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'A JOYFULLY MISCHIEVOUS, JOURNEY OF DISCOVER'
Terry Jones



The GOSPEL according to MONTY PYTHON

Julian Doyle

'LIFE OF BRIAN' - THE WHOLE TRUTH

SAMPLE CHAPTER

www.juliandoyle.info

'Great stuff. Lots of interesting research.
Connections. Thoughts and Blasphemies.'
Terry Gilliam

Who was the real Brian? Who was the real Jesus?
Who was the real Bishop of Leicester?
Did the Romans build the Jerusalem Aqueduct?
Were the Magi wise? Was Brian's father a Roman?
Or a member of the Judean People's Front?
All the crucial questions this book attempts to
answer without offending the Spanish Inquisition.

A wild, chaotic, bronco-busting ride in an out-of-control
fairground, but hang on in there - it's worth it.
Terry Jones

THE LIFE OF ~~BRIAN~~
Jesus

Julian Doyle

NOTE

This is the original book that has since been re-titled
The Gospel According to Monty Python
Because a title with a word crossed out
cannot be properly catalogued.

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www.juliandoyle.info

To Graham Chapman
who was Brian Cohen
and Joshua ben Joseph
who was Jesus Christ

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Monty Python from whom I earned money, which I gratefully used to buy valuable time, and with that time I wrote this book.

FORWARD by Terry Jones

Prepare to leave your assumptions, suppositions, familiar notions and points of view far behind as you set off with Julian Doyle on this joyfully mischievous journey of discovery and self-discovery. The first thing to say is that Julian is a polymath.

I first met Julian when Terry Gilliam and I invited him to help produce *Monty Python & The Holy Grail*. Julian turned himself into

Line Producer and then Director of Photography for the Black Knight sequence.

He went on to edit *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, *Monty Python's Meaning of Life*, *Jabberwocky*, *Time Bandits*, *Brazil*, and *Wind in the Willows*. He also directed the special effects for many films, and wrote and directed his own movies, *Love Potion* (1987) and *Chemical Wedding* (2008)

He then turned himself into a theater dramatist, and wrote a play, *Twilight of the Gods*, about Wagner's relationship with Nietzsche,

which was as intelligent and informative as any fun play could possibly get. I have only just discovered that before he went into films he was a research scientist!

The great thing about Julian is that he doesn't have any assumptions or pre-suppositions, but he does have points of view. He has lots of them. This book is an exploration of his mind. Like the original film, this book is likely to outrage and irritate a lot of people, but it is never dull. It is full of surprising and interesting ideas.

Although it centers around the world of Jesus as reflected in *The Life of Brian*, it embraces the career of Richard Dadd, the nature of

Masonry, the Jewish identity. It asks startling questions such as: Was Jesus really crucified? Did the Christians pinch the symbol of the fish from the Pythagoreans? At one point he presents a fascinating explanation of Bosch's mysterious picture of Christ being adorned with the crown of thorns, and then the next moment he is examining the significance of numbers in the Bible story. It's a wild, chaotic, bronco-busting ride in an out-of-control fairground, but hang on in there - it's worth it.

Terry Jones
The Film's Director
and Brian's mother

BACKWORD by Michael Palin

Julian Doyle, like many others who worked on Monty Python's Life Of Brian, has clearly not recovered from the experience. To be honest Julian's mental state has worried us all over the years. Having worked with him on Monty Python and The Holy Grail and Jabberwocky I urged the others to have him put quietly in an institution, rather than endure any more of his offensive Anne Boleyn impersonations. But no one listened and now look what has happened. He's written a disgusting book and used our likenesses to try and sell it. I was sent a complimentary copy and, to be honest, I threw it in the bin, as instructed by Sarah Palin. My lawyers are currently looking at a copy and rather enjoying it.

Michael Palin
Pontius Pilate
a cured Leper and
a lucky, lucky Bastard

INTRODUCTION

TO THE SECOND EDITION

The original aim of this book when writing was to prove that the movie 'Monty Python's Life of Brian' was the most accurate Biblical Film ever made. And secondly to defend the Monty Python team from those banning the film and yelling blasphemy!

A lot has happened since publication. The first aim of the book came to pass when I was asked to attend a conference held at Kings College London, for Professors of Theology, from round the world, to discuss the importance of the 'Life of Brian' to Biblical research.



PROF. JOAN TAYLOR INTRODUCES JULIAN DOYLE

But more surprisingly I think we can say that the second aim was achieved when I was invited over to Limerick to in Ireland introduce the movie to an audience for the first public showing in Ireland of 'Monty Python's Life of Brian'.

Furthermore, in the original edition I suggested 'Crucifixion was a doddle.' I have since written two books on the subject and it is no longer a suggestion – the proof that crucifixion 'is a doddle' is now inserted into this edition bringing it bang up to date with the latest Biblical research.

INTRODUCTION

THE DEBATE

They didn't look like trouble. The Bishop of Southwark, the Right Reverend Mervyn Stockward in all his glorious, purple gowns and Christian broadcaster Malcolm Muggeridge in mustard jacket and tie, but like the Spanish Inquisition they came to attack and condemn the film, 'Monty Python's Life of Brian' as blatant blasphemy.



Defending themselves were Monty Python's Michael Palin and John Cleese. But by the end of the discussion the Right Reverend pointed his massive cross, like Abraham Van Helsing warding off Dracula, at the blasphemers and announced that the two sinners would "get their thirty pieces of silver".

Malcolm Muggeridge on the other hand took the stand that "There is nothing in this little squalid number that could possibly affect anybody because it's much too tenth rate for that."

This attack certainly made the wonderfully 'nice' Michael Palin show some extraordinary (for him) anger. As he recalls,

"We had done our homework, thinking we were going to get into quite a tough theological argument, but it turned out to be virtually a slanging match. We were very surprised by that. I don't get angry very often, but I got incandescent with rage at their attitude and the smugness of it."

The anger came from the inability to argue against such a comment. What were Michael and John supposed to say, "it is a good film or its a great film etc, etc..." How can the filmmakers themselves actually say that? But now 30 years later we do have the ammunition to deal with these scornful and derisive remarks.

In 2007 'Life of Brian' was voted, 'the funniest comedy ever' in Channel Four's '50 Greatest Comedy Films'. And then the British Film Institute declared it to be the 28th best British film of all time. So I think we can now definitively say that Muggerridge's scathing, personalized criticism is wrong. The film is not tenth rate or infantile but funny and lasting.

I should add that on the internet this comment appeared.

Ketersimax:- *What a hypocrite! That priest with the purple shirt is gay and an alcoholic.*

This in fact is true, the Bishop of Southwark's obituary reads: 'His capacity for alcohol was prodigious, but it never impaired his mental facilities; the more wine he drank, the sharper his memory became.' As the bible says: 'Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.' (Luke 12:1)

And so the gay movement did just that and ousted the Right Reverend. Here I must slap my wrists for dropping to their level of mud slinging and I want to add that being Gay does not in my mind make him a good or bad Christian, in fact I know Mervyn Stockwood did some very good work in his Diocese. And in a later section about the identity of Jesus I will investigate the

groups who believed that Jesus himself was involved in homosexual activities.

But let us tackle the main thrust of the Right Reverend's argument. Was the film 'Life of Brian' blasphemous?

Many considered it was. 'Life of Brian' received its world premiere in New York on 17th August 1979, the same week as Apocalypse Now and The Muppet Movie. In the USA, freedom of speech and religious choice are enshrined in the Constitution. Or so it was thought.

The opening salvo in what became a heated and often surreal war of words appeared on August 19th from Rabbi Abraham Hecht, president of the Rabbinical Alliance of America,

who claimed to speak for half a million Jews. Writing in Variety Magazine, he declared, "*Never have we come across such a foul, disgusting, blasphemous film before.*" Hecht went on to make public his view that 'Brian' "*was produced in hell*". After Hecht's

denunciation, outraged religious leaders queued up to vent their spleen to any hack with a microphone, in stark contrast to other more liberal churchmen who defended the film's right to be shown.

The Protestant voice of protest belonged to Robert EA Lee of the Lutheran Council, whose tirade against 'Brian' "*crude and rude mockery, colossal bad taste, profane parody. A disgraceful assault on religious sensitivity*", was broadcast across

1,000 radio stations. Not to be outdone, the Catholic film-monitoring office rated 'Brian' 'C' for '*Condemned*' and implored

its flock not to visit theaters where it was playing, it being a sin to do so. With massive protests against the movie from all denominations of Christianity, and Judaism, John Cleese joked, "We've brought them all together for the first time in 2000 years!"

Naturally, the protests and marches only served to heighten Brian's media profile and so increase its box-office take. Nothing sells better than when it comes attached to the whiff of notoriety. With such free publicity, the original plan to open Brian on 200 screens nationwide snowballed to nearer

600. As John Cleese admitted on an American TV show, "*They have actually made me rich.*"

But some countries acted to prevent any success. The film was banned in Norway, and so it was marketed in Sweden as, *'The film that is so funny that it was banned in Norway!'* Ireland

banned the film for blasphemy and banned director, Terry Jones' next film 'Personal Services'. Terry went on to say, *"I'm not sure if I have made a good film if the Irish don't ban it."*

On November 8, 1979 'Life of Brian' opened in London and, in spite of hymn-singing demonstrators outside, went on to break box-office records in its first week, smashing the previous house record set by 'Jaws'. The film was backed by an advertising campaign in which each Python recruited, either a relative or friend e.g. Gilliam's mum, Michael Palin's dentist, to present their own radio spot. John Cleese's 80-year-old mother, Muriel, read an appeal to listeners, claiming that she was 102-years old and kept in a retirement home by her son, and that unless enough people see his new film and make him richer, he will throw her on to the streets where she will assuredly perish. The ad won a delighted Muriel an award for best radio entertainment commercial of 1979.

But in the rest of Britain, 'Brian' became a victim of regional censorship. There is a loophole in British law to protect the spread of disease. Local authorities have the power to close cinemas for health reasons, and they used this extraordinary clause to ban 'Life of Brian' because it was unhealthy. As Michael Palin recalls, *"I suppose they thought it would spread diseases in cinemas."*

So 'Life of Brian' was banned in Harrogate, parts of Surrey, East Devon where councilors refused even to watch it, arguing that, *"You don't have to see a pigsty to know that it stinks"* and Cornwall where, after one screening, a local councilor stated, that all the participants in the film should be locked up in Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum.

Terry Gilliam noted, "In Britain, it was banned in certain towns; what that meant was that people in those towns organized coaches and went to the neighboring town where it was showing. But in the States they banned it in the Bible belt and nobody went to see it. One has to conclude that the British can't be controlled and the Americans can."

In 1997 Swansea Council finally permitted the film to be shown in cinemas in aid of Comic Relief. Informed that the ban had been lifted, Eric Idle told the press, "*What a shame. Is nothing sacred?*"

Finally Aberystwyth in Wales lifted its local ban in 2009 when, extraordinarily, Sue Jones-Davies the actress who played Judith (the Welsh tart!) in the film was elected mayor of the town.

But one thing the Monty Python team all agree on, (except one: who might have a different perspective from Heaven) is that 'Life of Brian' could not be made today.

Obviously it was difficult even then to raise the money for the film. Originally Barry Spikings, then production head of EMI, agreed to back the film with a budget of \$4 million. Sets built for the Zeffirelli's television series *Jesus of Nazareth* were still standing near Monastir in Tunisia, and were earmarked for the film, which was due to begin shooting in April 1976.

I still remember the moment with incredulity. The crew had signed contracts and were packed and ready to leave on Saturday to fly to North Africa. Then on the Thursday before, EMI pulled out! To our dismay EMI's 69-year-old chief

executive, Lord Bernard Delfont had read the script! Shocked, he famously declared, "*What are they trying to do, crucify me?*"

So EMI paid a hundred thousand dollars to get out of their commitment!

I had my bags packed and nowhere to go. And the Pythons found themselves marooned in pre-production limbo and there began a desperate scramble to raise the funds. They went to the studios but as Eric Idle describes "It was like trying to sell 'Spring Time for Hitler'. But by coincidence, Eric was friends with Beatle, George Harrison, a Python fan with a private library of records and films of just about everything the group had done. He admitted that when the Beatles were breaking up, he kept himself sane by watching Monty Python's Flying Circus. George personally offered to finance the film. When asked later why he put such a lot of his own money into such a dangerously, foolish venture, George just said, in his gentle Liverpool voice, "I

wanted to see the movie.” As Eric Idle teased, “This must be the most expensive cinema ticket ever bought!”

All this is reflected in the end song where Eric Idle sings the classic, ‘Always Look on the Bright Side of Life’. If you look up the lyrics of the song they end with the Chorus, with Eric as Mr. Cheeky, adlibbing in brackets.

*Always look on the bright side of life...
(Worse things happen at sea, you know.)
Always look on the bright side of life...
(I mean - what have you got to lose? You know,
you come from nothing you're going back to
nothing.
What have you lost? Nothing!)*

In fact if you listen to the film there is actually more adlibbing by Eric, saying the last lines of the film.

*“Who do you think pays for all this rubbish? They’ll never
make their money back – I told them. I said to them, Bernie,
I said, they’ll never make their money back.”* (Bernie –
being Lord Bernard Delfont)

But George Harrison (the man who paid for all this rubbish) had the last laugh when he found himself in the first class lounge at Kennedy airport with Sir Bernard Delfont. He could not resist going up to Bernie and asking if he had heard that ‘Brian’ had gone into profit. George thanked him profusely – (all the way to the bank).

So was the film blasphemy and is it true that it could not be made today? Or is it both respectful and, as I will argue, the most accurate Biblical film ever made?

Here I suppose we should ask what exactly is blasphemy? Being totally impartial, let’s take the dictionary definition.

‘Blasphemy is irreverence toward holy personages, religious artifacts, customs, and beliefs. The Abrahamic religions condemn blasphemy vehemently. Some countries have laws to punish

blasphemy. These laws may discourage blasphemy as a matter of blasphemous libel, vilification of religion or a religious insult.'

The word is hardly mentioned in the Holy Books. Leviticus 24:16 states that those who speak blasphemy "*shall surely be put to death.*" Another verse that directly concerns the sin reads as follows:

'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.' (Exodus 20:7)

These quotes raise one particular problem with blasphemy. Clearly '*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,*'

has no relevance to atheists who obviously do not have a 'Lord thy God', as they don't have a God at all, so how can you take his name in vain? In this case, one has to say that blasphemy can only be a crime to a believer in God. Those who do not have a God are presumably exempt.

The only other Gospel reference to blasphemy is in Luke.

'And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven.' (Luke 12:10)

This is rather confusing and difficult to interpret. It probably means that, you will be forgiven if you blaspheme Jesus, or perhaps 'everyman', depending on who you think the 'Son of Man' is, but not if you blaspheme the Holy Ghost or Spirit of God or in a better translation, the 'Breath of God'. So somebody (it does not say God or Man) is not going to forgive you if you blaspheme against – a 'particular kind of Ghost' - a Holy one. Which I presume means God.

So that's it, in terms of the Bible, but now we come to the official religious organizations, that follow a particular God. Blasphemy is condemned as a serious, or even, the most

serious, sin by all the major creeds and Church theologians. Thomas Aquinas writes that, '*It is clear that blasphemy, which is a sin committed directly against God, is more grave than murder.*'

Wow, that makes it pretty serious.

The Book of Concord calls blasphemy *'the greatest sin that can be outwardly committed'*.

Christ Almighty! Worse than genocide?

(Oops! Did I blaspheme there?)

The Baptist Confession of Faith says: *'Therefore, to swear vainly or rashly by the glorious and awesome name of God...is sinful, and to be regarded with disgust and detestation.'*

All these seem to be referring to swearing using God's name, as becomes clear from Calvin who found it intolerable: *'when a person is accused of blasphemy, to lay the blame on the ebullition of passion, as if God were to endure the penalty whenever we are provoked.'* 'Ebullition of passion' like, *'Christ, that cake is bloody luvly.'* Or when you accidentally hammer your thumb and yell, *'Jesus b___ Christ!'*

So whereas the Bible hardly mentions blasphemy, the Christian organizations go for it big time as a method of control and authority. And I am sure Jesus did not expect this Spanish Inquisition.

But let us look at it from God's perspective. An ordinary, intelligent adult human being would find name calling, childish, stupid and irrelevant. But an ignorant thug would take offence and retaliate.

"Who you calling a thug?"

"You, you ignoramus."

And bang! I would have a busted nose.

Which is your God? Someone who is so stupidly oversensitive that he can't take a bit of name-calling? If that is true then he is obviously not worth worshipping. Give up on him and find a more intelligent and adult God.

Perhaps we just have the wrong attitude towards God. Yannis Andricopoulos, in his book *'The Greek Inheritance'* explains that the mischievous Greek Gods:

'... did not personify 'pure good' and could never claim, even if they tried, to be the guarantors of a morally ordered universe or the source of moral obligation. Unscrupulous and wretched, they

often offended human decency and were severely reproached for their misdeeds by the humans.'

I must say I like these naughty Gods and I really think that, us present day humans, should at least have the same rights that the ancient Greeks had, to attack any immoral and disgraceful action by anybody's God. In other words to blaspheme!

Before we begin a small caveat, this book is not a research document and therefore references are not always given but all information can be found in the books listed in the bibliography.

But I must warn you, from the books used for my research one was described by the Vatican as, '*Fantastic speculation to new levels of absurdity.*' Another by the respected Jewish author,

Arthur Koestler, was attacked by the Israeli ambassador, as '*An anti-Semitic action financed by the Palestinians.*' And the man

who translated the third into English, was arrested by Church Authorities, tried for heresy, found guilty and strangled to death. His body was then burnt at the stake. His name was William Tynsdale, and the book he translated into English was the Holy Bible. I hope I will survive the publication of this one.

IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning were the Shepherds. Well the film did initially begin with the Shepherds but we cut the scene before the film was released. What was the Shepherds scene? It was a portrayal of the Christmas Carol, 'While shepherds watch their flocks by night all seated on the ground an Angel of the Lord came down and glory shone around.' Why was it cut? Well let's look at it.



1. EXT. HILLSIDE NEAR BETHLEHEM NIGHT

Three shepherds sit round a campfire watching their sheep. Scattered around are other distant campfires.

MIKE PALIN: I love sheep.

TERRY JONES: So do I. Terrific animals. Terrific.

MIKE: No trouble.

TERRY: No, no trouble.

ERIC IDLE: Except at shearing. They can play up a bit then, can't they?

MIKE: Oh, yeah, but I like that sort of little burst of frenzy they have then, you know. I like it when they get a little bit angry. Shows they're human.

ERIC: Oh, yeah. I-- I-- I'm not saying I dislike them at shearing, you know, but they can be a bit of a handful, can't they?

MIKE: Well, so would you be if you had a great pair of scissors snippin' away while someone held your back legs apart. You'd wiggle a bit. You'd kick up a bit of a fuss.

ERIC: Yeah, I-- I'm not saying I just expect them to stand around in the fields and nibble the grass and look a bit pretty. I-- I'm not saying that.

TERRY: Oh, but they are pretty, aren't they?

MIKE: Yeah.

Behind them as they talk a mysterious light falls upon a distant hillside and an Angel flies down.

TERRY: I mean, look at that one over there against the sky. The white of the coat, the little black face against the twinkling stars. MIKE: Yes. Aww. Terrific. Terrific animals. I think, of all God's creatures, sheep have the best offspring.

TERRY: Oh, yes. Terrific animals. Terrific.

ERIC: Yeah. They're so sure-footed.

MIKE: And quick-witted.

ERIC: Are they quick-witted?

MIKE: Yeah. Yeah. Oh, yeah, they're quite, uh, quick-witted.

TERRY: Always cheerful.

ERIC: Well, except at shearing.

MIKE: Why are you always on about shearing?

ERIC: I'm not always on about it, Morris.

MIKE: Of all the moments in their little lives, you unerringly put your finger on the one moment where they lose a little bit of dignity. Well, I regard that as cheap, quite honestly.

TERRY: Oh, look! Look. One of them's looking up at us. He knows we're talkin' about him.

ERIC: Don't get me wrong. I actually like their behavior at shearing. I actually like them when they get a little bit cross. I find that endearing.

MIKE: That's the fantastic thing. They're beautiful to look at, well-disposed, quite quick-witted, and yet, tough as nails.

TERRY: You know, I can't think of anything I'd rather do than watch sheep.

The distant Angel flies back up with the magical light. The shepherds oblivious continue.

ERIC: The only other animals that I would be remotely interested in watching would be cats.

MIKE: They don't have flocks of cats.

ERIC: No, I-- I'm not saying they do.

MIKE: Can you imagine a herd of cats waiting to be sheared? Meow! Meow! Woo hoo hoo.

TERRY: Shh! Shh! I heard something over there.

MIKE: Wolves?

TERRY: Could be.

MIKE: Where?

TERRY: Over there.

Mike picks up a stone and flings it. There is a thump.

MIKE: Take that, you buggers!

JOHN CLEESE: Oowhh.

TERRY: That's not a wolf.

John and Graham as shepherds appear out of the darkness.

GRAHAM: What did you do that for!?

MIKE: I thought he was a wolf.

GRAHAM: You hit him right in the face!

MIKE: Well, he shouldn't come snooping 'round like that.

GRAHAM: You wait till you hear what we've just seen! The most incredible things just happened!

JOHN: Don't tell 'em. Owhh.

GRAHAM: We were on the hillside over there when this amazing-

JOHN: Don't tell them! They broke my bloody nose!

GRAHAM: Can't I tell them about the amazing ...

JOHN: No! Oohh.

GRAHAM: Well, they said we were to tell everybody!
JOHN: Not people who break your bloody nose! Come on.
They head off towards Bethlehem.

ERIC: Where are you going?

GRAHAM: Bethlehem.

JOHN: Nowhere! Good night.

MIKE: That's right! Leave your sheep! Leave them to the wolves!
Call yourselves shepherds?! You're a disgrace to the profession!

TERRY: What a rotten thing to do.

MIKE: Yeah.

TERRY: To go and leave those little helpless furry bundles alone on the hillside.

MIKE: So they can go down to Bethlehem and get drunk.

They drop into silence. Eric looks at his wristwatch, (if he had one) then looks up.

ERIC: Is it A.D. yet?

MIKE: Quarter past.

Here I suppose I should describe the process of how this scene ended up on my proverbial cutting room floor. Perhaps I should add, as this becomes relevant later, that we do not actually throw rolls of film on the cutting room floor, other than in anger. All cuts and trims are logged, boxed and moved to vaults where they should be kept indefinitely. This unfortunately, for reasons we will deal with later, has not happened with the out-takes of 'Life of Brian'.

Anyway those of you who are not interested in film structure should skip this section and move on to the meat of the chapter.

For you film students, still reading, here goes.

To cover the main body of the dialogue of the shepherds scene you basically need 3 shots.

Shot 1. Wide shot of our shepherds seated by their fire.

Shot 2. A close shot of all three shepherds talking.

Shot 3. A shot of the sheep they are looking at. This is called a 'cut away' as we can use it to cut away from one take of the shepherds talking to another.

Now we have to use Shot 2 for the shepherd dialogue, close enough to see their faces for the comedy. But the ideal shot to do the gag of the Angel coming down behind them, is in fact Shot 1, the wide shot. Unfortunately we can only use this shot to establish the scene, we cannot stay on it, as this would harm the comedy. So Terry Gilliam was going to have to superimpose the animated angel on to the background of shot 2.

To see the hill behind the shepherds, you really need to shoot this scene Day for Night. Unfortunately if you shoot Day for Night the fire looks strangely dull. There is a moment at dusk when the fire is bright and you can still see the background hills but this only lasts half an hour – not long enough to shoot the scene. So we actually shot at night. The fire looks fine but there is absolute blackness behind the shepherds. At a strategic moment a light was put onto the hill behind. Unfortunately lighting the hill brought it forward, so it looked like it was just behind our shepherds heads. Remember there was no CGI in those days, so in hindsight we should have shot the scene in a studio with a painted background or better still a model background, which Terry G. could then animate his angel on to.

I edited the scene together and played the whole film back in London, with as yet no angel. The film seemed to be working, so we played it to an audience; generally friends. As you can imagine they enjoyed the film and laughed plenty at the shepherds scene (still without angel). Several friends have since said to me that they were really sorry the shepherds were not in the final cut because they enjoyed it so much.

There is a problem with accepting people's laughter at the opening of a Python film as it does not relate to how funny the scene is. What actually happens is that, the audience, laugh in expectation, even if what they are watching is not that funny. For instance when I edited Terry Gilliam's 'Timebandits' and we ran it to an audience there were a couple of gags in the opening scene. The audience '*over*' laughed at these, in expectation that this was going to be a funny, 'Python type' film. Then as the film developed into the adventure (it was not a comedy) you could feel the audience starting to worry about where the next laugh

was. I removed or played down the gags at the front so that expectations were not raised.

You always have to be careful about what the audience is laughing at. I was asked to go to Hollywood to re-cut the film of the Pythons' stage show, 'Monty Python Live at the Hollywood Bowl'. We had watched the first cut in London and it was not working. One sketch, 'Crunchy Frog' didn't seem to get a laugh at all. It was suggested that I remove it. Out in Hollywood I looked at 'Crunchy Frog' – it seemed to be working fine. Then I realized that it was the scene before Crunchy Frog that was not right. But because the scene before that was good, the audience laughed through the bad scene but were being killed by the time they got to 'Crunchy Frog'. I took out the bad scene and 'Crunchy Frog' worked great. There is actually a nice example of this in 'Brian'. After the 'Biggus Dickus' scene ends, with all the guards laughing (and all the audience hysterical by this point) Brian escapes and runs up a tower. To show that the tower is unfinished we cut to a workman at the top of the tower, hammering. He drops the hammer to show how high we are. The audience have been so wound up by the 'Biggus Dickus' scene, that they burst out laughing. Never in the history of cinema has a man dropping a hammer received such a big laugh.

Back to the shepherds; Terry Gilliam put the animated Angel on to the shot. The idea that this small fluttering thing was going down to a distant hill was not obvious – as there just was no depth in the shot. It looked more like a little fairy coming on to the shepherd's shoulders. It received the same laughs, or maybe a few less, than before as the angel addition was all a little confusing. So as the shepherds was just one of the two opening pre-credits scenes and did not actually involve Brian directly, it was cut.

Let us have a look at the shepherds sketch and see how it fits into the biblical story as told in the Holy Book. For clarity, I had better start with a quick history of the Bible.

The story of Jesus is told in the four books of the Gospels, which were written no earlier than AD 65 (30 years after his death) and probably as late, if not later, than AD 100 (63 years after his death). Jesus does appear in other Christian Gospels

that were originally held as Holy Scripture, the Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Phillip, of Magdalene, of Nicodemus, etc. But when the New Testament was formulated these were not selected and an attempt was made to destroy them. Luckily a monk in Egypt, rather than destroy his Holy Scriptures, buried them in sealed jars. These were found in 1945 and became known as the Nag Hammadi Scrolls. Some of these Gospels offer a different point of view, which we shall refer to later.

The four Gospels that start the Bible's New Testament are named, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, although these names may not be true as they were originally untitled and the names suddenly appear around AD 180. Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the synoptic Gospels because they seem to be from a common source with John much later. If you place them in order, Mark is the first, with Matthew and Luke being slanted re-writes of Mark. From this, you can tell the way Christianity was developing. For instance in Mark, Jesus is clearly a Jew but by the time of John you have phrases like "Jesus said to the Jews" as if He were not Jewish.

Later we shall be dealing with occult imagery in paintings, so you need to know that the imagery for Mark is a Lion: look at St. Mark's Square in Venice, the main feature is a lion on a plinth. John is an eagle, Luke is a bull and Matthew is a human with wings. In fact they all have wings, as you will see from the lion in St Mark's Square. But sometimes you just have the animal sitting there oddly. You may have wondered why there is a bull sitting in the picture of a saint with a book. This tells you it is Luke. Or an eagle, which identifies John.



On cathedrals where you see statues of the Apostles, these four are shown with books. You will also find a Lion, an Eagle, a Bull and an Angel carved into pulpits where they read from these four Gospels

The only Gospel that tells the shepherds story is Luke.

'And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

As Luke and Matthew derive from Mark (the original), any story that is not in Mark but appears in Matthew and Luke must be viewed a little skeptically. And, in fact neither of the original Gospels, Mark or John, contain any story of Jesus' early years. Both start at John the Baptist baptizing Jesus, with Jesus already 30 years old. So one has to wonder why the shepherds have been introduced into this later Gospel.

Whereas Jesus' birthplace is never mentioned in the original Mark, both Luke and Matthew try to place his birth in Bethlehem. Why? Because the Messiah, it was said by the prophets, would be born in Bethlehem in Judea of a virgin (although this is a mistranslation – the Old Testament word just means 'young woman') and be of the bloodline of the Biblical King David.

So both Luke and Matthew have him born of a Virgin in Bethlehem and from the line of David, all the requirements to be the Messiah, which somehow the original Mark seems to have missed. But this is not all; unfortunately these Nativity stories contradict each other on all counts.

Firstly, their genealogy that traces Jesus back to David does not match as Jesus has different grandfathers on his father's side. Secondly Matthew has our Holy couple married at the time of the birth, while Luke says that Joseph went to Bethlehem with Mary:

'...who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.'

Thirdly they live in different places. Luke has them living in Nazareth and traveling to Bethlehem where they can't find anywhere to stay, while Matthew has them living in Bethlehem and escaping to Egypt. It is only after their return from Egypt that they go to live in Nazareth. In Luke they do not escape to Egypt at all. He has them active in Israel while the child is still an infant. But the worse contradiction of them all is exposed by the 'shepherds scene'. The last words of the scene should be correct.

"Is it AD yet?"

"Quarter past!"

The Anno Domini dating system was devised in 525 AD by Dionysius Exiguus. It was decided to restart the dating of the world; just like Pol Pot did later in Cambodia, from the beginning of the Khmer Rouge. Both Pol Pot and Rome were making an attempt to wipe out the previous history by burning books as well as half their populations in witch-hunts and killing fields.

There is however a rather daft mistake in our system of dating. There is no year zero! So the dating runs uninterrupted from 1 BC straight to AD 1 which means firstly that there is a year missing in all our historical records and that we celebrated the millennium recently one year too early. It should have been on the eve of 2000 to 2001 not 1999 to 2000.

So the shepherds got it wrong: it was not '*quarter past AD*'; in fact the time would have been '*one year and a quarter hour past AD*'. But here, 'Life of Brian' is still more accurate than the infallible word in the Bible, as Luke and Matthew make an awful hash of the dating.

Matthew's Gospel makes a big play of Herod the Great, who on hearing that Jesus has been born, goes out and kills all the innocent children in an attempt to wipe out this King of the Jews. But Herod the Great was a much maligned, historical character, who we know died in 4 BC. So Matthew is out by at least 4 years if not more. And Luke, what date can we assume from him?

'In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Bethlehem in Judea, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.'

The census of Quirinius was an important event at the time in that it was the precursor to a property and poll tax on the Judeans. It is used by Luke to explain why Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem the town of his birth at that particular time, (when she was in labor) and ended up giving birth in the correct town for the Messiah.

But I am afraid this is all so totally wrong. Firstly the tax was on property and wealth so where you were born was obviously irrelevant. The idea that Joseph left his property in Nazareth to go to Bethlehem and stay in a stable like a pauper, can only have one interpretation. That Joseph was trying to conceal his real wealth in Nazareth. He was a tax evader! I wish I could advance this theory, as I like it a lot, but I'm afraid there is another fact that makes it fall. Nazareth is in Galilee, and the Romans did not tax Galilee, at the time of the census.

The census occurred because after Herod the Great died in 4 BC Israel was divided; with Judea ruled by his son Archelaus and Galilee by another son Herod Antipas (Herod of the crucifixion). Archelaus ruled so badly that he was banished by Caesar to Vienne in Gaul in AD 6. Judea was then put under the direct rule of the Roman Governor of Syria, none other than Publius Sulpicius Quirinius. He then undertook a census, but not

the population of the whole world under Caesar's instruction; and not even the population of Israel, but just the population of Judea. Galilee was not his domain and was still taxed by Herod Antipas. So we can date the census no earlier than AD 6 when Quirinius took over control of Judea or possibly as late as AD 7.

Someone is definitely wrong here, either Matthew 4BC, Luke 6 AD, or Dionysius Exiguus who set the date of Jesus' birth at 1 AD. If Dionysius is right then Matthew and Luke are wrong but if Matthew is right then Luke and Dionysius are wrong. And vice versa, if Luke is right then Matthew is wrong. I am sorry to say the Bible has a glaring error. Is it blasphemy to point out that it is absolutely and definitely wrong? Very likely, because to say the Bible is wrong is offensive to Christians. Can I be found guilty of blasphemy for this statement? Yes! Definitely. I must therefore offer myself up for a hefty fine or imprisonment. At least I should be grateful that today I won't be burnt at the stake. There are though two possible solutions to my dilemma. Firstly, that all blasphemy laws be repealed, or secondly that God performs a post-dated miracle and makes Herod not die till the census of Quirinius. All things are possible to God so don't be surprised if next week, the history books all have this revision suddenly magically appear in them.

Given the considerable contradictions in the Bible about the Nativity – they go to Egypt – they don't go to Egypt. Herod kills all the babies – Herod isn't alive to kill anyone, etc. I suppose we have to ask ourselves, at this early stage, if Jesus was ever born at all? Whether he even existed?

Besides the Christian Gospels, there are only four major non-Christian writers of the late 1st and early 2nd centuries, who according to the Church mention Jesus: Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius and Pliny the Younger. However, these are generally references to early Christians rather than to a historical Jesus. Here I shall deal with a few examples as some give a clear picture of Israel at the time. The most important is the Jewish historian Josephus. He was born in Israel just after Jesus' death, and was involved in the war against the Romans in AD 66. Josephus wrote up his experiences in the 'Jewish Wars' and later composed a history book, 'The Antiquity of the Jews'.

Between them he mentions Herod the Great, John the Baptist, Pontius Pilate and also tells us exactly what life was like in Israel at the very time of Jesus, which is why he is so vital to Academics. But does Josephus mention Jesus? Judge for yourself whether this is written by a dedicated believer in Judaism.

'About this time came Jesus, a wise man, if indeed it is appropriate to call him a man. For he was a performer of paradoxical feats, a teacher of people who accept the unusual with pleasure, and he won over many of the Jews and also many Greeks. He was the Christ. When Pilate, upon the accusation of the first men amongst us, condemned him to be crucified, those who had formerly loved him did not cease to follow him, for he appeared to them on the third day, living again, as the divine prophets foretold, along with a myriad of other marvelous things concerning him. The tribe of the Christians, so named after him, has not disappeared to this day.'

Concerns have been raised about the authenticity of the passage, and it is widely held by scholars that, at least, part of the passage has been altered. The language clearly does not sound like Josephus, a Jew, but more like a Christian. In fact not a single writer before the 4th century; not Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian, Arnobius; in all their defenses against pagan hostility, make a single reference to Josephus' wondrous words, which clearly suggests that they were forgeries created at a later date.

It is suggested that evidence for Jesus comes from the Roman historian Tacitus who when writing about the Fire of Rome in AD 64, blamed it on: *'followers of Christos a person convicted by Pontius Pilate during Tiberius reign.'* Some scholars

suggest that even this was added to Tacitus by Christians, at a later date. Actually I believe Tacitus wrote this section because he adds in the same paragraph *'it is a most mischievous superstition.'* Not something a Christian would write. But I will deal with this reference later.

There are some, well-researched, theories suggesting Jesus never existed. Daniel Unterbrink, in his book 'Judas the Galilean' explored the similarities between Jesus and this other

first-century rabbi whose followers were zealots. Both men cleansed the Temple in Jerusalem, were involved in a Barabbas-style prisoner release, were proclaimed Messiah in Galilee, and both founded new philosophies. Josephus, wrote extensively about the life of Judas the Galilean.

'Judas the Galilean was the author of a Jewish sect. These men agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions; but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty, and say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord. They also do not value dying any kinds of death, nor indeed do they heed the deaths of their relations and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man Lord.' (Antiquities 18:23)

Now although Josephus recorded the crucifixions of two of Judas' sons in AD 45 and the stoning of another, Menahen, in AD 66, he incomprehensibly forgets to tell us how Judas the Galilean himself actually died. Unterbrink suggests that 'the Galilean' was Judas and that the Christian Church's Jesus did not actually exist.

Another theory from Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, in their book, 'The Jesus Mystery', also suggest Jesus never actually existed because of the fact that not one action or belief that Jesus is purported to say or do is original. They are all from the Mystery Religions of the time. The Mysteries are based on the ancient Egyptian death and resurrection God, Osiris, which was spread through the Mediterranean by the Pythagoreans. Water into wine, riding on a donkey with palm leaves waved, turning the other cheek, etc etc.. These writers believe Christianity was a product of Paul a man who never met Jesus but took this Jewish cult to the Gentiles in Rome.

When you take all the information together, in the end it is just personal judgment as to whether you believe he existed, there is no absolute evidence one way or the other. I myself believe he did exist but recognize the validity of the dissenters. I suppose in the end I have three main reasons for believing in him.

1. Even though history has been doctored, there is one ancient ethnic group called the Mandaeans who in fact believe Jesus

existed but are rather disparaging about him. The Mandaeans still speak Aramaic and they accord special status to John the Baptist. They do not consider John to be the founder of their religion but revere him as one of their greatest teachers. Interestingly Mandaeans maintain that Jesus was a false messiah, who perverted the teachings entrusted to him by John. So they are unlikely have invented Jesus.

2. My second reason is that there are people in the Bible who the church would prefer not to be there. For instance, the Bible lists five brothers and at least two sisters, hardly something that would be invented by the church who like to set Jesus alone in the carpenters workshop helping Joseph. Another is Mary Magdalene, whom the Roman Church have desperately tried to discredit and would love to write out of history, remained a historical character in the South of France where evidence suggests she lived and died.

3. My last reason is that a version of Josephus appeared called the Slavonic Josephus. It has sections that, like the original Greek version, have been doctored but there are other passages, of which the Greek text shows no trace. These sections were not written by a Slavic scribe but have been shown to be translations from Greek, not only by the construction of the sentences, but also the Greek original for the curtain of the temple (katapetasma) is retained. The main point is that some of these references are not flattering to Jesus, and secondly, it has John the Baptist functioning as a prophet during the time of the census of AD 6. This totally contradicts the Bible because John and Jesus were meant to be the same age and yet in the Slavonic Josephus, John is already an adult at the time of the census that is supposed to have occurred at Jesus' birth. So why would this be forged by a Christian, unless he was an idiot?

But although I believe he did exist I am pretty sure that no angels singing, 'Hosanna in the Highest' descended on a band of sleepy shepherds on a hillside just outside the 'little town' of Bethlehem. So this is as good a reason as any to cut it out of the film.