

Baptist of the Year: Al Gore

Al Gore is EthicsDaily.com's pick as Baptist of the Year for 2007.

He has pressed for the global good with a compelling message about the danger of climate change and a clear call for moral responsibility, knitting together science and faith, reason and passion.

In the opening paragraphs of his Nobel Peace Prize lecture, Gore said, "I have a purpose here today. It is a purpose I have tried to serve for many years. I have prayed that God would show me a way to accomplish it."

With an acknowledgment of Providence, Gore tethered his speech to his moral vision. He quoted the Bible, refused to make God responsible for human inaction, called squarely for an ethic of love for neighbor, confessed human failure and placed moral authority at the tip of the needed plan for planetary redemption. His address was profoundly Christian without being offensively so.

"The earth has a fever. And the fever is rising. The experts have told us it is not a passing affliction that will heal by itself. We asked for a second opinion. And a third. And a fourth. And the consistent conclusion, restated with increasing alarm, is that something basic is wrong," he said. "We are what is wrong, and we must make it right."

Gore appraised realistically one of the major obstacles to making things right—the deficit of leadership. Quoting from Winston Churchill about those who ignored the threat of Adolf Hitler, Gore spoke about the character of too many world leaders: "They go on in strange paradox, decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all powerful to be impotent."

Gore has challenged that leadership deficit with a decisive doggedness that surely comes from the depths of the prophetic vision. Regrettably no Baptist has received less applause from Baptists than Gore, a shameful but not unexpected

reality from a people snarled in religious fear, suspicious of science and stuck in the rut of spiritualized reading of the Bible.

“No prophet is accepted in his own country” (Luke 4:24, KJV), remarked Jesus after he issued his moral mission statement in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:18-19), which concluded with a pro-environmental vision. That vision proclaimed “the year of the Lord’s favor,” a time that protected the land, its livestock and laborers from exhaustion. From that day to our day, people of faith have too often pushed aside the prophetic imagination that beckons us to shelter the earth, the powerless and the poor.

Yet our own well-being depends on remembering that God-given obligation to guard the garden and our neighbors from harm. If we fail to honor the prophetic witness, we abandon our reason for being and risk our own impoverishment. Honoring Al Gore is one way to stir that moral memory with the hope of a renewed faithfulness among goodwill Baptists.

EthicsDaily.com acknowledges that our recognition is a modest one. It all but disappears in comparison with the long line of globally prestigious awards for the former vice president—the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, the third annual Quill Award, the Founders Award at the International Emmy Awards and an Oscar. Nonetheless, we offer a small Baptist voice of thanks to a faithful servant of the global good

Tennessee’s Nobel Peace Laureate becomes the first individual North American Baptist to receive EthicsDaily.com’s Baptist of the Year recognition.

[Lebanese Baptists](#) were EthicsDaily.com’s pick as the Baptists of the Year in 2006. They weathered a withering war. They showed physical courage and spiritual grace under unspeakable pressure. They used the best of technology to share their story. They shared their limited resources to house and care for a flood of Shiite refugees. They spoke with a compelling theological clarity about the Middle East that was long overdue, challenging the misreading of the Bible that mingles bad theology with bad politics.

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Brit [Paul Montacute](#) was EthicsDaily.com's Baptist of the Year in 2005 for being a global Good Samaritan, who directed Baptist aid initiatives in response to two major natural disasters: the tsunami and the earthquake in Pakistan.

In 2004, EthicsDaily.com closed the year with a list of [proactive Baptists](#) who had exercised constructive influence for the common good and/or deserved to be watched in the year ahead. At the top of the list were three British Baptists: Doug Balfour, David Coffey and Tony Peck.

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