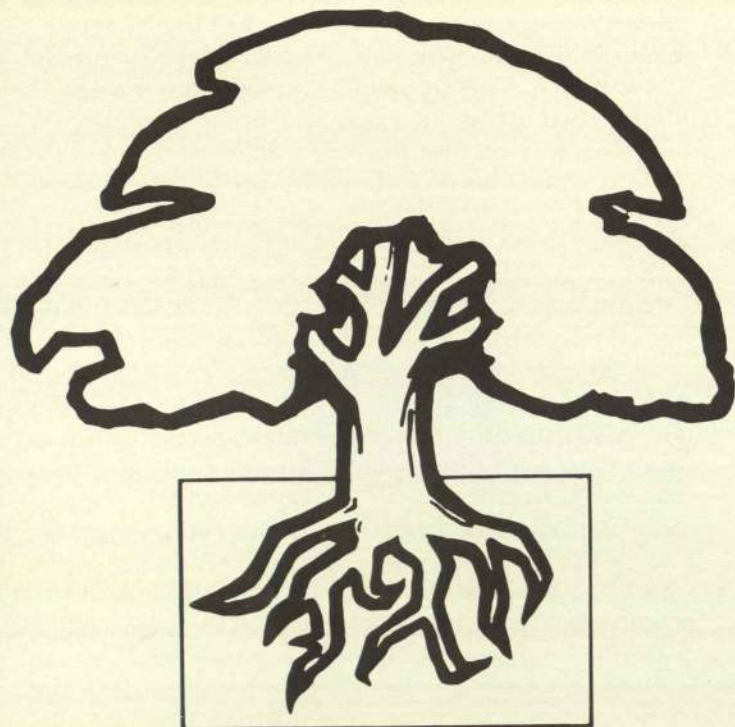


Our Roots series began with Jorge Himitian's, "How Firm a Foundation," back in our October 1979 issue. From there we have covered the moving of the Holy Spirit from Pentecost through the middle ages and the Reformation (Luther, Calvin, and Knox), through the times of the early revivalists in America such as Wesley and Whitefield, the Irvingites, the Welsh revival, the Azusa Street revival, the Latter Rain and Healing revivals, up to our last installment which dealt with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. What we have experienced in the last 10 or 15 years is what is known as the charismatic renewal, which has evolved tremendously in these last few years.

That brings us up to the present, and this installment of the Roots Series will feature an interview with Ern Baxter. Ern has had over 40 years of experience in the various moves of God and this gives him a unique perspective to interpret what God has done, where He has brought us, and where we are headed.

NW: Ern, with your 40 years of experience in various moves of God, can you comment on all that God has done and give us some perspective on it?

EB: That's quite a demanding question and I'm a little reluctant to try to attack it because it requires not only a comprehensive answer but also a perceptive one.



ROOTS SERIES

The God of Surprises

An interview with Ern Baxter

Rather than answer specifically, I will begin with an important principle I have seen in all movements—the need for balance between the Word and the Spirit. In one of the movements of God's Spirit that I was involved in which was experiencing some instability, I told the leaders right from the beginning, "If you don't bring this movement under the disciplines of the Word of God, it's going to scatter 27 ways to nowhere." And that's what happened. Had it stabilized and come under the authority of the Word, it could have made even more of an impact than it did. As it was, its impact on Christianity was considerable.

The conviction I have held for over 40 years now, ever since I was a young man trying to lay my own conceptual and life foundation, is that if we don't maintain balance between the *didactic* and the *pneumatic*—the Word and the Spirit—we will get off the track. When there's an overemphasis on doctrinal rectitude and conceptual accuracy, to the neglect of the inspirational and the pneumatic or charismatic, the Christian life deteriorates into an intellectual exercise and produces little spiritual food. On the other hand, when people get too involved with the experiential and the emotional without hedging it with biblical disciplines and guidelines, they go off into fanaticism and radicalism, and the movement eventually dissipates.

As I read history, it seems to me that somehow all the problems lie in that area. In fact, I was recently talking to a group of men who were discussing their

pastoral responsibility, and I asked them, "Where are you headed?" They replied, "We've been pretty heavy into teaching with our people lately and we really feel that we need to get a little more inspiration." I smiled, because I could see that these men were wrestling with that legitimate tension between the Word (didactic) and the Spirit (pneumatic). That is an ever present tension.

I can look back over my own life and see where I have reacted to both sides. I have said about certain movements, "Well, that's too cerebral—too theological. It doesn't have any life in it." And in doing so, I've almost thrown the baby out with the bath water. Other times, I've reached for the inspirational and found it going off into extremes, and I have overreacted to that. So what I'm saying is to some degree autobiographical.

NW: *That tension of maintaining a balanced approach to the Christian life is something we all grapple with, don't you think?*

EB: Yes. I recently talked with another group of men who are in charge of a large constituency of believers and they had obviously reacted to some charismatic extremes. I said to them, "I can understand why you've reacted, but in the final analysis, it rests upon those of us in leadership to determine where the balance is." That's the agony of being a leader. I can't indulge my personal feelings. I must make godly evaluations and try to maintain a balance between the Word and the Spirit, because from Genesis to Revelation, the Word and the Spirit are Siamese twins. They are inseparable. If you try to cut them in half or separate them, you will have problems.

NW: *That whole question is very appropriate to the charismatic renewal because it certainly caused an explosion of the experiential in most denominations and churches.*

EB: That's right. All of the revival movements mentioned earlier sprang up out of an obvious need for some kind of renewal. The Church had not just settled down to normal—it had settled down to *subnormal*. The renewal came to break that subnormalcy and breathe some life into the situation. James Gilchrist Lawson says in the preface to his book, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians*, that historically it's obvious these renewal forces had to be extreme to bring about the required effects and changes. I believe that's true for any renewal. Then adjustments can be made somewhere along the line to bring the extremes back into balance.

Unfortunately, those adjustments aren't always made. I've heard people in the charismatic movement glibly say, "The Lord said this" or "The Holy Ghost told me that," and I didn't have to have the

gift of discernment, or any profound perception, to simply recall two or three scriptural references to show conclusively that "what the Lord was saying" wasn't what the Bible said. When it comes to a choice like that, my choice is in the Word of God.

Some Christians who have lived in a dry religion for years are so enamored with this new-found release that the charismatic movement provides that they don't believe there are any perimeters or boundaries. They go off emotionally—and that brings us back to the constant tension between the didactic and the pneumatic.

NW: *In many ways, we're still struggling to find that balance, aren't we?*

EB: Yes, but I see the battle between the didactic and the pneumatic as a part of the process of God in history, and there will come a time when that balance will be achieved. I would probably give in to an ultimate discouragement if I didn't believe from the Word of God that in the purposes of God there is a time factor that God has planned in the inscrutability of His decrees and counsels, that there is a time in history when certain things are going to happen. I'm prepared to live with the process of God in history that's going to have an ultimate victorious outcome.

We're saved by hope, but hope is not "I hope it will happen." In the Bible, hope is the assurance of what *is going to happen*. Men like David served their generation, made their contribution to the divine historic process and then went on to sleep. That gives me comfort because I, too, have to serve my generation and fall on to sleep. It is my hope that the next generation will be the one to see the Kingdom of God in all its reality. If it's not, that

When it comes to a choice...my choice is in the Word of God.

generation will also contribute to the process. The plan of God is a progressive one, and only a philosophy that sees the ultimate victory of the decrees of God can keep you safe.

NW: *Where do you think God's plan is taking us?*

EB: I can only attempt to answer this from God's standpoint. To try to get into an analysis of all of the elements and factors involved is, first of all, beyond my ability. Secondly, even if I were an expert in that kind of analysis, there is other data that indicates to

Just Around the Corner

Preparing the Next Generation

Will the next generation carry on God's purposes or will they falter and forsake the Lord?

me that I don't have all the information.

So I have to approach it from God's standpoint. I believe that such factors as righteousness, the purposes of God, obedience, and others are being worked out in us. Man is learning, God is teaching. God is revealing these principles and we are making our responses, whether they be good, bad or indifferent. Ultimately, the decree of God is going to be victorious. God has always had a witness and God will always have a people. These people are destined for ultimate victory to co-share with Jesus Christ the sovereignty over the earth. God's going to work it out. I'm a biblical optimist and I believe as we walk in the light, we will see God's purposes revealed.

I don't want to be abrasive, but I sometimes think that we can be a little too inquisitive about what is going to happen, a little too anxious to prognosticate the future rather than being childlike and trusting that our Father is taking care of tomorrow.

One of the problems with trying to analyze the future is you can never anticipate God's surprises. I was thinking about this recently and I began to mentally list the surprises of God as revealed in the Scriptures. The Bible is full of God's unanticipated interventions—unanticipated because you would never have guessed in a hundred years what He was planning to do. For example, the coming of Christ. Who could have ever believed that a Nazarene carpenter being put to death between two thieves could be the Savior of the world?

What will His next intervention be? God reached down and put His hand on John Wesley, Dwight L. Moody, Augustine, Saul of Tarsus, Peter the fisherman. Who is He going to put His hand on next? We can't know what is just around the corner, but the fact that God intervened in the lives of all these men

and has performed a whole lot of exciting interventional surprises since, indicates that He's got a lot more up His sleeve.

What is He going to do next? I don't know! I look at the visitations just in my own lifetime and I wonder where they all came from.

I don't want to appear to be wisdom personified and say, "This is going to happen," because I *don't know* what's going to happen. You may pick up the newspaper tomorrow and find a whole new thing is taking place.

I know that doesn't provide much intellectual satisfaction, but it feeds me in that I know I am walking with a God of history and sovereignty. And the God of history is certainly no drab personality. He is the most exciting Creature in the universe.

NW: It really is a privilege to be alive in this day and age. The Scripture talks about Samuel, and says that he was born in a time when the word of God was rare. That's quite a contrast between our time and his. What a privilege we have to be born in a time when there is so much happening spiritually.

EB: Yes. It's very obvious that quantitatively and qualitatively there's never been a time like this. It is an unprecedented period.

But getting back to God's intervention in our lives, I was struck in one of my studies of Scripture with the recurrence of phrases like "And on the 27th day of the third month, the word of the Lord came." It didn't come on the 26th day; nor on the 28th day. When the 27th day came, nothing in the world could prevent that word from coming. That word came sovereignly because God decided on the 27th day of the third month He would intervene. Many times that word was an earth-shaking, life-changing history-reconstructing word. Well, what if on the 5th of December the word of the Lord came? Or the 9th of January? That word could change the entire course of history. What I'm trying to say is this: let us not make evaluations and try to come up with prognostications that rule out the fact that God is full of surprises and that the word of the Lord may come down tomorrow.

NW: What would you say our responsibility is to be, knowing that God, by sending His word, is able to completely alter our circumstance?

EB: I think our main job is to find out what God wants us personally to do and then do it. I'm not sure that I haven't been too nosey and curious about what everyone else is doing. There is a place for a general knowledge, but I don't need to be aware of what everybody is doing down to the last detail. Rather, my responsibility is to find out what God wants me to do and do it. I've received great comfort from that in recent years because there was a time

when I wanted to be a kind of cosmic ecumenist; I had to know what everybody else was doing. Lately, however, I have received great strength and comfort from finding out what God wants me to do, getting involved with it, and *doing* it. It carries with it some publicity, but that's really not important. The point is, I must do the will of God.

Jesus knew what it was to be in the limelight, to feed five thousand, but He also knew what it was to forego the pleasure of going to Jerusalem with His brothers. Jesus found His fulfillment in doing the Father's will. He said, "I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (Jn. 8:29). I want to give myself totally to what I should be doing. That is our responsibility—to know what God wants us to do and then do it.

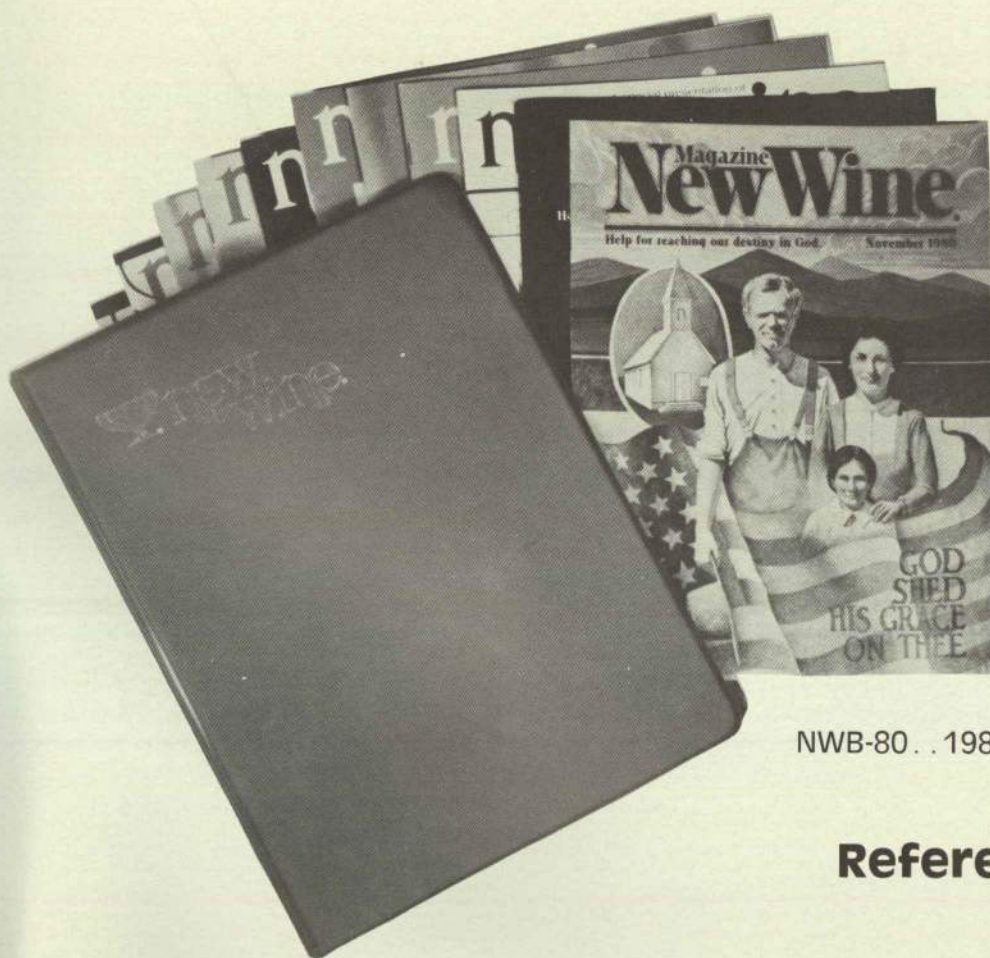
NW: That whole characteristic of God's unpredictability is the essence of what He did in the charismatic movement. For example, who could have ever predicted that God would reach down into the midst of the drug culture and start the Jesus movement, bringing those young people into the things of God?

EB: That's right. In fact, God almost seems to have a kind of humorous mischief about Him. The Caesars and the governors were carrying on as if they owned the world, not knowing that the little baby who had just been born in Bethlehem was about to split history in two. Who would have guessed that the little boy growing up chiseling wood in his stepfather's carpenter shop was nothing less than history-changing dynamite—a little kid in a carpenter shop. During the 30 years that he was growing up, the rulers had no idea what was going on.

My question is—what's going on somewhere right now? I know something's going on. It has to be going on because Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." There's no doubt the Lord is at work to accomplish His purposes and establish His sovereignty in all the earth.

My personal confidence, which I think is pretty well known, is that God will win the victory. Not one jot or tittle of His plans will fail. I live for that and I live *in* that—it is my hope. You and I and every other Christian are a very small part of the whole plan; but thank God we are a part of it. ♥

1980 Issues with Binder



Order now to receive this handsome, durable binder containing all of our 1980 issues of **New Wine Magazine**. This set will make an excellent Christmas gift for your friends. If you are new to our family of readers, this is your opportunity to catch up on the issues you have missed. Regardless of your reason for ordering, we suggest you order now as our supply is limited. Once these are gone there will be no more available.

NWB-80 . . 1980 Issues with Binders . . \$12.95

A Study Guide—A Reference Set—An Item for Collection