

# FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY

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# CHAPTER 1

## REVELATION

### IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The divine plan of salvation begins with Creation: God created the world from nothing, brought creatures into being, and gave each one of them unique characteristics. In this chapter, we will study how God reveals himself via creation and how, on the basis of this first manifestation, he communicates with mankind by means of his intervention in history.

#### I. Revelation and the Word of God

In the Old Testament, there is no specific term or concept that corresponds to revelation. Yet, there are several ways employed to make reference to God's intervention in human history. Among them, the term that most clearly represents a revelation of God to man is, the *divine speech*, that is, the word of Yahweh.<sup>1</sup>

*Word* in the Hebrew language is *debar*, or *dabar*. Its origins are uncertain; its corresponding verbal root could indicate the idea of "being behind of" and "push," or "to express what is inside" and so would mean "to talk" (and think), as well as "to produce."<sup>2</sup>

The word *debar* in the Old Testament has a broader meaning than our term *word*. Sometimes it means a locution that expresses an idea, a thought. At other times, it means either the thing to which that locution refers or to an action or an event. For instance, *dibre Selomo*

(cf. 1 Kgs 11: 41) does not mean “the words of Solomon” but “the acts or works of Solomon.”

The word has, therefore, its own efficacy, not only to signify—i.e., to make known, etc. (*noetic value*)—but sometimes it also has power to carry out what it means (*dynamic power*). Examples of this double dimension of the word in the Old Testament are the blessings and curses, which, once they have been pronounced, have a sort of efficacy of their own. They cannot be retracted (cf. Gen 27: 33–35; Jos 6: 26 related to 1 Kgs 16: 34).<sup>3</sup>

In the Greek translation of the Septuagint, *debar* is sometimes translated as *logos* and sometimes as *rhéma*. The first principally means the noetic value; the second, the dynamic value of the word because, besides meaning “word,” *rhéma* means “thing.” The original Greek text of the New Testament uses both *logos* and *rhéma* to express the Hebrew idea of *debar*. On the other hand, the Latin text of the Vulgate occasionally translates *rhéma* as *res*, “thing” (cf. Gen 18: 14), and at other times it is translated as *verbum*, “word” (cf. Lk 1: 37).

This double dimension of *word* is eminently shown in the Old Testament, when it deals with the Word of God (*Debar Yahvé*, translated to Greek as *ho logos tou Theou* or *tó rhema tou Theou*). So, we read in Isaiah 55: 10–11, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

The Word of God is revealing; it communicates knowledge to men. It is also effective, which is to say, the Word of God influences human history. It is the cause of concrete events, conducting history and, moreover, it carries out the history of Israel as the people of God.

Divine Revelation is united to the Word of God in the Old Testament in such manner as to make the rest of the divine manifestations (theophanies, dreams, etc.) ways of transmitting the Word.<sup>4</sup>