

IN THE CONSISTORY COURT OF THE DIOCESE OF BRISTOL

In re Foxley Churchyard, memorial for Dick Batstone

JUDGMENT

1. The petitioner, Mrs Mary Batstone, wishes to introduce a headstone for her husband's grave which includes a design of two intersecting triangles and a '12 spoked Dharmachakra'.
2. I asked Mrs Batstone to explain how this design was "explicitly consonant with 'Orthodox Christianity'" as required by the Churchyard Regulations, in particular the hope of the resurrection. I also needed to understand how the design was consistent with the three principles of honouring the dead, comforting the living, and informing posterity.
3. With refreshing speed Mrs Batstone sent a most charming and helpful explanation of the design. She explained that she was content to abide my decision made on the papers rather than ask for an oral hearing. As she put it *'There is no way my gentle, saintly, peaceful husband would ever want to challenge the decision of the church concerning his headstone, so I will not dispute your decision. It is a pity that the system is set up in such a way that I cannot speak to you in person unless I want to go to court and prove you wrong. What a HORRIBLE idea.'*
4. The design is apparently the symbol of Sri Aurobindo combined with that of 'the Mother' who ran the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry where her late husband stayed for 15 months in 1959-1960.
5. Mrs Batstone informs me that Sri Aurobindo *'did not found any religion'* stating that his spirituality is *'concerned with the Divine in matter and in this world, rather than an escape into some other state.'* The symbols include what appears to be a star of David, but are in fact two triangles, one pointing downwards representing the descent of the Divine into matter, 'the Grace', the other pointing upwards representing the corresponding aspiration of matter towards the Divine in the form of life, light and

love. The symbol of 'the Mother' is in the form of a flower representing '*in the centre the Divine Consciousness, surrounded by the petals standing for the four creative powers, surrounded by twelve petals of their outward manifestation; sincerity, humility, gratitude, perseverance, aspiration, receptivity, progress, courage, goodness, generosity, equality, peace*'.

6. Mrs Batstone states that she has found '*the doctrine of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Resurrection and...the second coming embedded in the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*'.
7. Whilst I accept that the 'outward manifestations' of the 'four creative powers' may be said to be consonant with Christian virtues, I cannot find any hint of the doctrines stated above in the symbols that she wishes to place on the headstone. In particular I can find no manifestation of the hope of the resurrection. Indeed, without her very helpful explanation, the design would simply baffle anyone without a profound knowledge of a certain strand of Indian spirituality.
8. I cannot, in all the circumstances, grant the petition for the design as prayed.

30th November 2017

Justin Gau,
Chancellor