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Garner Ted Armstrong

Born	February 9, 1930 Portland, Oregon, United States
Died	September 12, 2003 (aged 73)
Place of burial	Gladewater Memorial Park (Gladewater, Texas)
Residence	Portland, OR (1930–1932); Eugene, OR (1932–1946); Pasadena, CA (1946–1978); Tyler, TX (1978–2003)
Nationality	United States
Other names	William Talboy Wright (pseudonym used for his book <i>Churchill's Gold</i>)
Education	BA (1956), MA (1960), Ph.D. (1964), Ambassador University
Occupation	Minister, Author, Educator, Radio and Television Commentator
Known for	Voice of The World Tomorrow, President of Ambassador University (1975–1978)
Title	Vice-President, Radio/Worldwide Church of God (1958–1978); President, Ambassador University (1975–1978); President, Garner Ted Armstrong Evangelistic Association (1978–2003)
Successor	Herbert W. Armstrong (as President of Ambassador University); Mark Armstrong (as leader of the Intercontinental Church of God)
Political party	Independent (though conservative leaning)
Religion	Church of God
Spouse(s)	Shirley Hammer Armstrong

Children	Mark Armstrong (b. 1953), David Dale Armstrong (b. 1955), Matthew Ted Armstrong (b. 1956)
Parents	Herbert W. & Loma D. Armstrong
Relatives	Sister Beverly Armstrong Gott, Sister Dorothy Mattson, Brother Richard Armstrong, Uncle Dwight L. Armstrong (Christian hymn composer), Nephew Tedd Armstrong (Rock Musician)
Website	www.garnertedarmstrong.org

Garner Ted Armstrong (February 9, 1930 – September 15, 2003) was an [American](#) evangelist and the son of Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of the Worldwide Church of God, at the time a Sabbatarian organization that taught observance of seventh-day Sabbath, and annual Sabbath days based on Leviticus 23.

Armstrong initially became recognized when he succeeded his father as the voice of *The World Tomorrow*, the church's radio program that aired around the world. A television program of the same name followed, aired mostly in North America, eventually giving way to a *Garner Ted Armstrong* broadcast, a half-hour program that mixed news and biblical commentary. His polemical message was unlike that of most other religious broadcasters of his day.

Brief biography

Garner Ted's genealogy is described in his father's autobiography. The elder Armstrong reported that the Armstrong ancestors arrived in America in the late 17th century with William Penn. The ancestry was traced to [Edward I of England](#). Garner Ted's grandmother was "something like a third cousin to former President [Herbert Hoover](#)".^[1]

Armstrong was born in Portland, Oregon, to Loma Isabelle (Dillon) and Herbert W. Armstrong.^[2] He was raised in Eugene, Oregon. He was the youngest of four children. He was named for a great-grandmother on his mother's side, Martha Garner, who was born in Suffolk, England in 1841 and died in Iowa in 1923, seven years before he was born.

Following service in the [United States Navy](#) during the [Korean War](#), Armstrong returned to Pasadena, California, where his father had moved the church's operations in 1946. He was baptized in early 1953 (Origin and History, p. 36). He enrolled in Ambassador College, founded by his father and supported by the church. Ambassador was not regionally accredited, and Armstrong eventually completed bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in the only discipline offered, theology. He was ordained a minister in 1955 and held key administrative posts in both the Worldwide Church of God and

Ambassador College until he was disfellowshipped (excommunicated) by his father in 1978. Prior to his removal, he was executive vice president of the church and president of the college, and was widely considered to be heir-apparent to succeed his father as head of the church and its operations.^[3]

Personality

Armstrong performing at the Feast of Tabernacles in San Antonio, Texas, 1979

In the mid 1970s, *Penthouse* magazine described Garner Ted as providing "late night companionship to thousands of truckers, the voice of the morning to millions of farmers, the living room preacher to a subculture of lonely, frightened, disoriented Americans." Noted for his charisma, movie star looks, and for being a music enthusiast, he toyed with becoming a nightclub singer before following his father into the ministry. He was at ease before cameras and microphones. In radio and TV programs he mixed political, economic, and social news of the day with religious commentary. Armstrong's voice, style and presentation (with a low-key, ironic delivery more in the style of a comedian's monologue than in the didactic fashion of the standard evangelist) attracted millions to the church-sponsored broadcasts. His voice was so widely known that his name was included with many of the world's politicians and entertainers on the record track *The Intro and the Outro* by the Bonzo Dog Band of the 1960s. On a radio commercial that aired in the Raleigh, NC area in the mid 1980s, he was among several celebrities said to have been seen at a popular restaurant in the area.^[3]

Armstrong's proclivity toward secular pursuits outside evangelism was evidenced by his appearance as a guest on the US television show *Hee Haw* in the 1970s. Garner Ted was particularly a popular speaker among the country music stars of the US, personal friend of men like Merle Haggard. In fact, after Garner Ted died in 2003, Haggard commented that "after [Johnny Cash](#) died, I lost a real close friend in Garner Ted Armstrong. He was like a professor to me. What education I have, I owe to him."^[4]

In 1976 Garner Ted was a guest on the *Hee Haw* show that starred Buck Owens and Roy Clark. He popped up out of the "corn patch" on the show to say "Sa-loot" to his hometown of Eugene, Oregon. He sang a country western song he had written titled "Working Man's Hall of Fame," and joined "the whole Hee Haw gang" to sing the popular Ocean gospel song Put Your Hand in the Hand.^[5] He was so well-known that one of the Hee Haw regulars, Archie Campbell, released a parody record in which he did a voice impression of Garner Ted doing the World Tomorrow program. On Archie's record he was "Gagner Fred Hamstrung." The Simpsons actor Harry Shearer parodied Garner Ted Armstrong during coverage of the annual New Year's Day Pasadena Rose Parade along with The Credibility Gap ensemble of comedians featuring Michael McKean and David Lander of Laverne & Shirley fame, on their Warner Bros. Records comedy album, *The Credibility Gap Floats*, 1979.^[6]

Garner Ted Armstrong became a bit of a “household name” in the US and some other parts of the world where his program was broadcast. Armstrong also arranged for *Hee Haw* co-host Buck Owens to entertain attendees at the WCG's annual convention one year. He authored a novel, *Churchill's Gold*, penned under the pseudonym William Talboy Wright - a mixture of names from his grandparents: **William** Dillon (maternal grandfather), Isabelle **Talboy** (maternal grandmother), and Eva **Wright** (paternal grandmother).^[2]

Ministry

Garner Ted Armstrong was ordained to the ministry by his father in 1955. G. T. Armstrong later reported in a sermon that he did not want to be a minister, to which his father answered something to the effect that because he did not want to enter the ministry that was a sign that he should. In 1957, he began to take over much of his father's broadcasting responsibilities. During that same year, he traveled extensively through South America. As a fluent Spanish speaker, he made several Spanish-language broadcasts of the *World Tomorrow*.^[7]

Garner Ted Armstrong proposed dropping such an approach in favor of one centered on Christian living and an outline of church doctrines and practice. Nevertheless, by 1977, Armstrong's media exposure included a daily radio program broadcast on over 300 radio stations across the United States, 33 in Australia, and 11 in the Philippines, with other programs throughout the world rebroadcast in the German, Spanish, French, Italian, and Russian languages. With an annual television budget of six million dollars, his exposure also included television programs which appeared on up to 165 channels. For almost two years this included a daily television appearance. According to Armstrong, notables such as President [Lyndon B. Johnson](#), Nelson Rockefeller, [Cyrus Vance](#) and Hubert Humphrey, as well as a number of U.S. senators were frequent viewers of the broadcast. President Johnson personally told Armstrong during an afternoon lunch the two men had at Johnson's Texas ranch, quote "I watch your show (The World Tomorrow (radio and television)) all the time and I agree with most of what you have to say".^[8] Senator [Bob Dole](#) requested all copies of Garner Ted Armstrong's 1970's World Tomorrow broadcasts be preserved into the national archives of the Library of Congress TV & Film division.^{[9][10]}

His establishment of a "Systematic Theology Project" was eventually jettisoned by his father, but a form of it was later adopted by a separate church that Garner Ted would establish.^[11]

Relationship with Stanley R. Rader

By the mid-1970s, Stanley Rader, an attorney and church accountant who had been a personal assistant to Herbert W. Armstrong since 1958, appeared to be stepping into the number two position of administration previously thought to be Garner Ted's

domain. Relations between the two became strained and a power struggle ensued.^[12] One conflict was that Rader had set up privately owned, affiliated corporations that were doing business with the church. Garner Ted, and others in the organization, were skeptical of Rader's legal and financial dealings and suspected a bid to control the church's multimillion-dollar business. One objection to Rader's role was that, being Jewish, he had never been a baptized member of the church or a practicing Christian. That obstacle was removed in 1975 when Rader was baptized by the elder Armstrong.

By the mid-1970s two different and rival views were developing regarding the work and future of the church.

One plan was formulated by Garner Ted Armstrong, who wanted to take the church in a direction built around a larger publishing and broadcasting platform that would go out under his name. Garner Ted was wary of prophecies built around specific dates, and he was reported to be against the idea of continuing to deliver messages that associated the U.S. and Britain with the Lost Ten Tribes. He experimented with turning the church's flagship magazine, *The Plain Truth*, into a tabloid-size newspaper in the style of the *Christian Science Monitor*. He envisioned a television broadcast along the lines of one that was later developed by the Christian Science Church, which created a short-lived nightly news program that was later seen on the Discovery Channel.

Meanwhile, Stanley Rader aided significantly in crafting a unique role for the senior Armstrong on the world stage: Herbert W. Armstrong was promoted to various governments as an "ambassador without portfolio for world peace." In that role he did not so much represent the Worldwide Church of God or Ambassador College as he did a completely new entity called the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation (AICF). This foundation helped to finance the Tatum O'Neal motion picture *Paper Moon* and a new and slick commercial publication called *Quest*; bought Everest House, a publishing company; and turned the Ambassador Auditorium, located on the college campus in Pasadena, into a performing arts venue that boasted an annual subscription series featuring world-renowned performers and celebrities from stage, screen and the recording arts. Gifts from the foundation helped Rader secure the audiences with world leaders for the elder Armstrong, whose message was less an overt Christian one than a more general one about peace, brotherly love, giving instead of getting, and a "great unseen hand from someplace" intervening in world affairs.

Garner Ted was known to disagree with this approach as well as the expenditure of funds on it and other foundation activities. It became an increasing point of division between father and son.

In 1977, he officiated at the wedding of his father to the former Ramona Martin. The two separated in 1982, and divorced in 1984.

Death and legacy

Armstrong died on September 12, 2003, due to complications from pneumonia.^[21] He was buried in Gladewater Memorial Park, approximately two miles east of the former Big Sandy, Texas, campus of Ambassador University. He is buried with his wife's family: his father-in-law Roy Hammer, his mother-in-law Pearl Hammer, and several other members of the Hammer family. His parents, paternal grandmother, and brother are buried in Altadena, California. The Hammers were the donors of the original property on which the Ambassador campus was located. His widow Shirley continues to serve as the vice-president of the Garner Ted Armstrong Evangelistic Association, and continues to reside in the private, gated community of Emerald Bay, Bullard, a small community outside Tyler, Texas, on Lake Palestine.

Rather than selecting a new media spokesman, the evangelistic association continues to broadcast old programs made by Garner Ted Armstrong on approximately 30 television stations and cable outlets^[22] according to the Garner Ted Armstrong TV/Radio Page of the ministry's website. The Intercontinental Church of God (USA) and Garner Ted Armstrong Evangelistic Association are now led by Mark Armstrong, one of three sons of Garner Ted and Shirley Hammer Armstrong. Mark Armstrong functions as CEO of the organizations and producer of the television outreach program.

Writings

- Your Marriage Can Be Happy (1960)
- The Plain Truth About Child Rearing (1963, based on doctoral dissertation)
- After Death...then What? (1966)
- The Wonderful World Tomorrow: What It Will Be Like (1966, co-written with Herbert W. Armstrong)
- A Whale of A Tale (1968)
- Modern Dating: Key to Success or Failure in Marriage (1969)
- Some Fishy Stories About Evolution (1969)
- A Theory For The Birds (1971)
- The Real Jesus (1972, short version; 1977, expanded version published by Sheed, Andres, McMichael)
- What Is A Real Christian? (1973)
- Did God Create a Devil (1973, contributed Part Two titled, "Satan's Fate"; remainder of text written by Herbert W. Armstrong)
- Do You Have An Immortal Soul? (1975)

- How To Get Rid of Guilt (1979)
- Why Should You Repent? (1980)
- Oh God, Where Were You When I Needed You? (1980)
- Peter's Story (1981)
- Facts You Should Know About Christmas (1981)
- The Ten Commandments (1981)
- Saturday-Sunday, Which? (1982)
- What Is The Real Gospel? (1982)
- Europe and America in Prophecy (1984)
- Can You Understand Bible Prophecy? (1984)
- Believe It Or Not - The Bible Does Not Promise Heaven! (1985)
- The Passover - Is It For Christians? (1986)
- What Is The Mark of the Beast? (1987)
- Churchill's Gold (1988, under the pseudonym, William Talboy Wright)
- The Answer to Unanswered Prayer (1989)
- The Shocking Truth About Satanism (1989)
- Violent Crime Can Be Stopped - Here's How! (1992)
- The Origin and History of the Church of God, International (1992)
- Betrayal and Forgiveness (1993)
- The Real Reasons Why Christ Came to This Earth (1995)
- God's Armor (1995)
- The Great Tribulation: Is It About to Happen? (1996)
- Life on Mars? Or Did God Create the Universe? (1996)
- The Beast of the Apocalypse: What Is It? (1997)
- Saved By Grace? (1998)
- Coming Soon....An Invasion From Outer Space! (1999)