

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov

The Book of Revelations: *a Commentary*



Izvor Collection



P R O S V E T A

Translated from the French
Original title: « APPROCHE DE LA CITÉ CÉLESTE
COMMENTAIRES DE L' APOCALYPSE »

Original edition:

© 1989, Éditions Prosveta S.A., ISBN 2-85566-476-4

© 1991, Éditions Prosveta S.A., ISBN 2-85566-491-8

© 2000, Prosveta Inc. Canada., ISBN 1-895978-23-8

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Prosveta S.A. – 83600 Fréjus (France)

ISSN 0763-2738

ISBN 978-2-8184-0344-0

Digital edition: 978-2-8184-0381-5

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The Book of Revelation

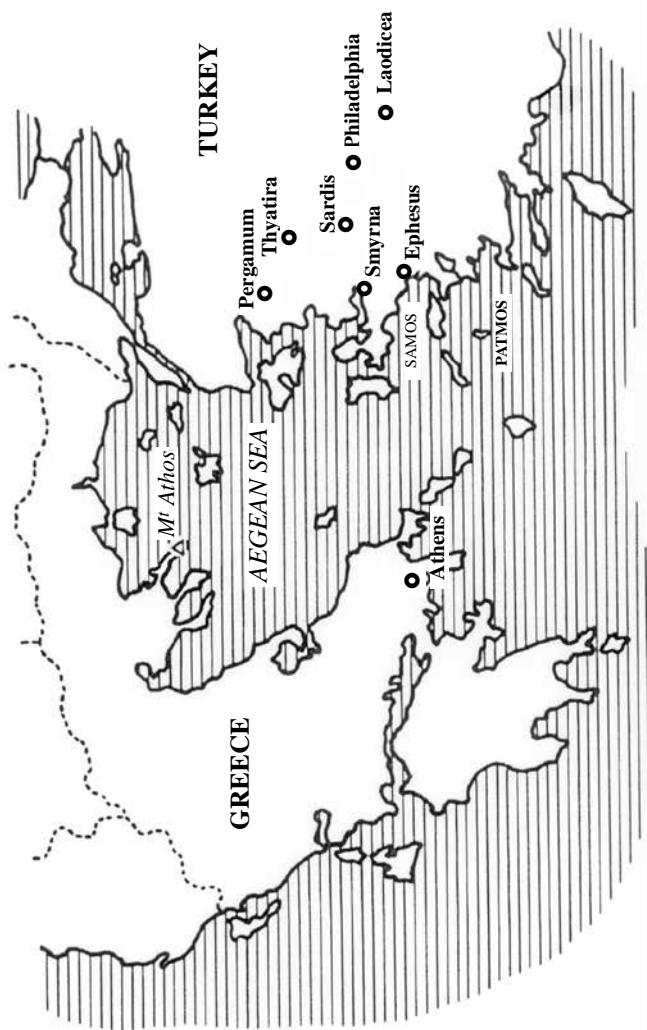
a Commentary



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P R O S V E T A



Map of Greece and Asia Minor
showing principal places mentioned in the text

Chapter One

The island of Patmos

I want to take you with me today as I go back to visit a place that won my heart and the hearts of all those who were with me when we first visited it together. Come with me; let me take you a long way from here, and let us visit this blessed place, the island of Patmos.

Although Patmos is a Greek island, it is much closer to Turkey than to Greece. The only access is by boat and the trip from Athens takes nearly thirteen hours. Patmos is a tiny island, a mere dot on the map, but its spiritual importance makes it immense, and it is this immensity that we had set out to explore. Our visit was a pilgrimage, you see, a pilgrimage to the place where St John had lived and wrote his gospel and the book of *Revelation*.

As you approach the island, the first thing that strikes you is the immaculate whiteness of the houses, a whiteness that is all the more dazzling set against the blueness of sky and sea. Some of the island's little villages are built by the sea. Others,

like Khora, are up in the hills, and it is there, in Khora, that we find the monastery of St John the evangelist and the cave of the Apocalypse*. In the course of the centuries, many buildings have grown up round the cave in which St John lived, and it is these buildings that constitute the monastery. They include the basilica of St John the Divine**, built on the ruins of a temple dedicated to Artemis; a chapel dedicated to St Christodoulos, the founder of the 12th century monastery; and many other churches and chapels as well as the monks' cells, a refectory, a library and so on. The whole complex, which can be seen from every point on the island, is surrounded by the fortifications built in the 17th century, when it was necessary to defend the place against the frequent incursions of pirates. It is an impressive sight.

The only entrance to the monastery is at the top of a short flight of steps cut out of the rock. Corridors, inner courtyards and flower gardens flanked by cells and chapels lead from the entrance to another flight of about thirty steps, also cut out of the rock. At the bottom of these steps are still more chapels and, finally, we come to the chapel of St Anne which gives directly on to the cave of

* The cave is named after the old name for the book of Revelation

** Divine meaning theologian, from the Greek name for St John: John the Theologue.

the Apocalypse. This little chapel was the first to be built, and Christodoulos dedicated it to St Anne in honour of the mother of Mary (Jesus' mother) and of Anne, the mother of Alexius I Comnenos, the Byzantine Emperor of the period*.

The cave of the *Apocalypse* itself is neither very big (it can contain only a few people at a time) nor very high (six or seven feet). We were shown a hollow in the rock, which is traditionally believed to have served as a pillow on which St John rested his head, and above this hollow is a cross which the Saint is said to have engraved in the rock. There is also another hollow, on which he is said to have leaned for support when he stood up, for he was already very old.

One part of the rock is very straight and smooth with a kind of ledge, and we were told that this was where his disciple Prokhoros wrote the gospel to St John's dictation. In the arched roof of the cave is a triple opening, which is said to have been made by the thunderbolt that fell when the voice of the *Revelation* was heard; this triple crack in the rock is considered to be a symbol of the Trinity. The cave also contains several sacred objects and icons with lamps burning in front of them, and on the walls are various inscriptions in Greek: 'In the beginning

* It was the Emperor Alexius I Comnenos who gave Christodoulos the island of Patmos.

was the Word'; 'It was here, at Patmos, that these things happened' and 'This place of dread'.

The priest who showed us round pointed out innumerable treasures everywhere: magnificently illuminated manuscripts, relics, icons and all kinds of sacred objects, and when he related many details of St John's life – based on the testimony of some of the saint's disciples here, at Patmos – he was in such an extraordinary state of inspiration and rapture, he hardly knew what was happening to him. He was quite radiant.

I visited the cave twice to meditate and be in communion with the spirit of St John and was much struck by the quite extraordinary quality of the silence. After two thousand years and in spite of the countless visitors that have been in and out, nothing has been able to wipe out the fluidic traces left by St John the evangelist on those rocks. I could sense so many things in this cave, for it is a truly sacred, truly pure, divine place. I hope that you will all have the opportunity to visit it one day.

In the first chapter of *Revelation*, St John himself tells us why he was at Patmos. '*I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*'

During the persecution of Christians in the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian, St John

was arrested in Ephesus and, accompanied by his disciple Prokhoros, sent in chains to the island of Patmos. Tradition has it that while they were at sea a violent storm arose and the sailors were hard put to it to keep the ship on course because of the huge waves. Suddenly, to the horror of the passengers, a young soldier fell overboard, and the boy's father was in such despair that he tried to throw himself over the side, wanting to join his son in death; the other passengers had great difficulty in holding him back. In the midst of all this emotion, only St John remained unperturbed; in fact, he seemed almost to be pleased about the accident. They asked him, 'Doesn't the boy's death mean anything to you? Can't you do something to help us?' 'Why don't you ask your own gods?' St John replied. 'Perhaps they would save him.' But they replied, 'We have been imploring them for hours already in vain'. So St John began to pray and, within a few minutes, the boy appeared on the surface of the water and was rescued, unharmed by his ordeal. Everybody was astounded. They surrounded St John, thanking him and asking him to forgive them for putting him in chains. Then they released him from his bonds and treated him with great respect.

When St John disembarked at Patmos he was taken to live with the family of a man called Myron, and while living in his house he drove out the evil spirits that had taken possession of

Myron's children and did so much good to all around him that his renown spread throughout the island and more and more people came to consult him. Gradually, he began to talk to them about Jesus, to tell them who he was and what he, himself, had witnessed as his disciple, and many of those who heard him were converted. In this way, Myron's house became the first meeting place for the Christians of Patmos.

Yes, but there was also a sanctuary on Patmos dedicated to Apollo, and the growing influence of St John enraged the priests of Apollo, for their temple was soon abandoned by the population. At the head of these priests was a dangerous black magician called Kynops, and the priests decided that Kynops should get rid of St John by sending a very powerful demon to attack him. But St John wrestled with the demon and defeated it. Then Kynops sent a second, more powerful demon, accompanied by a third, whose task was to report to him on the outcome of the struggle, and when this second demon was defeated in the same way, Kynops decided to confront St John himself.

Accordingly, he set out and found St John preaching to a crowd of people. Interrupting him, Kynops began to question a boy in the crowd: 'Where is your father?' he asked. 'He's dead', replied the boy. 'He was lost at sea.' Turning to a man standing by, Kynops asked, 'And you,

there: where is your son?' 'He's dead', replied the man. 'He committed suicide by throwing himself overboard.' Others said the same thing; they all had members of their family who had drowned accidentally or on purpose. Turning to St John, Kynops challenged him to bring all those drowned men up from the bottom of the sea. To this St John replied that his mission was not to raise the dead but to preach the gospel of Jesus. Kynops, delighted to have the chance to show his superiority, then performed some magic rites and brought out of the sea a semblance of each of those who had drowned. The people, taken in by these sorcerer's tricks, believed in Kynops's power again and, spurred on by him, turned and attacked St John, who fell to the ground, grievously injured. Then they all went home, very satisfied with the day's work, convinced that St John was dead. During the night, however, the disciple Prokhoros came to where St John was lying and heard his voice saying, 'Prokhoros, go and tell Myron that I am still alive and that I'll be coming back to the house. Everything's going to be all right.' When Myron heard the good news he was astonished and delighted.

It was not long before the war with Kynops began all over again, and it went on for a long time. Then, one day, a crowd of people dragged St John to the beach, where Kynops was again performing

his magic rites in order to prove, once and for all, that he was more powerful than St John. St John prayed and, when Kynops dived into the sea, saying that he was going to bring back the semblances of the dead men, he disappeared. For three days many people waited on the beach hoping to see him coming out of the sea, but in vain: Kynops never came up again. St John finally persuaded them, by his words and his attitude, to accept the teaching of Christ and to go home quietly. Today, people will point out a rock in the sea which has three parts and will tell you that they are the petrified head, trunk and limbs of the sorcerer Kynops.

Not many years after these events, the Emperor Domitian was assassinated, and his successor, the Emperor Nerva, proved to be more tolerant towards the Christians. Under his rule the persecutions came to an end and St John was allowed to leave Patmos and return to Ephesus. Of course, by this time, St John had enlightened, helped and healed so many of the inhabitants of the island that they had become deeply attached to him and did not want him to leave. They begged and implored him to stay, but he told them, 'I must go. There are other brothers and sisters who are waiting to hear the Good News', and although they continued to implore him, he was adamant. At last, when they realized that they could not prevent him from going, they asked him to write something for

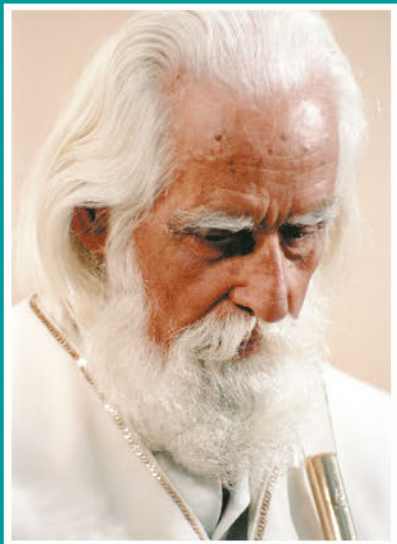
them before he went, something that would be a reminder of the Good News he had brought them. This St John agreed to do and, after several days of prayer and fasting, he began to dictate his gospel to Prokhoros: *'In the beginning was the Word...'* followed by the book of Revelation. When this was done, the inhabitants of Patmos understood that he had given them all they needed and they let him leave.

Our guide at Patmos told us that, at the end, when St John felt that death was near, he asked two or three of his disciples to dig a big hole in the ground. Then he got into the hole and told them to fill it up with soil as far as his chest and to come back the next day. When they came back St John was still alive. He told them, 'Bury me up to my shoulders and come back tomorrow'. The next day he was still alive, and he asked them to add a little more soil. When they came back the following day he was no longer there. Of course, this must be just a legend. There are a great many more or less legendary stories about St John, which are said to have been handed down in oral or written form by his disciples, and I was told that some of them can be seen in certain libraries in Greece. I would be very interested to learn some of the details they talk about.

Throughout the centuries, ever since the earliest days of the Church, there has always been

a tradition at Patmos that takes its inspiration from the teaching of St John. It was because of this tradition that, in the 18th century, a school was founded not far from the monastery. This school, known as Patmias, has enriched Christianity by producing numbers of churchmen, theologians and thinkers, some of whom were very remarkable people.

Patmos is such a magnificent place that I would have liked the Greek Brotherhood to have a piece of land there so that they could go and stay on the island from time to time. What exceptional conditions they would have had for prayer and meditation and a brotherly life together! And how much they would have enjoyed growing melons and all kinds of fruit trees! In fact, the taxi driver who drove us to the monastery owned several plots of land on the island; I noticed one of them in particular on the top of a hill, which he said he was willing to sell us. It had a wonderful view of the sunrise, and you could see a number of other islands in the distance, as well as the monastery and the harbour with all its little houses. Patmos is not so very far from Athens, but unfortunately it takes a long time to get there and the journey cannot be made by air. The only way to get there is by boat: thirteen hours there and thirteen hours back again, and if the sea is choppy – as it was when we were there – it is quite an expedition.



The distinguished philosopher and spiritual Master, Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov came to France in 1937. Although his work deals with many aspects of initiatic science, he makes it clear that: 'Each one of us must undertake his own self-development, but only if his goal is not solely for himself, but for the good of the collectivity. Then, the collectivity becomes a brotherhood. A brotherhood is a collectivity where true unity reigns, because by working on himself, each individual is also consciously working for the good of the whole.'

'A great many scholars have given us their interpretation of *The Revelation of John*, but, to my mind, not one of them has ever understood what it is really and truly about. Why is this? There are several different reasons, but the main reason is that they have failed to recognize its essential message as a description of the elements and processes that are common to our own inner life and the life of the cosmos. They have been more concerned with trying to identify the historical characters, countries and events portrayed in it. As a result, a lot of nonsense has been written about the four horsemen, the beast with seven heads and ten horns, the woman with the crown of stars, the great whore and the new Jerusalem.

'I too have interpreted some passages from *The Revelation* for you, but you must realize that what I have told you cannot be of any benefit to you if you have never worked or made an effort to acquire the true foundations of the spiritual life. For it is not enough to understand all these symbols intellectually; you have to be able to make them come alive within you. As long as this preliminary work of purification, self-control and inner ascent has not been carried out, the marvels of *The Revelation* will remain a closed book to you.'

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov

ISBN 978-2-8184-0344-0



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www.prosveta.fr/en
international@prosveta.com