

The Visions of Joa Bolendas¹

An Introduction

Robert Sardello

This work is a remarkable collection of very unusual records of conversations and a journal of visions, telling of the connections between an individual, here called Joa Bolendas, and spirit beings who have been appearing to her since 1957. These beings range from angels to Mary, Joseph of Arimathea, Jesus, unnamed saints, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and several individuals that Joa Bolendas has known who have died. I know practically nothing about this woman; I have never met her, nor have I corresponded with her. I first heard about her from my friend and colleague, Therese Schroeder-Sheker, who does know her, has visited her several times in Switzerland, and first told me about this remarkable woman in 1990. What most impressed me – and the reason I am involved at all – is that Joa had told Therese that it was *most* important that these records be published in America. Therese conveyed this appeal to me with such intensity and urgency that I immediately said I would be more than happy to do whatever I could to help. This brief introduction constitutes a continuation of my promise.

First, let us try to clarify the genre of these writings. They do not belong to what these days is known as channeled information. There are indications in the writings themselves that Joa is in a completely awake state during the visions and conversations. Her body is not taken over by spirit beings. She retains her own voice, and the voices of those with whom she communicates are apparently experienced as quite independent of her own psychic being. These spirit beings cannot be heard by anyone around Joa when they manifest, and others also cannot see what she sees. Nor do these conversations belong to the related realm of mediumism. A medium, or a seer, reports only what takes place within her or his own inner psychic being, even though this is more than mere subjective reporting and usually involves a capacity to sense in more subtle ranges of perception than are available to most people. Mediums report what they see. What is seen, however, does not in turn operate as an interactive partner, adding, modifying, or correcting the medium's experience.

These conversations and visions are also different from initiation experiences, in which the initiate goes through a long physical, psychic, spiritual, and moral training that makes it possible to enter other realms and modes of experience completely unfamiliar to ordinary experience. Contact with spiritual realms and beings achieved through initiatory experience must then be translated into ordinary human terms and ideas. The boundaries among these types of experience are not fixed; neither, however, should they be confused and considered basically the same. The experiences reported here most clearly belong to the realm of visionary experiences, which

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differs in important respects from any of the above-mentioned forms of spirit communication.

The visionary mode of experiencing other realms is quite unusual in the modern age. The figures that appear and speak do so in a way that is similar, or analogous, to ordinary perceptual experience. In several places, Joa Bolendas begins, for example, with brief descriptions of what one of these beings looks like, is wearing, or how tall it is. On the other hand, the visions are not at all limited by the laws of physical reality as we know them; she sometimes describes a mist or a veil that covers the entire inner space of a church, or sees the extension of a being ranging from one continent to another. The main question is whether these appearances are visions or hallucinations, and this is the same as asking whether what is seen originates from within or from without. The difference between hallucinations and visions is that in the former the subject involved is a distorted sensation of physical reality, whereas in the latter the subject exists in a world other than physical reality. The difference cannot be comprehended by saying that in visions something “real” is experienced, whereas in hallucinations something not “real” is perceived. If I were there with Joa in a church in Switzerland, and she was experiencing a vision, and I could not see nor hear what was going on, it would not be justifiable to say that she was hallucinating and that what she saw was not real. Perhaps she sees things that I am not capable of seeing. Further, the visions recorded in these writings lack characteristics that typically accompany hallucinations – namely, a severe change in the experience of one’s own body, a confusion of subject–object boundaries in which the subject fuses with the environment, a destabilizing of everything being sensed, the stoppage of time, a boundlessness of space, and the disintegration of the order of experiential connections. In the auditory realm, in hallucinations one hears voices, but not the voices of people speaking. Even when the hallucinating person can identify the voices in a general way as male or female, loud or soft, clear or scarcely distinguishable, it is the voice that presses in, as if from all sides. Hallucinatory voices also typically deride, persecute, and command. There is no indication of any sort in the body of the text that the freedom of the person receiving these visions has been interfered with in any way. A great deal of care and discipline is displayed in the writing and in the ongoing records kept by this individual for nearly forty years.

Finally, we may consider if this writing is in the genre of imaginal dialogues – that is to say, the conversations have been created solely out of imagination. Perhaps the conversations are a variation of what Jung spoke of as active imagination, a procedure of either taking an image from a dream or fantasy life or of conjuring up an image and then initiating a conversation with an imaginal figure as if it were real. The primary reason that this is probably not the case here is that in such imaginal conversations the images do not cross the boundaries of their own world and intermingle with outer reality; their reality remains clearly psychic. Visions are not so clearly a part of an inner world. Some of the visions here, for example, take the form of Joa Bolendas seeing a halo of light around a priest saying mass or around a minister preaching a sermon; and such appearances, as described in the text, seem to occur spontaneously.

Still, searching through all of the possibilities, it must be stated that there is no way to prove conclusively or even to say very much about the reality of the beings who form the content of

these visions. The intention of going through these possibilities, in fact, is not to attempt such proof. Rather, the aim is to make some positive suggestions concerning how to approach such a text. First, I suggest that the organ that perceived these visions is not the physical eye, but rather the heart. Such a suggestion is made, not to evoke a sympathetic response, but to indicate that this body of work is best read by engaging the heart, in order to see what is actually present. Moreover, the text itself can serve to educate one into the reality of the heart as an organ of perception; it resists a purely mental engagement, and remains forever closed to that point of view.

The suggestion that one approach this text through the heart and that by doing so one also develops the capacities of the heart, is not a call to sentimentality. The heart evoked here is the *thinking heart*, not emotional response. The first page of the text tells us something about what is needed for a proper relation to this kind of writing. Joa Bolendas is being spoken to, according to the text, by one who has risen from the dead; Joa is being instructed about the reception of visions, as are we who read the visions:

*Revelations have another wavelength.
The words, images, sounds (the hymns) come
over an extended period of time – with great intervals –
which demand a lot of energy from those who receive them.
Devotion and concentration are needed.
Whenever someone receives revelations, the brain
works more quickly and the heart beats more slowly.*

The particular form of visions recorded in this work are referred to as *revelations*. This designation indicates, *I believe*, that nothing was done on the part of the recipient to make these visions occur. They began spontaneously, and are not the result of any particular inner training or practice beyond a devout practice of prayer and a sincere belief in God and the revelations of the Old and New Testaments. That these visions are termed revelations does not imply that they have the same status as the revealed word of God, or biblical texts; it does mean that the initiation of the experiences was on the side of the spiritual worlds and that these experiences are evidently intended to increase and renew the connections between human beings and the spiritual worlds. The significant aspect of the above statement, however, concerns the conditions under which the visions occur – that is, devotion and extended concentration.

The attitude of devotion belongs to the capacities of the heart. Devotion means constant and fully engaged attention, such as, for example, the physical organ of the heart itself constantly gives to the circulation of the blood through the body. The heart, unlike any other muscle of the body, never ceases its work, even for a brief moment. We are thus led to conclude that these visions did not occur outside of the important context of a life lived in a constant attitude of love. It is far-fetched, I am sure, to imagine that these visions occurred to one who lives a life forgetful of the divine order of all of creation, needing to be reminded periodically by jolts from the heavens. These visions are more like momentary episodes in an ongoing life of dedication to communion with the spiritual worlds. Thus, the indication that concentration is a condition for the reception

of the visions is not limited to the actual moments of the visions, but also signifies a life orientation. From the text alone, we do not learn much concerning this extremely important context, but it seems crucial to be able to imagine the kind of life that must go along with these experiences, to be able to visualize that they are not episodic intrusions, but episodic concentrations within a life dedicated to bridging the seen and the unseen.

The passage quoted also hints at the specific alteration of attention needed for the reception of visions. More important, for the reader of these documents, this same passage indicates something of what is required for a right understanding of the work. The reader must recognize that reception becomes possible when “the brain works more quickly and the heart beats more slowly.” If the text is read primarily by means of the brain – that is, through mental capacities alone – very little will be gained. A speeding up of the brain implies that another level of mental work is going on, a level that is bypassed entirely when the text is read in the ordinary way. In practice, if the text is read in that manner, extraordinary nuances are read as ordinary words, and their deeper significance goes unnoticed. To properly understand this sort of text, we are effectively told that the heart must beat more slowly. Reading must occur at a different pace, or different rhythm, than is usually asked for in reading. In fact, the key to benefiting spiritually from spending time with the text is found in the way the words are savored and felt, in the way readers allow themselves to be touched by what is said. If we approach revelation as new information, frustration follows. If we, on the other hand, approach the text with the possibility that untouched levels of our being can be moved and new capacities awakened, then something entirely different results. I want to explore this difference in detail.

The Difference between Information and Transformation

In this age of information there is a very great danger that abstraction will effectively seal off the possibility of learning anything truly new. Such a statement sounds strange indeed, for it would seem that the whole idea of the information revolution is to make it possible to know, in a broader sphere, what was previously known only by a very few. The inherent deception, however, is that knowing new information has little to do with learning. Learning is the transformation of our body and soul and the vivifying of our spirit through the development of otherwise dormant capacities. Knowing more and more information only adds, in a cumulative fashion, to the stock of available facts at our disposal. Information allows us to become more clever, perhaps more inventive, even more practical in certain realms, but it does not help us to become more human, or to realize what it means to be human. The intent of information is power, and power has become coupled with speed.

One might argue that I have just conveyed information. Information certainly is involved, but here information does not do business on its own. Information serves as a medium through which other, more subtle qualities can find a habitation and expression in the world. And, in the visions of Joa Bolendas, the informational content is further reduced while subtle qualities of soul and spirit are increased. I am not suggesting here that information is of no value; it is a necessary medium, but the problem arises when, as Marshall McLuhan said, the medium becomes the mes-

sage. For example, the corporate head of Microsoft, the principal maker of computer software in the world, has tried to buy the rights to photograph all of the great art of the world in order to create a software program to display these paintings and other works of art on home computer screens. Such an achievement would make “information” available to vast numbers of people, but would this make art more available in the world? Would not these high-quality digital graphics increase the distribution of art that would remain otherwise largely unavailable? A most difficult question indeed. Answering in the affirmative neglects the fact that a work of art is not just a thing, even a beautiful thing; it neglects the reality of a work of art as having body, soul, and spirit. A work of art is a living being – not a human being, but more than a picture. A picture is the informational part of a work of art. I am not suggesting that the project of making digital reproductions of art is of no value; it has value as long as the makers of the product are clear that they are making only a certain version of art available – not the experience of viewing the paintings themselves. But, if this is not clearly stated, the result may be that art will become an abstraction; we may all *know* a great deal more about art, but it is likely that its transformative capacity will be curtailed. We are already in the habit of living with secondhand versions of things, which unfortunately leads to a basic incapacity to deal with the original. We want information *about* the spirit, but do not know what to do with its actual presence. What I feel urged to do, in a first gesture toward Joa Bolendas’s visions, is to struggle against the likelihood of their being approached as information, attempting to open up a space where they may be considered with a fresh attitude instead of our habitual mind-set.

Information has become so widespread that there is a strong tendency to approach things that are not so easily codified as if they should be mere data. If a reader takes up these writings of Joa Bolendas infected with an attitude of seeking information, there is nothing much to be learned. In a certain sense, these writings are not about the reality of spirit; they are rather living manifestations of spirit, and thus must be read through presence of soul and spirit. The informational content is minimal; the transformational value is enormous. But, if they are to become available for their transformative value, it is necessary to dwell with them and not approach them as simply ideas or facts.

The reader is advised to refrain from coming to this book with the same attitude with which one approaches other books. A reader ordinarily believes that a book is already finished, completed, and self-contained. Such technical reading assumes that through reading one can possess the content of a writing. In general today, writing has taken the place of speaking, and reading has taken the place of listening. This book, however, has to be heard, even though the hearing comes through the process of reading; and, further, one hears not just his or her own inner voice, but also the voice of the ineffable. The noisiness of the knowing mind, with all of its curiosity and questions, has to be stilled; the will to hear must supersede the will to know. In an attitude that wills to hear rather than to master, the reader manifests a willingness to be modified by what is heard. The understanding that the reader brings to the text, which enables one to read at all, is placed at risk; suddenly we are placed in a space of unknowing receptivity. This kind of reading takes place between the familiar and the strange, the known and the unknown. One opens to the possibility of being transformed rather than informed.

What does it mean to dwell in the presence of these words, these visions? Whereas the aim of gathering information is to increase a sense of our own power, the aim of reading something communicated as a vision is to yield to its power. Here we become more by becoming less; we are required to grow beyond our own egotism in order to learn. We have to give up the expectation of gaining something for ourselves from the text, entering its being as much as possible, and what may then happen is an increase, a development, of our own inner being, which is far greater than mere ego. Having done so, we may well be unable to say very much about what we have learned, but we experience in a most immediate way that we are different as a result of having relinquished, for a while, our own special interests. We are more open, more present to the moment, less self-involved, closer to a true impression of the spiritual worlds; new, inner capacities can be felt, in which we sense ourselves as more than we ever imagined we could be. Of course, these newfound capacities can also be used in an egotistical manner. We can begin to feel special, gifted, and spiritually astute. Thus, to allow ourselves to be formed by an original document of the sort presented in this series of visions also carries an attendant responsibility. The responsibility involves – in perhaps small and imperceptible ways, as far as the rest of the world is concerned – continuing in life with the ever-present challenge of gradually releasing the acquisitive act of wanting to add to our store of information. To relinquish this form of greed is not the end of learning, but rather its true beginning.

Observations Concerning the Manner of the Visions

The journal of Joa Bolendas contains entries from 1957 through 1990, and continues this journal writing into the present. The conversations with spiritual beings concerning the creation of the universe and the Old and New Testaments are not dated. Visions are presented without interpretation.

I would like to draw attention to the particular quality of the relationship between Joa and the spiritual beings who come to her. On her part, there is a deep attitude of reverence and respect, but she does not abdicate her own personality. In the conversations there is a remarkable air of what can only be called an equality of relationship. For example, as a member of the Reformed church, Joa at first has a difficult time handling the many appearances of Mary. These appearances often take place in a Catholic church, and Joa comes to a point when she tells Mary that she will no longer visit this church as it causes her to struggle with her own beliefs. Mary then accuses Joa of betrayal. Joa answers: “Mary, I will not betray you! I will write down everything, about your love, your light and your greatness. I will not betray my church. I will betray no one. I only want to serve. Understand me – forgive me. Do not withdraw from us. Give me and all the others time. I beg you – forgive me!” Notice the strength in the conversation. Mary does not coddle this woman. On the other hand, Joa does not simply prostrate herself in submission either. She says she will not betray Mary, nor will she betray her church, and in fact will betray no one. This response indicates a truly free person, or, even better, a moment of becoming truly free. She discovers her freedom in speaking what she really wants – to serve –

and this is possible without betraying either Mary or the Protestant church.

Could the essence of such interactions between Joa and these many spiritual beings have to do with discovering that the spiritual worlds do not want anything from us beyond a free and completely open relationship with them, one in which we are exactly who we are, which requires putting aside all that we think we are? Joa at first thinks of herself as a member of the Protestant church, a church that says, “Christ must increase, Mary must decrease.” She discovers that she can love and honor Mary and still belong to this church, but now, for her, this has become a free association; this is not a matter of her thinking whatever she wants, in spite of what the church might hold. Something far deeper is involved, a deeper sense of what constitutes *church*. But, such an understanding of church cannot be arrived at by logical thought; rather, this comprehension is encompassed in the vision itself. Mary does not say that Joa betrays her by choosing the Protestant Church instead of devotion to her. The one word spoken by Mary, “Betrayal!” does not even indicate that it is Mary who feels’ betrayed. She could as well be indicating to Joa that to choose one, the church, over the other, Mary, is a self-betrayal of Joa herself; or it could indicate a betrayal of both Mary and the church, Mary speaks in a wonderfully objective manner; it is, I think, this objective way of speaking that makes possible Joa’s discovery of freedom; it is not given to her, for no one, not even a spiritual being of the highest rank, can give one freedom. Rather, Mary here speaks in a way that opens a space for the possibility of discovering true freedom. Further, as we read this section of the text, it becomes clear that this moment of discovery emerged from a larger context, a context of struggle, of trying to find words for experiences that do not yield easily to words, of discarding more and more of what one could say, and of finally speaking when one does not want to speak at all – a long process of distillation of the heart: “I tore out page after page from my notebooks and rewrote them again. It is simply so difficult to put into words one’s experiences with God. If only I could paint, maybe then I could pass on the visions in a better way – but that would be a never-ending task. I have taken so much out of the books about Mary and Holy Communion, but I can’t leave out everything, when God wants me to write it.”

The single instance described above shows the direct, frank, open form of the conversations between Joa Bolendas and spiritual beings, which is multiplied in many places throughout the text; it creates a tenor for the whole of the text. Joa, for the most part, says little, but her questions are direct, and sometimes a little argumentative. The spiritual beings always speak very directly, without elaboration or any rhetoric that could excite the personal imagination of the listener. The statements are almost oracular, so clearly stated and lacking in ambiguity that there is no need for any analysis. Nothing is presented in a convoluted manner; this is true even when quite esoteric notions are discussed. For example, in one conversation with an unnamed saint, the saint explains what is meant by Holy Communion. This figure instructs Joa to open her eyes, to see what is really before us when we are with another human being. At that moment, Joa sees the life energy of the person she was with the previous day: “And I ‘saw’ the same Hannes as yesterday, except that his body – his arms, legs, and head – was full of small rays of light, like small lines of light. The trunk of his body was darker than the other parts. I ‘saw’ an aura around his body consisting of thin, short, intensive rays of silver. And when Hannes spoke, all this light

was in movement – like active energy.” The saint is then able to go on and say that Holy Communion is the life of Christ. Here, there is no elaborate explanation of etheric bodies, astral bodies, and such. The most esoteric of topics is discussed with such immediacy that one does not even stop to think that what is being presented is out of the ordinary. The effect of this mode, this tenor, is that the spiritual worlds are experienced as being right here, united and one with our own world.

Whereas the effect of the tone of these visions is to unite us with the spiritual worlds, I do not intend to imply that this result is brought about by a deliberate use of a particular form of address. One never feels manipulated reading these visions. It must then be concluded that, if we only had eyes to see and ears to hear, we would, indeed, experience the spiritual worlds as all around us. By means of these visions recorded by Joa Bolendas, we may at least have an inkling of what this would be like. The journal and conversations have transformative power because of this immediacy of the reality of a spiritual universe, which is right here. Through a meditative reading of this work, it seems that sacred stories, angels, saints, and divine beings – realms that have, for some at least, been a matter of belief, even intense belief – suddenly come near – almost near enough to touch. This transformation comes about almost imperceptibly; what was previously more or less remote, becomes close. On the one hand, a more vivid insight into the nature of belief becomes apparent. Belief is like seeing something very far in the distance, knowing that it is indeed there, but not being able to get to it, as if an impenetrable veil spreads out in front of us and blocks our way to the objects believed in. As the reading of this text proceeds, it is as if this veil is gently lifted, and what we may have known as true all along in our heart is clarified, despite the confusions brought about through our mind. On the other hand, as belief is transformed, we must look carefully into the precise nature of this transformation. I do not think of it as a transformation into immediate perception, but rather as a transformation into a new way of knowing, a knowing that may best be called *faith*.

For those who approach these writings in an attitude of radical receptivity, belief can be transformed into faith. Belief and faith are often thought of as virtually the same, but whereas belief gives an indication of something beyond the veil, faith is a way of knowing; with belief we do not yet know, but with faith there is certainty. This certainty is, however, of a different type than that given when we apprehend something in the physical world through the senses, or when we grasp something in an inner way with our reason.

Faith is a much more intimate way of knowing; it is as if the senses and reason are circumvented in favor of a more direct connection with the heart and spirit. To *circumvent* means either to go around or to encompass; it is the latter that I think applies here. We are not asked to close our senses or to stop thinking while reading this material. Rather, faith is opened, which also produces an alteration of sensing and thinking; they become more capable, as if augmented by a new inner capacity.

Faith is something like a first level of higher ways of knowing. Joa Bolendas, it seems, was born with a high potential for this capacity, and it seems to have awakened through a dream that occurred when she was sixteen. In the introduction, we are told this dream:

In the middle of the night, men came walking on a stone path. They carried wooden poles, upon which were stone plates. On the plates was written: “Wake up, keep watch, and pray.” She did not understand the dream but simply put it into action. To “wake up” is to enter into faith as a mode of knowing, and the principle way of strengthening this capacity is through prayer. The intermediary act between faith and prayer is keeping watch. Faith can go back to sleep, and usually does so in the particularly devastating sense that we do not even know we have fallen asleep. Joa is quite aware of this possibility, for there are times in the conversations when she is praying but realizes there is for her no living force in her words. This plight causes her severe agitation.

What do we learn concerning the character of prayer from these visions? Many times in the text we observe that a vision begins while Joa prays. But we can also feel, from the whole tone of the visions, that Joa is always praying; prayer is a state of the soul, not merely an external act. When she sometimes finds herself praying as an external act, she is merely talking to herself. Prayer, it seems, is the soul’s mode of conversation with the spirit. It is not performed primarily with the lips nor with the mind, but is more like an action of the soul’s breathing. As such, prayer has its own particular quality of rhythm. At one point, in a conversation with Mary about the Hail Mary prayer, Joa says to Mary that she finds this prayer decidedly uninteresting. Mary’s reply is that the rhythm of the prayer is exactly right; and she says to Joa that her questioning of the prayer in this manner hurt God. Thus, to pray, it seems, involves establishing a rhythm in the life of the soul so that it becomes capable of spirit consciousness. Prayer is a way of exercising the capacities of the soul. And prayer is a completely free human act.

What could Mary be referring to when she says that the rhythm of the Hail Mary prayer is exactly right? First, it seems to mean that we are taken out of our established life rhythms, which have accumulated as habits over the years. We freely allow ourselves to be set within a different kind of movement and a different kind of space, which follows laws that are different from the laws of the physical world. For example, the rhythm of prayer decidedly partakes of a much slower movement than the events, experiences, and occurrences of ordinary waking life. If, for example, these visions are not approached in a prayerful attitude, then we will find our reading advancing too quickly. The rhythm of prayer thus refers first to its own particular time, which is very different than linear or clock time. Then, a second aspect of rhythm requires that every word is in its right place. When Mary says that the rhythm of the Hail Mary is exactly right, she is also referring to the particular placement of the words, which is to say that time is also a place; get the right timing and you find yourself in a different place. If we always pray by making up our own prayers, seeking for something from the spiritual worlds, it is likely that our timing will be off, and we will find ourselves exactly where we started. Formulated prayer thus has the important aspect of learning to become accustomed to a different mode of time. One can then go on from there and improvise according to one’s own idiom, but the soul has to be strengthened first, or else we constantly fall back into ordinary consciousness.

The matter of prayer is relevant because this whole text of Joa Bolendas can be considered prayer. We could say, in fact, that *vision* is just another term for prayer. Prayer launches the

visions, which are more intense modes of praying. This central characteristic of this text and the years of effort represented in this work, more than anything else, separate these visions from channeling and mediumism. If we imagine a progression of human connections with the spiritual worlds, it might well be channeling, mediumism, active imagination, prayer, vision, and initiation.

Working toward Unity

We may now explore the purpose of these visions. The title itself gives us our starting place – *So That You May Be One*. This title is brilliantly ambiguous; it can refer to the individual, to all the peoples of the earth, or to the church; it can also be something told to Joa Bolendas, having to do primarily with her, or suggesting that any greater unity begins with her. What we feel through the visions is the gradual unification of all of these spheres, and that unification in one sphere alone is illusory. Let us start, however, with the one sphere that is perhaps the most problematic – the unity of the churches.

In 1993, I attended the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago. The apparent aim of this huge weeklong gathering was to open lines of conversation that might eventually bring about a sense of unity. I was more than surprised, as I am sure many others were, to see the attitudes displayed among the many sects as each attended the showing of its wares to the others. In some sessions, bitter fighting erupted; I vividly recall one confrontation between Native Americans and an Islamic sect. At the same time, once I got over being overwhelmed by the multifarious costumes and displays of incredibly strong tendencies to hold onto the past, and began to meet individuals, I found that conversations were possible and fruitful. We are, however, apparently light-years away from achieving anything resembling a unity among religions. And yet, for nearly forty years, the visions of Jon Bolendas have concentrated on this one theme.

One might wonder what one individual could possibly contribute to the unity of the churches. A meditative reader of these visions would conclude, I believe, that any possible unity will not come from the churches as organizations. By *church*, Joa does not seem to mean an organization. Over half of this text concentrates on the Old and New Testaments, and we are presented with nothing about the sacred texts other than those of the Christian religion; this does not necessarily imply that unity ultimately means that all religions will be absorbed by Christianity as we now know it. Joa works toward the question of unity from this background because it is her background. Much of what occurs in the visions of the Old and New Testaments consists of an angel or a saint saying to Joa that one thing or another is unimportant, that it belongs to the times when the Bible was written. The purpose of the communications does not center on doctrinal concerns. Rather, one of the central purposes of the biblical visions seems to be to help develop a symbolic imagination, particularly a capacity to sense the symbolic as true. Thus, purely historical matters are not excluded, but the focus is on how such matters are presented symbolically. A saint, for example, says, “The story of Adam and Eve – is not a legend. It is symbolic! A story that was told over and over again – from tribe to tribe: they, the tribes,

eventually turning it into their own Hebraic history. Therefore it is both true and symbolic.” Repeatedly, in these conversations, history and symbol are seen to be intertwined. But, apparently some things are only history, and have changed in the course of evolution; other things – those that are symbolic – are still meant to be observed today and contribute to the unification of the churches. Concerning Passover, a saint tells Joa, “Celebrate it – the Passover – in the language of today, with the Jews! (It is to be part of the one unifying church.)”

So That You May be One thus seems to be a title that conveys the possibility of developing the capacity to distinguish the essential from the nonessential; first, it is an individual capacity, one not easy to acquire. If we look at these visions in a certain way, seeing a unity between the visions and the questions Joa brings to those who appear to her, we see that two capacities combine to form a new capacity. On the one hand, there is the questioning – the quest – which must issue from a desire of the heart. On the other hand, there is the capacity of vision, of coming into connection with the spiritual beings, the reality that one quests to know and to understand. There is guidance that stems from a life of concentrated prayer, the inbreathing and outbreathing of the soul in communion with the spiritual worlds. In order to become One, we first need to establish a unity of mind, soul, and spirit. Prayer and questioning indicate the method. The new capacity that can develop out of such a practice is symbolic vision – not argument, logic, discussion, or philosophy. If individuals are disposed to be one within themselves and then to come together, a similar unity of quest and vision can take place in community. What has happened to this one person, Joa Bolendas, could happen for everyone; that, I suggest, is the purpose of these visions.

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