

Naugle, David K. 2002. *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

During this century the term ‘worldview’ has become increasingly important in evangelical circles in North America. Its popularity has emerged as many in the Christian church have come to see the comprehensive scope and religious threat of the modern worldview which shapes the cultures of Europe and North America, they have sought to encounter those dominant beliefs with an equally comprehensive understanding of the world rooted in the gospel. The concept of ‘worldview’ has served this purpose well.

In this book Naugle sets out to investigate the historical development of the concept of worldview. He begins by examining the two primary sources of worldview thinking in evangelical protestantism – James Orr (1844-1913) and Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) along with some of their followers (chapter 1). He then looks at how some in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox tradition have also appropriated this notion (chapter 2). He offers a philological history of the term ‘worldview’ tracing it from its first use in Immanuel Kant to its use today in continental European countries and the English speaking world. He traces the use of the word and concept in philosophy (chapters 4-6), in the natural sciences (chapters 7), and in the social sciences (chapter 8).

After narrating this history he asks whether or not the term, saturated as it is with the idolatry of the modern worldview, can be employed in a way faithful to the gospel to express the comprehensive claims of Christ. He believes it can and in chapter 9 he fills the term with Christian content: a worldview must take account of the way God has ordered the creation; a worldview is rooted in the human heart that is fundamentally religious; worldviews not shaped by the gospel will be directed by the power of idolatry; a true worldview must be shaped by the gospel. In his concluding chapters he offers some philosophical reflections on worldview (chapters 10), and then closes considering some dangers and benefits of the notion of worldview (chapter 11).

Naugle succeeds admirably in what he sets out to do. It is well-written and well-researched, but it is an academic investigation and does not have the narrow goal of tracing the concept of worldview. Naugle’s book nicely opens up the dangers and possibilities of that concept for the Christian life. If you don’t have the time to work your way through the entire book, the preface, the first and ninth chapters will offer much good food for thought.

For readers of this newsletter the concept of worldview should have considerable interest. Newbigin called for a missionary encounter with modern culture. It is precisely for this reason that the notion of worldview developed in the first place. In my own experience of teaching worldview on four continents I have found that this is one of the most helpful ways to help folk see that the church is in an advanced state of syncretism, that the gospel is public truth, and that our missionary engagement extends to every area of the public square.

Some readers may be disappointed in Naugle’s treatment of story. It is treated in the philosophical section and does not have the kind of foundational importance displayed, for example, in Newbigin’s notion of the Bible and modernity as competing claims to interpret universal history. Nevertheless a careful study of this book will repay the reader with rich dividends.

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