

# A Tribute to John Alexander Motyer 1924 - 2016

*In August 2016, Trinity's first principal, Rev Alec Motyer, passed away just before his 92nd birthday. In 1950, Alec took up his first teaching post at Clifton Theological College; he was named vice-principal in 1954, a position he held for eleven years. After serving as vice-principal of Tyndale Hall, Alec was named principal when Clifton, Tyndale, and Dalton House combined to form the new Trinity College in 1972. We remain deeply grateful for his ministry, and would like to share these reflections on his life.*



## Rev Canon Dr Herrick Daniel Trinity alumnus

I was a student at Trinity College approximately forty-three years ago and was fortunate enough to have had Alec Motyer and Jim Packer as associated principals.

I have many happy memories of Alec Motyer, whom I consider a modern spiritual giant in our time. When I was at Trinity I chose to study the Hebrew language, which was optional, because of Alec's great influence on me. He was a man who lectured with tremendous passion on whatever subject he undertook. He had a real conviction in his preaching, and he would present his message with extraordinary accuracy. He believed strongly in the theology of the Old Testament as the foundation on which the New Testament is built. Above all, he declared the totality of the authority of the Bible as the Word of God.

I can remember him saying to us once that if we made a mistake in reading the wrong Collect, for example reading next Sunday's Collect instead of the present one, not to worry about it. In fact, people would think that you were a forward-looking person. Also, when one preaches the same sermon more than once, it is great because every time it is preached, it becomes more mature. One of the most powerful messages I heard from him was one on Leadership, where he pointed out that God gives a person the quality of leadership, as leadership involves big responsibilities. He gave examples of great leaders like David in the Old Testament, who was called and appointed by God.

Finally, during my two happy years at Trinity College, I was richly blessed by Alec Motyer's teaching, preaching, prayers, examples of godly living, personal encouragement, clarity of thought, fellowship, and thorough knowledge of his subject.

## Rev Gervais Angel

Former dean at Trinity

Alec's principles as a theological educator were:

1. The **Word of God**, i.e. the Christian Scriptures, as authority on God and on life.
2. The **whole of life** as response to the authority of the Word of God. This is communicated publicly in speaking, writing and behaviour/obedience. This is absorbed inwardly by constant study and 'unceasing prayer'. To my knowledge he read the Bible in the original languages for at least an hour each day, and he probably prayed as much as he breathed. I heard him preach at the Southern Counties Convention at Weston on the sin of prayerlessness, and he offered me an opinion that if every Christian studied and prayed aright there would be no need for charismatic renewal. What's the point, if you're already walking with the Lord?
3. **Community** as the environment for being a Christian. He stressed that private daily prayer was necessary for a healthy life as a Christian, but loving one's neighbour as oneself was for him an odd command if there was no one around to love. On this principle he was an inclusive community former. In 1971 he faced, with the Lord, the task of forming one community out of three distinct components. Alec's task was to form a community where the love of Christ was shown. When

appointed dean of college and principal in 1971, he refused to allow any academic staff member of any of the three colleges to be made redundant by the process of the merger, whatever the financial cost of employing them all.

4. **Passion for the Lord**. Alec's style of being and doing could not be typecast into Conservative or Open or Reformed or Charismatic Evangelical. His passion for the Lord gave him an independence from the categories formed by people. Alec's liberal spirit had to be experienced to be believed. He disagreed with some of his academic colleagues on points of interpretation, but this did not affect his love for them.

5. **Passionate about righteousness**. Alec had an edge, which came out in his teaching, against sin in all its forms, against destructive forces which led to sickness or disaster, and against heresy which ran directly against the clear teaching of the Word of God. Hierarchical priesthood based on non-biblical asceticism and Old Testament views of priests were anathema to him; his preferred colour for a cassock was blue, like a Reader. His God is no respecter of persons, and his ministers are at best only fellow-members of the Body of Christ. Alec held firm to this New Testament understanding of ministry.

My family and I owed him, and Beryl, so much, but that's another story.



*The students and staff of the newly formed Trinity College in 1972. In the front row beside Alec Motyer is Associate Principal Jim Packer and Dean of Women Joyce Baldwin, with Dean Gervais Angel next to Joyce.*



Alec Motyer, with his sons Steve and Mark, at Clifton College in the 1950s.

### Rev Richard Simmons Trinity alumnus

As an ordinand training in 1973-75, I have great memories of Alec in my two years at Trinity. He was a great pastor, preacher and theological educator. When he preached, in chapel or at a local church, e.g. Redland Parish Church, his face would light up as he shared with us the amazing good news of the God of the Covenant. He was so easy to talk to informally in and around college, which made us feel we were more family than community. Sue and I had to see him before we were allowed to get engaged in 1974, and he was very supportive to us on our shared journey together. Being part of Trinity in its early days was a great privilege and one that has shaped my ministry for over forty years. I still look back on my time at Trinity Bristol with great affection and bless Alec and the faculty and all my fellow students there for being such an inspiration for Christian ministry.

**Trinity will host an afternoon tea and memorial gathering for Alec Motyer on the afternoon of 15 May 2017 at Trinity College, following the Association AGM.**

More details will be announced in due course. If you are interested in attending, please email [m.stratis@trinitycollegebristol.ac.uk](mailto:m.stratis@trinitycollegebristol.ac.uk).

### Drs Gordon and David Wenham Trinity faculty members

Alec made a massive contribution to the lives of many, many people as a theologian and scholar and theological educator. The awarding of a Lambeth DD to him for 'services to theological education' was well deserved.

When we both began our theological studies in the 1960s, Alec was one of those scholars—a fairly small band at that time—who offered a real and well-thought out alternative to the often sceptical approaches to the Old Testament that were dominant in our universities, breathing life into what others made a dry subject. Other people were strong on questions of language and background; Alec, while being a fine Hebraist, stood out as someone who helped us to appreciate and engage with the theology of the Bible, its themes and message. Unlike some scholars who have expertise either in the Old Testament or the New Testament, he was interested in the big picture of the whole Bible, writing commentaries on Old and New Testament.

He was also a very good teacher: we both benefitted from this, when he kindly gave us some tuition in basic Hebrew before we began our theological studies in Cambridge; we thought he was probably a better teacher than the famous teachers of Cambridge! He inspired and encouraged us, and we and so many others owe him a great debt, and not just academically: he was a family friend; he preached at David and Clare's wedding, and Gordon as a research student lodged for a year with the Motyers in London.

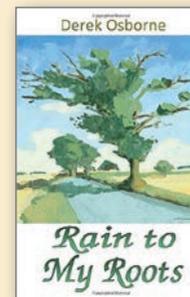
We thank God for his friendship (and for his humour!), and for him as a gracious, humble and kind servant of the Lord. ■

# Alumni NEWS

## 1950s

**Canon Raymond J. Lee** (Tyndale 1956) is now 86 years of age, and in September will reach the 60th anniversary of his ordination at Southwark Cathedral.

**Derek Osborne** (Tyndale 1957) has written *Rain to My Roots: A Pastor Among the Psychologists* (White Tree Publishing, 2015), which explores a creative conversation between psychology and Christianity to ask to what extent psychology can lead us into self-understanding and self-fulfilment, promote enriching relationships and encourage positive aspirations, and what positive changes should result from personal faith in Jesus Christ. Trinity alumnus **Bishop David Atkinson** has written a foreword for the book, which includes mention of J Stafford Wright and several lecturers from that era at Tyndale.



## 1960s

**The Right Reverend Kenneth Barham** (Clifton 1963) celebrated his 80th birthday this year. Ken was born in Uganda, brought up in what is now Burundi, educated in Kenya, farmed Jerseys in Uganda, was a bishop in the Anglican Church of Rwanda, and is now Hon Assistant Bishop of Chichester, in the Church of England. He recently raised funds for a



Lawrence Barham Memorial Trust (LBMT) building project in Cyanguu, a 37-bedroom annexe that will help to provide sustainable local employment, encourage tourists to the area, provide accommodation for business, government, and NGO visitors as well as church and mission teams. You can learn more about their work at [lbmt.org.uk](http://lbmt.org.uk).

**George O'Brien** (Clifton 1964) had served as curate at St James' Carlisle from 1964 to 1968, and then as vicar of Doxey Parish in Stafford from 1968 until 1988. He also worked as a hospital chaplain in Stafford from 1988 to 1999. This year Doxey celebrated forty years since the church building was dedicated. 'We were delighted to see past members,' George says. 'The first baby baptised there turned up, now a married family man. The building, like us, shows some wear and tear!' George celebrated fifty years as a priest this year, and he and his wife, Mary, celebrated fifty-three years of marriage.

## 1970s

**Heather Fenton** (Trinity 1977), editor of *The Reader* magazine, recently attended the 150th anniversary service for the Reader movement at All Souls Langham Place in London, which was also attended by Prince Philip as Patron of the Central Readers' Council.



**Dr Henry ('Laurie') Thompson** (Trinity 1978), who is currently interim dean/president and associate professor of liturgical studies at Trinity School for Ministry in Pennsylvania, US, recently enjoyed a visit from fellow Trinity alumna Janet Roberts, when she came from Liverpool and preached at Incarnation Church in the Strip District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He says, 'We had a wonderful reunion and caught up on many Trinity Bristol memories and friends.'