

It's all an act

PLENTY OF actors have said that the public can't tell the difference between the part they play and themselves. So when guests at the launch of Anchor House's fundraising campaign on Monday night were taken aback to see a villain at the party in the Inner Temple in the heart of London's law courts, it was a tribute to the acting skill of Steve John Shepherd. He plays the part of Michael Moon, a particularly nasty individual and serial womaniser in the BBC1 soap opera *EastEnders*.

Shepherd's support for Anchor House came about through his friend, Mgr John Armitage, vicar general of Brentwood Diocese, Anchor House management committee chairman and member of the appeal's board. Shepherd has known Mgr Armitage since he was one of his altar boys and used to clean his car for pocket money. "He's completely unlike his part; it shows he's such a good actor," said Mgr Armitage.

Other celebrities at the launch included ITN newsreader Julie Etchingham and boxer Barry McGuigan, who joined City financiers, real East Enders and residents of Anchor House to mark the appeal launch.

Anchor House, an old seafarers' hostel in the East End's Canning Town, now supports 180 homeless people every year. It wants to raise £9.3 million towards improved facilities and to build 25 new transitional "move-on" flats. Monday's party got the campaign off to a flying start with more than £1m pledged in support. (See next week's edition of *The Tablet* for an interview with Anchor House director Keith Fernett.)

Exclusive brew

THE BELGIAN Trappist monks in Westvleteren take their tradition of *ora et labora* seriously. At the St Sixtus monastery, they only produce enough goods for sale to meet their modest operating costs. This has meant that they brew only limited quantities of beer, including Westvleteren 12, a strong dark ale regularly voted one of the best brews in the world.

In normal times, the monastery near Ypres strictly limits sales of its three beer varieties to two crates of 24 bottles per person per month. Customers must reserve the beer in advance, collect it at the brewery and pledge not to resell it. The only other place to buy a few bottles of the beer is at the abbey shop across the street, where it is often sold out.

When the monks found their 180-year-old monastery needed extensive repairs, they began brewing more Westvleteren 12 to raise funds. Starting on 3 November, special boxed sets with six 33cl bottles of the 12 per cent ale plus two so-called "chalice" glasses will go on sale at a national discount supermarket



chain. But even these supplies will not be unlimited. Only 93,000 of these boxed sets, specially decorated with Gothic-style cut-out windows, will be put on sale. Customers can only buy one six-pack apiece after presenting a coupon that will be available in a local newspaper and two Belgian magazines.

Meat and fitting

THE DECISION by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to re-establish meatless Fridays provoked the question from Catholics about what they should do if they were invited to a dinner party on that day and were served meat.

This was precisely the conundrum faced by the Archbishop of Westminster at the recent Council of European Bishops' Conferences meeting in Albania that was held on a Friday. On the menu for the archbishop and fellow presidents of European bishops' conferences was pork. After a discussion with the catering team, the archbishop was served an omelette while most of the rest ate the meat.

The archbishop was, of course, following his own bishops' conference guidelines on the matter. In a document on meatless Fridays, they said that Catholics invited out to a dinner party should make it "clear ahead of time that we do not eat meat on Fridays".

A Fiennes bishop

IT WAS praised for its gritty depiction of life at the coalface for clergy in inner city parishes. Now *Rev*, the Bafta-winning BBC sitcom, is attracting A-list actors to star in its second series, which is due to start in November.

Most prominent among these is Ralph Fiennes, who appears in episode one as a fictional Bishop of London and could seek help from his impeccable church connections. The *English Patient* and Harry Potter star is understood to advise the main character, the Revd Adam Smallbone, played by Tom

Hollander. Fiennes' great-uncle, Dom Sebastian Moore, 93, is a monk of Downside Abbey and his uncle is Professor Nicholas Lash, the Norris-Hulse Professor Emeritus of Divinity at the University of Cambridge. Professor Lash told us that his advice to his nephew would be to avoid "acting like Archdeacon Grantly" from the Anthony Trollope novels.

Mr Fiennes once said in an interview that as a result of having "priests and professors" in his maternal side of the family, he "grew up with God being a subject that no one was frightened to talk about, even if they didn't believe in him".

Spare ticket

ON HIS recent visit to Germany Pope Benedict XVI said in a homily that questioning agnostics were closer to the Kingdom of God than those believers whose faith had become "routine". In a similar vein, Benedict has invited a group of non-believers to next week's Assisi gathering of religious leaders.

Among those on the "atheist" guest list is A.C. Grayling, the philosopher of Birkbeck, University of London, who had opposed last year's papal visit to Britain. Although initially he agreed to attend, Professor Grayling tells us he has pulled out.

"I accepted an invitation to a round-table discussion with (I thought) the Pope, but on subsequently learning that the deal involved accompanying the Pope on a pilgrimage to Assisi I declined, as having no wish to take part in such a thing," he said.

Professor Grayling was to be one of five non-believers who are scheduled to meet for a discussion with Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, the President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, and Catholic intellectuals. Next Thursday's event marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the historic first Assisi gathering and the Pope and attendees will travel together to the home of St Francis by train.

(See Kevin McDonald, page 4.)

Küngbaya

THE WORLD PREMIERE of the theologian Hans Küng's oratorio *Weltethos*, on 13 October was a major cultural event in Berlin but it attracted few reviews and those critics who did attend were underwhelmed.

Küng's libretto was considered banal by the German daily *Die Welt*. It was no wonder that Jonathan Harvey was the third composer Küng turned to after two had refused, wrote the reviewer, with lines like "No racism, no sexism, no nationalism! We do not want to be egoists. We are responsible for one another." The general conclusion was that Küng had overrated himself by trying to be "more papal than the Pope".