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# **The Eschatology of the Epistles 1 and 2 Peter. an exegetical-theological perspective**

- PhD Thesis Summary -

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**Key words:**

eschatology, epistle, 1 peter, 2 peter, certainty, fire, second coming

**The synthesis of the main parts**

**Introduction**

One of the essential chapters of the orthodox teaching is christian Eschatology, or the Teaching about the future. From an historical perspective, the shaping and the finalizing of the Eschatology teaching will be accomplished in the light of the Holy Tradition and under the guidance of the Holy Church. But a particularly important role in this process was the preaching of Christ and the apostolic preaching, because here we can identify the first details relating to this stage of the Christian life. Due to this, we proposed analyzing the fragments of the petrine writings, that helps us shape the Christian eschatology.

Both Catholic Epistles of St. Peter, and especially the Second Catholic Epistle of St. Peter presents us, through the details which we can find in the third chapter, an unique eschatology. The apostle Peter started, as we can see in the case with most of the books of the New Testament, from an actual situation, which appeared in the community to which he addresses: the apparent delay the Return of the Saviour, to which we add the death of the first generation of Christians, has generated a number of problems about the certainty and imminence of the Parousia. These problems have been speculated by those whom the Apostle Peter calls them "scoffers" (2 Pt 3,3) which desired to promote their own agenda. They, starting from the apparently immutable of the world, and aiming, mainly, the justification of their own immoral behavior, they spread doubt about The Second Coming of the Savior. In this situation, the apostle Peter, like a parent, feels compelled to intervene in order to "awaken remembrance" (2 Pt 3,1), to remind the Christians some truths that they already knew, but under the influence of the scoffers, they began to have doubts about those issues.

My work is divided into three main parts, starting with an introduction and ending with conclusions. The core work of the work is the analyse of the fragments from Epistle 2 Peter from an eschatological theological point of view, with emphasis on the third chapter of the Epistle.

**The second chapter**, which is entitled "Paternity of Epistle 2 Peter - paternity of the petrine eschatology " is the isagogical component of the paper, where I have tried explaining the obvious similarities that exist between the Epistle 2 Peter and other materials, particularly Epistle Jude, intending by this analysis to prove that the eschatology which we discover in the Epistle 2 Peter is a Petrine eschatology, because the eschatology of the Epistle 2 Peter can be understood as a Petrine eschatology only if the Epistle 2 Peter is recognized as an Epistle wrote by Apostle Peter.

The hypotheses formulated over time oscillates from one extreme to another: a) some scholars, the largest party, support the priority of Epistle Jude, from which was inspired the pseudo-author of the Epistle 2 Peter. b) On the other hand, there is the party wich supports the priority of Epistle 2 Peter, from wich was inspired the author of Jude, forming a kind of summary of it. c) And other researchers argue the independence of both letters, explaining the similarities that exist between them by using some common sources.

The conclusion of the analysis of these theories, these similarities, and that is probably the best explanation of them is the one that claims that the authors of the two Epistles had based their writings on a common source, made up of Jewish tradition, apostolic catechesis, but also from a number of formulations, hymns and liturgical and dogmatic expressions, wich were circulating as an verbal tradition, and wich were strewn among the Christian community.

**In the third chapter**, entitled " The contribution of Epistle 1 Peter to shaping the Petrine eschatology", is a exegetico - theological analysis of the few passages from the Epistle 1 Peter, where we can identify elements of eschatology.

From Epistle of 1 Peter we learn that Parousia or second coming of Christ is the main event and the border between two worlds: the earthly and heavenly. Parusia will mark the change of the current state of the world and will mark the beginning of next. Through death man passes into a new state of being, a state characterized by a continuous and conscious expectation of reward moment, up to The Final judgment. The soul continues to live even after death, in the fullness of its functions, being able to receive the Gospel message. After death, man passes through the filter of judgment, which will mean the punishment of sinners, and the reward of the believers. The Epistle 1 Peter proves the judgment of all, both the living

and the dead and the existence of eternal life after bodily death, but at the same time states unequivocally, the reality and imminence of Parusia (1 Pt 4,7).

**The fourth chapter**, which is the most extensive part, entitled " The Eschatology of Epistle 2 Peter" analyzes, in exegetico-theological terms, the eschatological material from the Epistle 2 Peter.

The apostle Peter is forced to bring solving to some problems in communities of which he addresses, some problem generated by the apparent delay of Parusia, coupled with the transition to the Lord of the early Christians. The moment was speculated by the adversaries of the Apostle, which he calls them scoffers and false prophets, who twisted the truths related to the Parusia and universal judgment.

In this situation Apostle Peter, in an exceptional syllogism, dismantles the alleged arguments they brought for denial of the Parusia, and then he offers his own arguments, to restore the true teaching among the faithful.

The first step in this process is the certification of the Parusia by understanding, in an eschatological dimension, of the three great moments in human history, moments that represented God's intervention in the world to punish the sinners. These events are presented in the second chapter of the Epistle 2 Peter. The first big event is invoking the episode of the punish of the angels who sinned, episode certifying God's judgment on sinners, even if they were angels. The second big event analyzed by the Apostle Peter is the Deluge, the diluvian event, that the author sees as a prototype of the eschatological judgment. And the third example used by the Apostle Peter in his syllogism to prove the reality of divine judgment focuses on the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, judgment that the author interprets as a foreshadowing of the final judgment. The conclusion of these three examples is given towards the end of the second chapter, where the author will emphasize, in verses 9-10, the punishment of the unjust on Judgment Day.

These three great moments are interpreted by the author in a "fire-water" formula that gives the eschatological dimensions to these events.

In the third chapter of the Epistle 2 Peter we discover a vast syllogism constructed by the apostle Peter in proving the reality and certainty of the Parusia. In the first instance, the author analyzes the arguments used by the false prophets to deny Parusia, in order to show to the Christians that the true intention of these contestants of the Parusia is the justification of their own immoral lifestyle, and which, naturally, implies the denial of the Parusia and the final judgment.

In the construction of this syllogism to prove the reality and certainty of Parusia apostle Peter, author of the Epistle 2 Peter, relies on four arguments: Scripture, history of the word, God's eternity, and God's long-suffering. The certainty of the Parusia is maintained throughout Scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament, a fact that Peter wants to remind to its readers. New Testament writers often turned to the Old Testament history to highlight a certain thing; So did the Savior Jesus Christ on several occasions (ex. Lk 11.29 to 32; 17.26 to 32). In the same manner, the apostle Peter calls the Old Testament history of the world in his apology for Parusia. Then Apostle wants to remind its readers a fundamental truth: God's perspective on time is much different from that of man, therefore God, who is eternal, reports differently to time compared to humans, so God's eternity is the third argument of the apostle Peter. And the fourth argument of the apostle Peter, an argument which is, an actual explanation of the apparent delay of the Parusia, reminds us that the reason for the postponement of the Parusia is the long-suffering of God to sinners.

A feature of the Epistle 2 Peter regarding eschatology is the mention of fire as an transfigured agent of the world and the material universe (2 Pt 3,10,12). The whole existence will be purified by fire. The proof that this fire is not a devastating, but a purifying fire is the fact that, after everything will be burnt, the world will form a reorganized "new heavens and new earth" (2 Pt 3:13), a new world, spiritual purified, which will have as main feature "habitation of righteousness". This world is the world of the just ones. Certainly, the fire about 2 Peter speaks will be a spiritual one, a divine energy that will have the ability to transform the current state of existence of the universe in an spiritual one, renewed. The practical consequence deduced by the author from the reality and the certainty of the Parusia is the urgent need of holiness and godliness life, which is required to the genuine Christians (2 Pt 3.11, 14.17 to 18). The exegetico-theological analysis of this fragment tries to clarify several details that Epistle 2 Peter brings to us: the original and correct version of the text, the different variants of it that we have today, and the interpretation of the text: the time of the fire, the size of the conflagration and especially, the effects of the purifying fire. The result of this great process of transfiguration of the world is described by the words "new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

Once the reader Epistle 2 Peter was entrusted of the certainty and reality of Parusia (v 10), after discovering even some details on how it will produce (v 10-12), after learning of events that will accompany the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and after learning that the world will continue in another form of existence (v 13), through the details he discovers in the final part of Chapter 3, which includes a series of advices addresses to those the apostle

called "beloved" , the reader discovers the consequences of knowing these eschatological details.

Knowing these details entails a number of consequences that translate into how a true Christian behaves from now, after knowing all these details. Living eschatological expectation, Christian stands up to misinterpretations of the false prophets, and by working to his own salvation, "he grows in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (v 18).

The fragment 2 Pt 3.14-18 contains a number of advices which are the consequences of all that the apostle Peter stated until now. Their analysis will outline to us the eschatology which we discover in the book.

The End of the Epistle 2 Peter summarizes the central idea of the whole letter. On the one hand, readers must guard so as not to fall prey to false prophets, and no to stray from the path they have started and they were strengthened, and secondly, they must grow in grace and in knowledge of Jesus Christ, that is the Christian teaching, always having as main target eternal life in the afterlife (2 Pt 3.17 to 18).

**In conclusion** I emphasized the contribution that the Epistles 1 Peter, and especially the Epistle 2 Peter, bring to the shaping of the eschatology teaching. From The Epistle 1 Peter we learn that Parusia of Jesus Christ will mark the change of the current state of existence and the beginning of the next one; life continues after biological death through immortality of the souls; and the universal judgment will contain the entire existence. The eschatological issues of the Epistle of 2 Peter are the most important contribution of the theology of the Apostle Peter to the New Testament theology. An important element from the picture of Parusia is the judgment of all man, and particularly those sinners, and we believe that the certainty of The judgment plays an important role in proving the reality and certainty of the Parusia. Therefore the author presents, in the second chapter of the Epistle 2 Peter, first, the certainty of the universal judgment, as evidence of certainty of the Parusia. Relying on the arguments presented in the third chapter of the Epistle, the apostle Peter stated with certainty the reality of the Parusia (2 Pt 3:10); and provides some details about the event. A feature of the letter regarding the eschatology, is the mention of fire as an changing agent of the world and of the material univers (2 Pt 3,10,12). Knowing all these eschatological details entails a number of consequences, that translate into how a true Christian behave from now on.



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