

John Alexander Motyer 1924 - 2016.



Alec Motyer was born in Dublin in August 1924. Interestingly the most significant influence in his life as a child was not so much his parents as his maternal grandmother, Catherine Nelson, with whom he lived from a tender age until he was seven. She had a remarkable knowledge of the Bible, and passed a deep love of Scripture on to Alec, so much so that he felt called to the ministry long before he actually opened his heart personally to Christ, at the age of 15.

He studied Classics and Philosophy at Trinity College Dublin, and then Theology in order to train for the Church of Ireland ministry. He gained the highest marks ever achieved in the 'Divinity Testimonium' at the end of the course – in spite of the fact that he also spent a lot of time playing tennis and cycling round Dublin with Beryl, whom he met when she sang the solo at a Christian Endeavour meeting at which he was the speaker. The solo turned into a duet in 1948 when they were married – but by this time Alec had already spent a year as a curate at St Philip's Penn Fields in Wolverhampton. He persuaded the Church of England authorities to let him cross the Irish Sea, because he was convinced that God was calling him to work in Penn Fields with Hugh Jordan, the then Vicar of St Philip's.



Stephen was born in 1950, just as the young couple moved to Bristol where Alec took up his first teaching post at Clifton Theological College. At the same time he was working as a curate at Holy Trinity Easton in Bristol. Steve remembers going on pastoral visits with him, sitting in a little seat on the back of his bike. Mark was born in 1952 – on Steve's birthday.

In 1954 Alec became Vice-Principal of the College, and worked very hard for the next eleven years seeking to build the College up. Students grew to love his masterful Old Testament lectures, laced with humour. In addition he frequently spoke at University Christian Unions and churches, and during this time published his first few articles and books, both academic and pastoral. He began to develop his particular interest in the book of Isaiah. And he started to preach also at Conventions, especially the Keswick Convention and the Southern Counties Convention at Weston-super-Mare, of which eventually he became Chairman. Thus his reputation began to spread more widely in the Christian world, and in 1964 he undertook his first foreign trip, to speak at the 'Keswick' convention in Jamaica.

In 1965 disaster struck at Clifton Theological College with a complete breakdown of relations between the College authorities and the staff. This led to three staff members, including Alec, being sacked, with two others

resigning in protest. After a period of great uncertainty the family moved to Hampstead, where Alec became the Vicar of St Luke's, Kidderpore Avenue, in December 1965. These were very happy years which saw much growth in the church – and indeed in the family, with the birth of Kate in 1968. During this time Alec became the Old Testament editor of the IVP *New Bible Commentary*, and published expositions of Philippians and of James.

Alec's heart was still in Bristol and in theological education, and in 1970 he accepted an invitation to become Vice-Principal of Tyndale Hall, one of the other theological Colleges there. However just at this time the 'Runcie Report' on theological education in the Church of England recommended the closure of all the Bristol Colleges, including Tyndale. After much uncertainty and difficult negotiation this recommendation was withdrawn, and Alec emerged as the first Principal of a new Bristol College, Trinity College, born out of the merger of the three existing Colleges (Clifton, Tyndale, and Dalton House which trained women).

Under his generous leadership the merger went well and Trinity grew by leaps and bounds, achieving financial stability and growing numbers. But Alec's passion was always for preaching and pastoring, and in 1981 he moved to become the Vicar of Christ Church Westbourne in Bournemouth.

Here too the church grew under his gentle and encouraging ministry, always focussed simply on 'preaching the word of God'. One particular feature was his Wednesday morning Bible expositions, which drew people from churches of all sorts across Bournemouth. He enjoyed his ministry in Westbourne greatly, but when he reached 'retirement' age in 1989 he was glad to lay down the responsibility of leadership and decision-making. He and Beryl moved to live in their holiday home in Bishopsteignton, Devon, which they had owned since 1969.

In between many preaching engagements both locally and further afield, Alec concentrated now on writing: first of all, his major work on Isaiah, long delayed by the demands of ministry. This detailed, patient and captivating explanation of Isaiah was published in 1993, and the American

edition won the Christian Booksellers' Association 'Book of the Year' Award. Many other books followed: he wrote fourteen in all, during the course of his long retirement, as well as editing the Old Testament volumes of the IVP 'Bible Speaks Today' series, and producing many small articles and Bible reading notes. His little book on preaching (Christian Focus, 2013), distilling the wisdom from decades of practice, was very warmly received.

Many friends came to visit and to stay with Alec and Beryl in Bishopsteignton, and their home was a focus of laughter, hospitality and practical care. After fifteen years there they moved in 2004 to live near Kate and her family in Poynton, and Alec's last years were spent very happily in the context of the fellowship of St George's church, where he frequently preached. He gave the Bible readings at the Keswick Convention for the last time in 2007. He cared for Beryl beautifully, with Kate's support, through her increasing confusion and frailty before her death in 2010.

Alec's own health was beginning to fail. He was diagnosed with diabetes in 2013, and Kate and Alan generously sold their home and moved their family in with him, to care for him. He became increasingly slow and frail, but was always uncomplaining and ready to welcome visitors and let them take him out for lunch or tea and cake. The passion of his life – love for Scripture, and for the Lord whose Word it is – remained undimmed, as did his memory for people and times past. In his last month, his reading was simply 2 Samuel – in Hebrew. We rejoice in his fruitful life well lived, but even more that the veil has been lifted, and he lives unrestrained in the presence of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.



"Well done, good and faithful servant." Matthew 25:21.

Tributes from some who have written to us recently:

"Here in Bishopsteignton, meeting [Alec] was such a joy for us, being with him brought joy into our hearts."

"We always prayed together. Alec prayed from the heart with all his devotion and faith."

"I owe Alec more than I can say for the way he shared his love for the word of God."

"We first encountered Alec at Trinity where his influence was, frankly, transformative. ... I encountered a way of handling Scripture that I had never witnessed before, and have never seen bettered, since."

"A great brain but very down to earth, with a wicked sense of humour and a wonderfully tender heart."

"We feel we have lost a dear friend, and the world is a poorer place without him."

"He was conscientious in everything he put his hand to."

"He was gifted with a wonderfully controlled humour that never deflected attention from his message, but anchored it firmly in the mind."

"What a life and what a legacy! Now he is in glory! Hallelujah!"

"I have so many happy memories of conversations and time spent with him."

"He had a profound theological understanding, a rigorous Biblical scholarship, a heart-warming gift as a preacher and a wonderful gift of friendship and personal relationships."

"For all his amazing intellect ... it is for this precious, simple friendship, with all its fun, humour and laughter with we simple folk that we shall always treasure and will remain a lasting memory."

"His Christmas letters always had some helpful, confident thought and had that real ability to say much in little."

"I am one of those who enormously enjoyed Alec's company and personal encouragement."

"He was indeed a dear and fine and very human person, and also utterly fascinating in his knowledge and insights into the Bible."



"Alec was one of the truly most remarkable men we have had the privilege to know."

"We have been blessed over many years by Alec's faithful Bible teaching."

"What a wonderful example, teacher, scholar, pastor and friend."

"Alec had a lovely sense of humour and fun and we all loved him dearly. He will be sadly missed."

"Praise God for the wonderful legacy he has left behind!"

"A great man in every way – in ability, warmth, humanity and godliness: what a treasure he was – and gave."

"Alec's ministry lives on, through the hundreds whom he trained and encouraged to the thousands who will continue to benefit from all his books."

"One casual word of [Alec's] ... gave birth to the Grove Ethics Booklets, a series which runs and runs powerfully to this day."

"It was only my privilege to know Alec in recent years but he has made a great impact on me, and I have loved my times with him. ... Alec was a winsome, knowledgeable, godly, interesting scholar whom I shall miss."

"His main influence for me is through his love of and writing on the Old Testament, ... through my being taught by those who learnt from Alec at Trinity."

"I really loved Alec's sense of humour, there was a bit of a rascal lying beneath the dedication and commitment scripture, his devotedness to Beryl, his humility alongside a formidable intellect and his loyalty and faithfulness to all he ministered to."

"His contagious trust in an utterly sovereign God – such an insistent undercurrent in his teaching and so consistently exemplified in his life – proved to be a spiritual life-saver in later years."

" ... transparent integrity and graciousness that brought me round to better ways of thinking."

" ... the inimitable Motyer humour ... brought even more hilarity as he expressed himself freely – not to say mischievously! – in his letters."

"What a humble, devoted and exemplary servant of the Lord and His word Alec was."

"The sermons. After 45 minutes everyone was paying full attention so that you could hear a pin drop as Alec would draw all the strands of the sermon together into an amazing conclusion. One could feel the presence of God in those sermons."

"What a man, what an example to us all. To me he offered a glimpse of Father God's character."

"He lived the life and demonstrated to me what a real man of God is like."

"A man who was entirely selfless and gave of himself for others... we can all follow that fine example."

"He opened Scripture in ways that brought - all at once and in great clarity - awe, comfort, illumination and rebuke."

"Together with your mother we enjoyed the company of a delightful team and saw the love of God manifest in a lovely and loving couple."

"A great friend and a good golfing partner."

"We are richer from having known Alec."

"He was a most valued colleague and friend, from whom I learnt a lot in a most enjoyable way."

"We have been parted from a very dear friend and brother in the Lord but look forward to that 'grand reunion' to come."