.intervarsity.org.

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

While all stories in this book are true, some names and identifying information in this book have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

Cover design: David Fassett

Interior design: Beth Hagenberg

Images: Andrew Unangst/Getty Images


©procurator/iStockphoto

photo of Adolf Hitler visiting the Nietzsche Archive in Weimar, October 1935: bpk, Berlin / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

ISBN 978-0-8308-3667-3 (print)

ISBN 978-0-8308-9634-9 (digital)

Printed in the United States of America ∞

 As a member of the Green Press Initiative, InterVarsity Press is committed to protecting the environment and to the responsible use of natural resources. To learn more, visit greenpressinitiative.org.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lanier, W. Mark, 1960-

Christianity on trial : a lawyer examines the Christian faith / W. Mark Lanier.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8308-3667-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Apologetics. I. Title.

BT1103.L36 2014

239—dc23

2014009323

P	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Y	30	29	28	27	26	25	24	23	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14		

Contents

Dedication and Acknowledgments	7
Preface.	9
Introduction.	13
1 Opening Statement	21
2 God? gods? Or Nothing?.	28
3 Who God Is Not!.	56
4 Who Is God? (Part One)	71
5 Who Is God? (Part Two)	87
6 Biolinguistics and the Communicating God	101
7 Reality and the God of Truth	122
8 Right, Wrong and the Moral God	142
9 Free Will, Moral Responsibility and the Infinite, Just God	167
10 The Audacity of the Resurrection	186
11 Death and Eternity	211
12 Closing Argument	219
Notes	225

Dedication and Acknowledgments

I DEDICATE THIS WORK TO my marvelous wife, Becky, and our five special children, Will, Gracie, Rachel, Rebecca and Sarah. They are God's gracious gifts in my life that continually show me the joys of family and love.

I also acknowledge and thank my godly mother and my father, who awaits us in God's kingdom, for an upbringing that taught of God and always encouraged questioning and thinking about truth and reality.

My thanks go to the many supporters and friends, including the pastoral staff at our church (David Fleming and Stephen Trammel), where I first taught much of this material. Many people commented on those lessons as I wrote and delivered them each week in our Life Groups. For those voices, thank you for making this book better.

I also thank the marvelous people at InterVarsity Press for publishing this work, especially Al Hsu and Drew Blankman. They, along with Charles Mickey of the Lanier Theological Library, improved this product significantly.

More information on my class, including video presentations of the material in this book and the resources I use in this and other writings, can be found at the class website, www.biblical-literacy.org, and at our library website, www.LanierTheologicalLibrary.org.

Preface

LAST WEEK STARTED OUT SUPREMELY BUSY. Sunday morning, I taught my class at church and went to a big family lunch. Immediately afterward, I left Houston for a 6 p.m. meeting in Chicago. A troop of lawyers convened to assist in my preparations for a deposition I was taking the next day. (A deposition is an examination of a witness under oath that has all the trappings of a trial except it doesn't occur in a courtroom and the judge is not present. Video cameras capture the event, and a court reporter takes down each word. That testimony can later be played by video or read into evidence at a trial.)

We holed up in a hotel conference room and went past midnight. Juan Wilson, my trusted friend and coworker, brought in dinner so we could work without losing any time. I was about to take the deposition of a design engineer who had led a team developing a metal hip implant. We believed the implant was poorly designed, and obvious safety warnings were ignored in an effort to secure a worldwide market that put over a billion dollars into the company's hands. The implants were taken off the market because of their dangers, but not before being placed in hundreds of thousands of unknowing victims. This deposition would cover issues of metal corrosion, testing protocols, the effects of metal debris in the body, ions and nanoparticles, and more.

I was up early Monday morning to do final preparation, and I began the deposition at 9:03. We worked through lunch, and the deposition ended midafternoon. We were taking the deposition at a hotel by the airport, which enabled me to quickly get out of Chicago and on to the next destination. I had to be at a reception in Scottsdale, Arizona, that night.

The reception in Scottsdale went well, but I had to leave it by 8:30 p.m. to return to the airport and get to Santa Ana, California. In Santa Ana I had a meeting late into the night in preparation for a federal court hearing scheduled to begin promptly at 8 a.m. It was what lawyers call a *Daubert* hearing. This name comes from a famous case (Daubert was the name of the plaintiff), and it determines whether an expert's testimony is going to be allowed at a trial.

In American courts the judge is deemed the gatekeeper to the jury, and a jury is not allowed to hear expert testimony unless the judge deems it reliable. The purpose is to keep junk science out of a courtroom. This was a high-profile trial concerning whether a major brand of car would at times accelerate even when the brakes were engaged. The judge would be scrutinizing each expert and each opinion very carefully, as the media watched from the gallery.

After a brief night's sleep, I was up and standing in line to make it through courthouse metal detectors by 7:15. The judge kept us until 1 p.m., with two ten-minute breaks allowed. Our team then met in the courthouse café over coffees and Diet Cokes for another hour of planning.

From there I hustled back to the airport to get back to Scottsdale, Arizona, where I was scheduled to give a dinner speech to a seminar full of lawyers. I arrived with just enough time to clean up and change clothes. I went into the dinner wiped out. It had already been a long week, and I was running on just a few hours of sleep.

At the appropriate time I gave my dinner speech. Afterward, I

finished dinner and hoped to retire to my room. (I had two hours of presentations I had to make the next morning, followed immediately by an expert coming to meet with me on matters of pharmaceutical sales practices. I was hoping to get some sleep before waking up early enough to get the PowerPoint done for the speeches. I also had the expert's ninety-one-page report to read before the next day began.) I politely excused myself and got up from my table to head back to my room. As I was walking out, a lawyer I had met at the reception the night before got up from his table and came to me. He asked me how my *Daubert* hearing had gone. I told him I thought it went well, and he then informed me that he had been on my website after meeting me. I smiled, wanting to be polite and wanting to go to sleep. He then said he had been on my "Bible website," not just my law firm website. I found that a bit surprising. Looking me dead in the eye, he proclaimed, "I am an agnostic. Give me the *Daubert* hearing on God!"

He was using lawyer jargon to ask me for evidence on why believing in God has any legitimacy. I smiled while his request sank in. Before I could say anything, I realized five other lawyers and one spouse were standing nearby and forming a chorus saying, "Yes, we would like to hear this too!"

It was like someone flipped a switch in me. There is something invigorating about declaring the wonders of God. That is not to say that sleep is unimportant. Nor that drowsiness cannot trump even the greatest opportunity to discuss God, but it is invigorating nonetheless.

Any sense of fatigue left me. I told those interested that I would *love* to give them a *Daubert* hearing on my faith! Each grabbed a chair, and we sat for well over an hour while I worked through probing questions about God, faith, science, the Bible, Adam and Eve, creation and evolution, and, most important, the work of Jesus and the relationship that he makes possible. The people in the

group identified themselves as atheist, agnostic, two Reform Jews, new age and uncertain. The conversation was rich, and I counted it a blessing to be a part of it. (I am continuing my dialogue with several of these people by email.)

Before the evening was over, I told them about this book, which is basically a *Daubert* hearing on core elements of the Christian faith. Is it reasonable to believe in God? If so, what kind of God is he? What are the implications of such a belief? Does it affect who we are and what we are doing? Does it explain life? Does it give life meaning?

Each of my new friends expressed a desire to read this book. My hope is that it serves as a catalyst for further discussions with them and with others who read it as well. I look forward to where God may lead these conversations.

Introduction

IS IT REASONABLE TO BELIEVE IN GOD? Can God be infinite, personal and moral? What are the implications of people being made in his image? Is it intellectually honest to believe that the Bible is God's revelation to humanity? Do people have an ability to make real choices, or are we simply products of our DNA in combination with our environment? Does a belief in a historical Jesus who died and was physically resurrected pass the test of common sense? Should we expect the eventual return of Jesus and life after death?

These questions probe the core of the Christian faith. They are real questions for real people living in a real world. They are questions that make a difference. They are the basic questions I explore in this book.

What business does a trial lawyer have examining the Christian faith? Isn't that the jurisdiction of the theologian? What can a trial lawyer bring to the discussion that is not more carefully or artfully covered by the "experts"?

These challenging questions have occupied many of humanity's best minds for centuries. Debating the existence of God or what kind of God she or he is, is not new. Nor is asking whether the Bible is God's Word. Through millennia great minds have sought

to discover truth and determine what makes “right” right and “wrong” wrong. Are these really the questions we want a trial lawyer to examine? Can we learn anything by putting these issues on trial?

Perhaps not! But before you dismiss the idea, let this lawyer provide a defense. The American courtroom is an amazing development. It has one ultimate goal: discovery of truth. The question for every jury boils down to “what truly happened?” To find truth, civilization has learned a number of things are necessary. Most important, there must be a fair playing field. Jurors should be fair. Judges should be fair. Even the lawyers are charged to be fair and honest in finding and presenting evidence. Because of this, courtrooms have evolved strict rules of engagement to allow lawyers the freedom to develop evidence and then put the evidence on public display. From that display jurors are able to look at the evidence and assess it. Experience has indicated that there is no other human institution that can so readily sift through and weigh information to derive trustworthy conclusions.

Someone who reads this will say, “Objection, counselor! The scientist’s lab or the mathematician’s calculation is the best place to derive truth.” Yes and no. Hard sciences and mathematics do tell us provable facts like two plus two is four, but we must distinguish what is provable in the lab from what is not.

Laboratories are marvelous places to answer questions of chemistry, physics and biology. But can you answer “Who ran the red light?” with test tubes and a calculator? No. Not even when we are confident that someone indeed did run a red light. That answer is best found from an investigation of evidence, eyewitness accounts, pictures, examining the scene, evaluating the skid marks and so forth. That investigation then goes to a jury or judge who is first found to be fair and unbiased. The judge and jury, upon presen-

tation of the evidence, then draw a conclusion based on common sense, logic and life experiences.

Do judges and juries always get it right? Of course not. The legal system can break down. Yet most jurists will confirm what studies have repeatedly found to be true. The American judicial system, when operating properly under its rules, is the best system society has devised for answering such questions. When the courts fail, generally it is not the fault of the system but rather of a jury or judge. The system works remarkably well, as long as judges and juries remain unbiased. They must be fair in weighing the evidence.

So is science the laboratory for testing faith? No. The issues of history are core to faith, and they rarely are answerable in a laboratory.

Trial lawyers live in a world of issues and questions that are bigger than any laboratory could ever address. In the world of trial lawyers, laboratory truths help. They are frequently key ingredients to more complicated recipes. Hard facts of science are part of a jury's basis for ultimate decisions. DNA evidence is a tool in determining whether someone is fairly implicated in a crime. The laws of physics help reveal whether someone was speeding at the time of a crash.

The real hard decisions, those that tap the sciences, are "Who did it?" and "What happened?" decisions. These are decisions that make a difference in life or death. These decisions can put people in prison or bankruptcy. These decisions utilize the tools of science, but juries, not a laboratory, make the hard conclusions. Common, ordinary people sit down, analyze the evidence, discuss their opinions and decide the truth.

In this process the lawyer plays an integral role. The lawyer first gathers and sorts through the evidence. The importance of that process cannot be overstated. Lawyers call it the "discovery phase" of a trial. For every hour in court, I spend over forty hours re-

searching and investigating. For example, before the final preparation session for taking the engineer's deposition I discussed in the preface, I spent roughly five hundred hours studying the subject. I pored through documents, met for days learning from eight of the world's top engineers, read scores of studies and worked through the science meticulously. This is all part of the "discovery phase."

This serves two goals. First, I must understand the science well enough to cross-examine the witnesses working for the other side. So, for example, in a benzene exposure case I recently tried, it was not enough that I was able to explain how the benzene led to a young man's leukemia. I also had to cross-examine a set of opposing experts who were arguing the benzene was unrelated.

Second, as a lawyer I must be able to present complicated expert testimony in such a way that it makes sense to nonexperts. But this cannot be done at the expense of accuracy. Things cannot be oversimplified such that it becomes anything less than dead-on right. That is all an appellate court would need to throw out the jury's decision and invalidate five years or more of hard work.

This "discovery" stage is broad. Lawyers are allowed to discover not only relevant evidence but also evidence that might lead to relevant evidence. It cannot become a fishing expedition, but unlike in a trial, every question does not have to be directly relevant itself.

A trial is different. In a trial, only relevant evidence comes before a jury. It is the judge's responsibility to decide what evidence is relevant and what is not. As I present evidence in a trial, the court often requires me to explain the relevance along the way. Failure to do so leaves me open to "Objection: relevance," with the judge responding, "Sustained."

A good example is the hip case I mentioned in the preface. I am conducting discovery to document what was known about the effect that metal ions and nanoparticle debris have on the human

body. Sometimes people who have artificial hips made of a metal ball in a metal liner/socket experience elevated levels of these metals that kill surrounding tissues. I need to know what the implant company knew or, through the exercise of reasonable diligence, should have known about the potential for this damage. While delving into two decades of emails, presentations, correspondence, files and experiments, I have found lots of fascinating and even damaging evidence that is not really relevant to my issue. Will that evidence get to a jury? No.

This is why I have presented the case as I have in this book. Some of the chapters are arguments. Others are more educational. The educational chapters are setting out important matters and a framework that becomes relevant in later chapters. It is my effort to stop a “relevance” objection before it is lodged!

Some might think trial work is simply lawyer hocus-pocus. As if through some sleight of hand (or better yet, through slick words), lawyers seduce the unwary public into supporting a position. Nothing could be further from the truth. Courts have rules that are rigorously enforced, rules that apply to the evidence under consideration as well as the arguments made by lawyers. Judges follow rules shaped over the last six hundred years in determining what evidence is authentic, authoritative, relevant and proper for consideration.

Are there ever absurd results? Occasionally, but not as often as one might think! The public only hears of the bizarre cases, not the millions of cases where the system works. Furthermore, those rare glitches are always subject to appellate review. This allows a set of judges to reassess the evidence and rules to see if justice went awry.

Over time, lawyers develop good habits about how to do their job. There are rules we tend to live by. We know better than to trust unreliable sources. We know that tabloid headlines are rarely true. We know that nothing substitutes for getting past hearsay to the

original evidence. Consistency is prized; inconsistency is abhorred. The principle of Occam's Razor applies to the courtroom too: The simpler explanation is typically more reliable than one that is unnecessarily complicated (at least if the simple one takes into account all the evidence). We know to look carefully for agendas that might taint a witness's opinions and to weigh each witness's credibility.

I have spent thirty years as a lawyer, although I began my formal training receiving a B.A. in biblical languages. My Bible studies continued through the decades as my courtroom experience took me coast to coast trying everyday cases as well as those on the front pages of the *New York Times*. People frequently come to me after Googling me with one of two lines. If I am approached when I have been speaking as a lawyer, they say, "I Googled you. I had no idea you are a Christian thinker and teacher." Where I speak on matters of faith or the Bible, I often hear someone say, "I Googled you. I had no idea you are a recognized lawyer." This book is a project that intersects these two lifelong interests—faith and law.

So, give this lawyer his day in court. Let's use the basic approach of court, along with the practical judgments from decades of work. Let's put these tools to work on questioning core Christian beliefs. Then you can be the jury and cast your vote. You can decide what is reasonable and what is not.

Each trial begins with a lawyer's opening statement. From there the lawyer presents the case, calling witnesses and putting documents into evidence. Once the evidence is in, the lawyer has a chance to give a summation or closing argument. At that point, deliberations begin and a jury makes its decision.

This is the journey we will take in this book. This book will proceed with the format of a trial, but with a few practical changes. Like a trial, I will begin with an opening statement that serves as the book's introduction. There, I lay out the road map of issues and

witnesses. I explain where the evidence in trial will go. After that I present the evidence. I cover the “witnesses” in a narrative fashion rather than the typical question-and-answer format of a trial. Evidence goes beyond witnesses. We will consider science, documents and the world as well—just like a trial. I will then give a summation or closing argument, where I draw conclusions from all the separate pieces of evidence.

We are missing one major component of a trial: opposing counsel. That does not mean we do not face the cynics’ challenges. The public is bombarded by those skeptical about Christian faith. Those opposing my view are not silent. We can readily find television shows that question or make light of the reasonableness of Christian faith. The Internet is replete with articles, Web legends and blogs opposing most every aspect of Christianity.

So I begin this book at the trial stage. The preparation behind this book has followed the rules I would follow in legal discovery. All that remains is for me to present my opening statement, the evidence in support of my case and the closing argument to you, the reader and jury.

So I begin, “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury . . .”

Opening Statement

MORE TIMES THAN I CAN COUNT, I have heard the black-robed judge declare, “Mr. Lanier, you may begin your opening statement.” Each time, I begin much the same. I thank the jury for their time and attention. I explain that I am going to give a brief summary of what the case is about, who the witnesses are and what is coming. The jury learns best if they know the rhyme and reason of a lawyer’s presentation. So my opening begins with just that, an explanation of what I hope to accomplish and how I plan to get there.

OPENING STATEMENT

Any exploration of Christian beliefs rightfully starts with exploring whether there is a God and, if there is, what kind of God. The Christian faith rests on core beliefs about God, humanity, truth, reality, right and wrong, the responsibility of human choice, the incarnate Christ, his death, burial, and resurrection, and a coming age where things are made right and Christ’s reign is apparent to all. These are issues that can and should be examined.

These issues need to be understood in light of not only the teachings of the Bible but also of the world around us. If Scripture is true, then we should be able to see its truth in the world around us. The biblical worldview should be one that makes sense of

everyday life. This is a commonsense test that applies to much of everyday life. We might call it the “smell test.” Does something smell right? Does it make sense with what we experience day in and day out?

Lawyers have two kinds of evidence they can present in court—direct evidence and circumstantial evidence. *Direct evidence* is something one has firsthand knowledge of. For example, if I am outside in the rain, I can affirm directly that it is raining. *Circumstantial evidence* is different. If I am in a building at the front door, and I notice that everyone who enters has a wet umbrella, wet clothes and wet shoes, then I can assess that as evidence that it is raining, even though I have not witnessed the rain directly. All I have seen are circumstances that indicate rain.

Circumstantial evidence can also affirm or contradict direct testimony. If someone tells me it is raining, and I watch people coming in with wet umbrellas, wet clothes and wet hair, the circumstances affirm what I am being told. However, if someone tells me it is raining, and people come in dry as a bone, with no rain gear, I might have my suspicions because the circumstances belie the claim of rain.

As we look at issues, especially as we weigh the skeptic’s concerns, we repeatedly ask whether the facts of life are consistent with or contradict one view or another. This approach is used in chapter two, where we discuss whether it is reasonable to believe there is a God. We explore this ultimate question with a close examination of the testimony of life. We cannot examine God directly; he is not subject to a physical examination. We rely on circumstantial evidence.

We do not stop there, however. Many people recognize that some sort of divine being is possible, if not likely, but that hardly means that the God of the Bible is real. Whatever being there is—God, god or even gods—how are we to know much about him, her or them?

Is God something akin to the Force in Star Wars? Is there a divine being sitting atop a mountain that we are all climbing toward? Is God an old man, sitting in a rocker, looking down on earth and occasionally wagging a finger over some particularly tawdry sin? Is the divine a supercomputer making calculations and keeping tabs on the universe? Is God male or female? Is God such an unknown that you envision nothing? Maybe instead of envisioning God, you envision his or her traits. Is God kind? Loving? Does God have a short fuse? Is God moody or easily angered? What is your role and relationship with God? Do you ignore the divine? Do you fear God? Do you have a relationship with God? Is your relationship strained? Is God your harbor in the storms of life? Is God the kind and loving parent who is always there for you?

We need to vocalize and consider these ideas of God, and we do so by first dismissing views that, however prominent they may be, are not those of the biblical God. It is the biblical God under examination here. We are weighing the God of the Bible against the reality of life, and so we need to first explore and understand *him*. This takes on added importance because a lot of people do not believe in God, in part because of a misperception of who the Christian God is. Those perceptions merit attention.

We do not start this examination with a blank slate. We will consider the views of God we get from the witnesses that have already discussed this issue, either directly or indirectly. I will examine the writings of a now-deceased Anglican minister named J. B. Phillips, who believed that many of us carry ideas of God that are not scriptural and carefully dissected these nonbiblical views. Through his ideas we will probe the distinctions between God as many understand him and God as explained in the Bible. I will also consider the gods of Hollywood and print. We will look at *Life of Pi* and *Star Wars* to consider their images of the divine.

Following that, in chapters four and five, I set out the direct biblical testimony about who God is. Chapter three erases the whiteboard with its misperceptions about God, and chapters four and five write anew upon the board, setting out the biblical teachings of God.

Simply looking at the Bible cannot do this, because the book is rooted in everyday life and the world. So this examination will necessarily entail looking at nature. In addition to the Bible, the witnesses include the heavens as understood by modern astronomical science, Albert Einstein and British physicist Sir John Polkinghorne. These witnesses speak to the biblical God in ways that affect our understandings of the biblical God in chapter four.

In chapter five I will call a last set of witnesses to testify about God's nature. In addition to the Bible's teaching from the apostle John, I will present as evidence subatomic particles as well as the testimony of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus.

After our efforts at determining the existence and nature of God, I turn the discussion to the idea that God communicates through Scripture (chap. 6). Does the idea of a divinely inspired Bible make sense? Is the Bible something that God gave to humans or something that humans made up about God? My witnesses will include the humanist Thomas Huxley, world-renowned linguist Noam Chomsky and the teachings of communication theorists. These scholars are notable for their writings on the human mind and how the brain integrates speech, communication and thought.

The next progression of examination will focus on reality and truth (chap. 7). Is our world like the one depicted in the Hollywood film *The Matrix*? Are we in a reality show like *The Truman Show*? Is what we are experiencing really real? My witnesses on this issue will include the ancient Greek philosopher Plato and the seventeenth-century French philosopher René Descartes. I will also call

to the witness stand Oxford's cutting-edge philosopher Nick Bostrom, who has made a number of bold claims about possible realities we might live in. Bostrom has popularized the idea that we might actually be part of a self-conscious computer program.

I will move our examination into questions of right and wrong in chapter eight. There I will put on the stand Charles Darwin and Friedrich Nietzsche. I will also address the testimony and ideas raised by Plato's predecessor, Socrates. This evidence addresses the deplorable actions of Hitler and the Third Reich, asking, How could they have thought they were doing something right or noble? Do we dismiss the Nazis as deranged people? I suggest we should examine them and their motives, and then see what conclusions are fairly drawn from the evidence. We will examine the ideas behind the Nazi morality, comparing them to biblical truth. The big issue will then be how ideas of right and wrong are formed today—through biblical principles or those of the Third Reich?

In chapter nine I will close in on the questions of determinism and choice. Do we do things because we choose to, or is the die already cast? Are we creatures with a will that can decide on a course of action after weighing different choices, or is that decision already made simply by the chemistry of our brains combined with the external circumstances? In other words, are we chemical reactions alone, or can we truly make choices? My witnesses on this issue include the twentieth-century behavioral psychologist B. F. Skinner, whom I will cross-examine on the subject. Skinner wrote that humans are a mere mixture of chemicals reacting to a preset environment. As such, people have no freedom or dignity. Such a view removes true moral responsibility from people. How can people be held morally responsible if they can't make meaningful choices?

If choices and moral responsibility exist, then everyone stands accountable before a moral God. This sets up a problem of huge

proportion. The Bible teaches that there is an answer to such a problem, and it is found in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus. But Jesus' death and physical resurrection is a challenging idea for many. At first blush, it can seem quite preposterous; certainly no one alive has ever witnessed it. So in chapter ten I will examine this idea under the most careful judicial scrutiny to see if there is any reasonable basis for believing it. My witnesses will include Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, as well as others. Using rules of court, I will set out the evidence for you to decide what is credible and what is not.

Before closing in a final chapter, I will examine the idea of heaven and eternity in chapter eleven. Is it simply a pretend hope of people doomed to eventual death? Is it a pipe dream that might help us muddle through the years of life? Or is it real? Is it a reasonable conclusion to the world and reality as we know it?

In each of these areas, we will weigh the biblical claims alongside the witnesses I bring into the discussion. The goal behind our activity is to see, after due scrutiny, whether it is reasonable to believe in

- God, who is infinite, personal and moral, who has made human beings in his image, and who has communicated to humanity through revelation
- Humans as creatures who can really make choices in life
- Jesus as a human who died and was then physically resurrected and will come again in an eternal reigning kingdom

So I ask, does Christianity provide a plausible account of the universe both broadly and in its particulars? Does it explain why we are the way we are, and why things are the way they are? Does it make sense of our life experiences?

I will conclude our trial with a summation, known in legal terms as a closing argument. In that chapter we will work through the

conclusions reachable from the evidence presented. We will consider the teachings of Scripture along with the world around us. We will see if science, current knowledge and common sense can combine to produce a rich understanding of God and the strength of the foundations for faith. The verdict can then be determined. Each person has to decide how to live in light of the verdict he or she reaches.