

Terry Jones (Comic writer)

Bennion devised the saying 'To refute a man it may be necessary to misrepresent him' when he was being attacked in the early 1970s over his private prosecution of Peter Hain. A good example of the maxim's operation arose when on 4 March 2006 the Prime Minister Tony Blair was interviewed on ITV1 television by Michael Parkinson. Asked about joining the United States in the war on Iraq in March 2003 Blair said-

'That decision has to be taken and has to be lived with, and in the end there is a judgment that - well, I think if you have faith about these things then you realise that judgment is made by other people . . . If you believe in God, it's made by God as well . . . the only way you can take a decision like that is to try to do the right thing, according to your conscience and for the rest of it you leave it to the judgment that history will make.'

When Parkinson asked Blair whether he prayed to God when making a decision such as going to war he responded: 'Well, I don't want to get into something like that.'

For political reasons, a lot of people wanted to attack Blair by accusing him of claiming on *Parkinson* that God supported his decision to join the Iraq war. One of these unscrupulous people was the Monty Python actor Terry Jones, who devoted a whole column in the *Guardian* (8 March 2006) to doing this. He said that in Blair's remarks on *Parkinson* 'the gist is clearly that if God didn't actually tell him to bomb Iraq, then the Almighty would certainly agree it was the right thing to do'. This was a lie, as Downing Street spokesman David Hill pointed out (*Guardian*, 10 March 2006).

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, said of Blair's remarks-

'I think he was trying to say something which I hope any religious believer would say, which is: "When I make a decision, particularly a really appallingly difficult decision, I know that finally what makes it right or wrong is not what I think, or even what the general public thinks, but God" . . . That seems to me bog-standard religious conviction and I am glad to hear it. But it's very odd how that was processed immediately into a crude, "God tells me what to do" story . . . What I heard the prime minister trying to say was not about convictions of rightness.' (*Guardian* G2, 21 March 2006).