

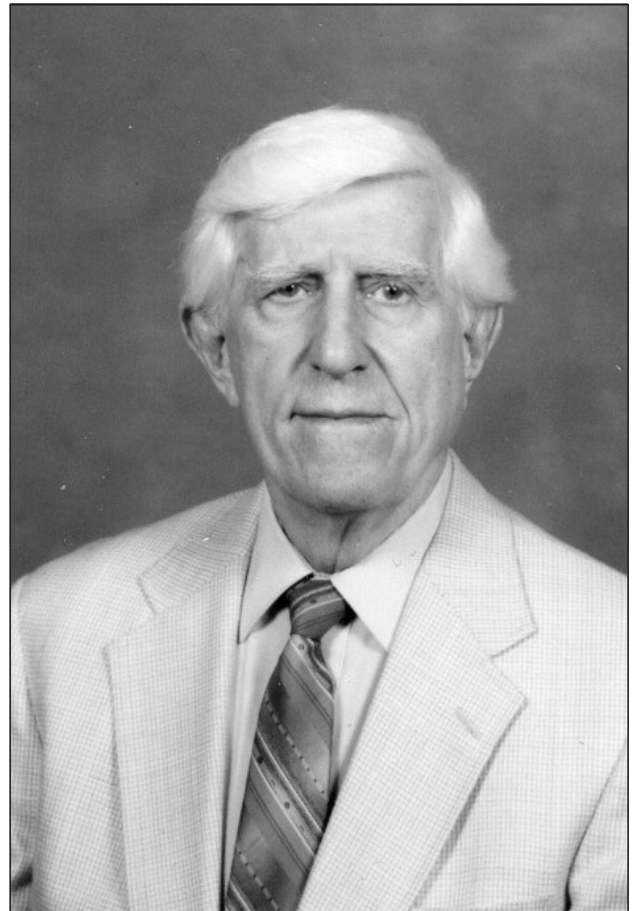
F. Alton Everest (1909–2005): Founder and First President of ASA

Walter R. Hearn

When Alton Everest passed away quietly at age 95 on September 3, 2005, the American Scientific Affiliation lost the last of its five founding fathers, its first president (1941–1950), and the towering figure whose determination and diplomacy did much to shape the organization in its fragile early years.

Alton Everest, born in Oregon and trained in electrical engineering at Oregon State and Stanford, was a young professor at Oregon State when Moody Bible Institute president William H. Houghton called together a few “Christian men of science” in October 1941. According to science historian Ronald Numbers, “The personable Everest quickly emerged as the organizational leader of the group” (*The Creationists*, Knopf, 1992, p. 159). Numbers tells how its first president kept ASA open to various evangelical interpretations of Scripture despite pressures from such groups as the soon defunct Deluge Geology Society.

World War II took Everest from his academic career to study underwater sound transmission for the Navy in San Diego, enabling him to travel and spread the word about ASA, which grew to over 200 members by 1950. With wartime restrictions lifted, he set up ASA’s first national meeting, at Wheaton College in 1946. He edited ASA’s significant “Christian student’s science symposium,” *Modern Science and Christian Faith*, which first appeared in 1948 and went through a number of printings. In 1958, when asked by then-president Russell Mixer to encourage the formation of local sections, Everest started the *American Scientific Affiliation Newsletter*, editing it with grace and humor for the next ten years.



F. Alton Everest (1909–2005)

In 1996 I nominated Alton Everest for the annual Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. I emphasized how groundbreaking ASA was in 1941, predating all the other 60-some organizations bridging science and theology now cited in the Templeton Foundation’s *Who’s Who in Theology and Science* (Continuum, 1996), most by forty years or more. ASA’s scholarly journal, begun in 1949, is the oldest science/religion journal listed, seventeen years older than *Zygon*.

That was real “progress in religion” but, as I pointed out, beside doing so much for ASA, Everest put his technical skills to work for the Christian church in two other unique ways. In 1945 he helped Irwin Moon found another enduring institution, the Moody Institute of Science (MIS), which used dramatic science footage to point viewers to the *God of Creation* (title of the first of many MIS films). As scientific director, Everest perfected many cinematographic techniques, including the time-lapse and slow-motion photography now common in *NOVA* and *National Geographic* programs. MIS films won many prizes, were seen by millions, and are still used by missionaries around the world to attract people to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In 1959 Wheaton College awarded Everest an honorary

In Memoriam

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Walter Hearn presenting **Alton Everest** a plaque of appreciation at the 1997 ASA Annual Meeting at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California.

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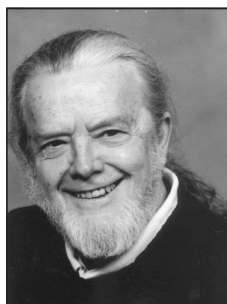
D.Sc. degree for his exemplary integration of his Christian faith and technical skills and for finding innovative ways to use those skills in the service of the Christian community.

A third innovation came after Everest retired from MIS in 1970 and returned to the U.S. in 1973 from teaching communications at Hong Kong Baptist College. While serving as acoustical consultant for hundreds of broadcasting studios around the world, he devised a way for financially strapped missionary organizations to benefit from his acoustical design expertise. He would send them a tape to play in their studio while making a response tape, which was mailed back to him with the dimensions of the existing studio for his sophisticated technical analysis. Each successful job gave him added experience for writing new books on studio design and construction. As the author of nine technical and semi-technical books on acoustic design, he became well known in the audio engineering world. As an energetic participant in the missionary enterprise, Alton was surely well known in heaven before he arrived there this past September.

As it turned out, that Templeton Prize went to a Hindu thinker. Oh, well, writing ten pages about Alton brought me closer to a brother in Christ I already admired, making me respect him all the more. Now I have learned even more details from his delightful *An Over-My-Shoulder View of the 20th Century* (2005). Alton's final book is full of photographs and personal accounts from each period of his life, including his summers with the U.S. Forest Service as a student and his pioneering work on television in the 1930s. The 140-page memoir was put together lovingly by his three children and is available at cost (\$10) from his daughter, Mona Everest, 7453 N. Hoyne Ave. 3S, Chicago, IL 60645; email EverMona@aol.com. (I added \$2 for postage.)

Going through early issues of this journal for that nomination process, I saw how many ideas presented for discussion at our meetings were later honed into valuable books on science and faith. I came to realize more than ever how important ASA is to the Christian world, and how much we therefore owe to our principal founder. At the 1997 meeting at Westmont College, the last meeting he attended, Alton was given a plaque with these words:

The American Scientific Affiliation presents this plaque to F. Alton Everest on August 2, 1997, in recognition of your vision and service to ASA. You were one of the five founders and as president for the first ten years (1941–50), helped shape the original constitution and course of the Affiliation. You are a competent scientist of strong Christian faith. For these things we honor you. *



ASA Fellow **Walter R. Hearn** is professor of Christianity and science at New College Berkeley in California and author of *Being a Christian in Science* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997). After a career in biochemistry (Ph.D., 1948), in 1972 he became a free-lance editor with his wife Virginia. From 1969 to 1993, he edited the Newsletter of the ASA and CSCA.