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McNicol, Allan J.
Jesus' Directions for the Future: A Source and Redaction-History Study of the Use of the Eschatological Traditions in Paul and in the Synoptic Accounts of Jesus' Last Eschatological Discourse

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McNicol's book, as indicated by its title, is a source- and redaction-history analysis of the use of suggested eschatological traditions in Paul (more specifically, 1 and 2 Thessalonians) and in Jesus' last eschatological discourse as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels. The author attempts to demonstrate how "a number of eschatological sayings attributed to Jesus were utilized both by Paul and the Synoptic writers to give direction on certain issues concerning the future within the earliest Christian messianic communities" (p. x).

McNicol approaches this subject as an adherent of the Two Gospel (Griesbach) Hypothesis, holding to the position of Matthean priority, which is evident in the order of his analysis. It deals first of all with the relationship between the Thessalonian correspondence and Matthew, after which he considers the Lukan parallels, and then finishes up with Mark. Despite the initial disclaimer that his study "does not attempt to furnish an argument to prove that the Griesbach Hypothesis is true, nor that its major rival, the Two-Source Theory, is wrong" (p. xii), a work of this type that deals with such an extensive set of Synoptic texts naturally results in what is a *de facto* defense of the theory. Nevertheless, McNicol does succeed in presenting his analysis without a constant apologetic for the Two-Gospel Hypothesis, although the presuppositions associated with this view are evident throughout the book. Indeed, it would have been helpful if McNicol had provided some basis for the conclusions he reached on certain material where he simply assumed Matthean priority against what looked to be evidence to the contrary.

The book falls into a natural threefold division. Initially, in a brief chapter dealing with "The Formation of the Gospel Tradition," McNicol provides some insight into the impetus for his analysis and his underlying assumptions regarding the transmission of the

Gospel tradition. He begins by noting the early work of Bernard Orchard, who argued for a direct literary dependence between Matthew and the Thessalonian correspondence based upon evidence such as verbal parallels, order of wording, and phraseology. He then cites work by C. H. Dodd and G. R. Beasley-Murray in which both scholars, though not arguing for any direct literary dependence, do suggest an underlying dependence by Paul and the Synoptic writers on a common eschatological tradition that grew out of the early Christian catechesis. Finally, he ends with a critique and dismissal of form criticism as a means for understanding the transmission of Gospel tradition, opting instead for the view of Birger Gerhardsson and the Scandinavian School, which envisions stricter control over the transmission of the traditions.

The second portion of the book (chaps. 2-3) is then devoted to an analysis of selected texts from the Thessalonian correspondence and the Synoptic Gospels in which an attempt is made to provide evidence for the existence of early eschatological traditions from which both Paul and the Synoptic writers drew. McNicol deals specifically with 1 Thess 4:13-5:11; 2 Thess 2:1-12; and Matthew 24, pointing out specific verbal and thematic parallels between material found in the Thessalonian correspondence and the eschatological discourse of Jesus as recorded in Matthew. McNicol argues against any type of literary dependence between the two bodies of text, claiming instead that the evidence suggests both were actually "dependent on a common tradition in eschatological matters and utilized this tradition for their own particular purposes" (p. 67). The primary themes which point toward this mutual dependence include Jesus' return as a "thief in the night," the "sudden calamity of the end," and a common apocalyptic tradition on the coming of the Lord/Son of Man at the end. While this portion of the book is well written for the most part, the correlation between the use of *οἰδατε* in 1 Thess 5:2 and Matt 24:42 seems to be a bit dubious given the fact that in one instance the reference is to believers *knowing* something about the coming of the Lord while in the second it is about believers *not knowing* something about his coming. Overall, however, the parallels uncovered by McNicol are quite convincing and provide support for his contention of some type of common eschatological tradition from which Paul and the Synoptic writers drew.

The final portion of the book (chaps. 4-6) looks at the three Synoptic accounts of the last eschatological discourse of Jesus, focusing upon the issues of source and redaction. This is by far the most lengthy of the three sections, comprising more than half of the entire book. With regard to the matter of source criticism, McNicol, as would be expected given his presuppositions regarding Matthean priority, discounts the dependence of Matthew on Mark and Q, positing instead the existence of "two major collections of Jesus tradition on eschatological matters" utilized in the composition of Matthew 24. He calls these two sources "On the Final Crisis of the Era" and "On the Coming of the Son of Man," and identifies the specific references within Matthew 24 that exhibit dependence on either source.

As for the subject of redaction criticism, McNicol provides extensive discussion on the theological concerns that were at the heart of the shaping of the specific versions of the last eschatological discourse in each of the Gospels. It is here that McNicol's adherence to Matthean priority is perhaps most evident and may cause difficulty for those who hold a different view. It is stating the obvious to note that quite different conclusions on redactional issues will be arrived at by those who hold opposing views on the Synoptic problem. Nonetheless, it should be noted that McNicol does provide a thorough and well informed exegesis of the passages under consideration.

In conclusion, McNicol's work provides significant support for the idea of a common eschatological tradition behind the Thessalonian correspondence and the last eschatological discourse of Jesus. At the same time, perhaps its most significant contribution is found in the fact that it provides the most detailed analysis to date dealing with such an extensive set of Synoptic texts from the perspective of Matthean priority; and those interested in source criticism will certainly want to consider McNicol's work for this reason alone, whether or not they are convinced by his arguments.