

Translator's Foreword to *So That You May Be One*¹

John Hill

In writing this foreword I wish to express my gratitude to a woman of extraordinary character. I have known Joa Bolendas for twenty-eight years. I have had many opportunities to witness her great joy and despair as she chartered her ship across the unsettled and unpredictable waters of our times. What treasures has her voyage discovered? As requested, I have outlined some of them in this introduction. During the many years I have worked with Joa, I have become convinced that God's word can still speak directly to the human being – perhaps the most valuable treasure she has unfolded. Sometimes Joa's gifts can be ablaze with such vitality that her words and intentions have been misunderstood. I remember the day when Joa was full of joy as she saw many saints of the Orthodox Church working for peace in Yugoslavia. As we were coming out of the church, she met an acquaintance and told her the great news. The lady we met looked at me askance, having not understood the context of Joa's experience. On several occasions, her work was rejected because it was too Gnostic, too Catholic, too Protestant. These were the storms, which nearly threatened to wreck the ship. She cried out to the heavens and let herself be guided by the winds and tides of God. She learned to become an excellent helmswoman. It is thanks to her courage and her loyalty to these invisible forces that her ship has been guided to a safe port, and some of its treasures are now to be unloaded. This is the background to the publication of this book. With these visions, Joa Bolendas offers us insight into a world that we can only dimly perceive. For the most part, it remains invisible and inaudible. Often I have sat near Joa in various churches, while she prayed and received messages from the heavens. Gradually a spiritual landscape has opened up for me – a landscape peopled with many wonderful beings of light and energy. Due to my Christian upbringing, this landscape was not unfamiliar. I began to understand the influence these beings have had on my own life and the lives of those who are close to me, not to mention the political and social events of our time. The figures of light witnessed in these visions are here to help us. At times I have felt their presence, believed in them, doubted them, ignored them, or refused them. Despite the fluctuations of my own spiritual life, I am deeply grateful to have had the opportunity to participate consciously in this greater life, while here on earth. These visions have brought God's world closer to me. They have been my source of strength, support, and consolation. Joa has received God's words for us all.

I would like to add that my affirmation of this material has not been without struggle. There was my struggle with the language of the visions. Statements were unclear, and subject to all kinds of interpretation. Often I had to ask Joa for further elaboration, and sometimes another wording of the original statement proved to be a clearer description of what was witnessed in visions. I struggled with the meaning of these visions, too. I had to meditate on the short cryptic messages in order to appreciate their symbolic meaning, and not assume that they would materialize in concrete form. Obviously, the active participation of the receiver is necessary so that each can

¹ Foreword copyright ©1997 John Hill. In: Joa Bolendas, *So That You May Be One*, Lindisfarne books 1997.

evaluate these statements in his or her own way. Nevertheless, I must say that I and others who have known Joa Bolendas have again and again had the experience of visions coming true. In the spring of 1968, Joa saw that the Soviet armies would crush the freedom of the Czechoslovakian people, which was confirmed several months later. Already in 1973, she saw that dangerous solar rays would penetrate the ozone layer of the earth's stratosphere and threaten life on earth – a prophecy that was soon to become public knowledge. Many times she has seen individuals who carry within themselves some potential illness. When they consulted a medical practitioner, the illnesses were discovered, and lives were saved. These are but a few examples of innumerable incidents where Joa has participated in a great struggle for the well-being of humanity. Her life and work express a deep concern about the collective dangers that threaten our planet, as well as a motherly care about the sufferings of individuals.

A New Theology

Joa Bolendas's words are a human testimony about God's revelation. Several of her texts refer to the spiritual understanding of the early church that we seem to have lost and need to find again. Many will recognize familiar Christian truths formulated in new ways. What Jews and Christians have long believed comes to life again through a direct encounter with the source of their faith. When I read the texts, it is not just the words that strike me but the space between them. In this space I encounter the spirit of the holy. Joa Bolendas does not attempt to contain these experiences in an interpretation, concept, or dogma. Her task is to serve – to pass on her experiences to others in a clear and unadulterated form. It is not her task to make people believe. The decision to believe is up to the individual. This testimony offers us an opportunity to meet the living God, who is closer than we imagine. We may see, hear, and be moved by God's world.

This volume of Joa Bolendas's work opens with extracts from her journals. In these early texts, we catch glimpses of a long struggle to accept what was given to her. Trials followed the initial joy of witnessing God's light and presence in her own Swiss Reformed Church. Beholding in vision Christ's suffering for humankind, the spiritual strength of his resurrection, Mary's loving presence, and the pleadings of the saints, Joa Bolendas's heart was moved so that she could say yes to aspects of Christianity not rooted in her own church. It was not self-evident that she would participate in the Mass, say the rosary, or pray to the saints. Her struggle with the churches and her assent to the spirit of ecumenism pervading these visions so transformed her that she could embrace not only the traditions of the Protestant and Catholic Churches but also those of the Eastern Orthodox Church, as witnessed in her words on the icons.

In the visions on the Grail, rosary, and icons, we can discern essential attributes of the three churches. These attributes are not to be understood as belonging exclusively to one church or the other, but enable us to catch glimpses of Joa's spiritual journey. In her text on the Grail, primal light received through the eucharistic meal becomes a theological extension of Joa Bolendas's own Protestant background. The significance of Mary and the rosary highlights Joa's initiation into the rich symbolism and rhythms of prayer contained in Catholic liturgy, adding a freshness and immediacy to older forms of worship. I can remember how joyful Joa Bolendas was when

she first discovered the icons of Ireland. She was overwhelmed by their beauty and depth. Through visions, she learned that these treasures of the Orthodox Church are not to be appraised for their aesthetic value only: icons have a lasting and transformative effect on the human soul.

The volume then expands on two themes that seem essential for the coming unity of the churches: asking for the Holy Spirit and receiving primal light at Communion. We are asked to pray to the wise saints (*startsi*) of the Orthodox Church so that we may be strengthened by those who were guided by the direct inspiration of God's Spirit. The visions tell us that, since Pentecost, every human being is entitled to ask Christ for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit acts directly on the human spirit, moving it, changing it. One of the key teachings of Johannine Christianity is that, when the human spirit is united with God's Spirit, a great spiritual unfolding will take place and, we are told, the peoples of the earth will learn to share the many gifts of life with their fellow human beings.

One of the earliest visions of Joa Bolendas was of a shining light surrounding the eucharistic bread. Later she witnessed Christ's physical suffering and sacrifice on the cross and, after taking this within herself, she could experience the spiritual strength of his resurrection. It is the risen Christ who is present in the eucharistic celebration. The Johannine understanding of Communion implies that, through the life of the risen Christ, the primal light of creation is passed on to human beings, strengthening them to participate in God's creation as people of light. This is God's gift to every individual, and by participating in this mystery with our whole self we become conscious of what this gift means. Every person can experience a direct relationship with Christ through the eucharistic meal. Joa Bolendas once told me that the greatest task of the coming church will be to discern the many different ways that human beings can receive God's primal light.

Through this work, we may contemplate the mysteries of revelation. The initial visions in part three of this volume reveal God's greatness in the story contained in the Old Testament: God's omnipresence in the creation of the world, in the development of the spirit of man and woman, in the Ten Commandments, in the celebration of the Feast of the Passover, in the life of the prophets. Then follow visions on the life and work of Jesus in the New Testament, witnessed in different ways by the Four Evangelists: Mark as the companion; Matthew as the artist; Luke as the narrator of Christ's mission to the poor, those who seek justice, truth, and love; and John as the one who prepares the way for the coming, unifying church—a serving church that will encourage each individual to develop in freedom as a person of light. John invites us all to come to the table of the wise and participate in the ongoing process of creation. The Johannine teachings presented here are holistic. Living in revelation provides space for the human body, soul, and spirit to meet God's Spirit.

In these visions we are exhorted to learn the language of symbols—a language of the soul that helps us express many things in few words. In the visions on John's Revelation, Luke tells us that symbols reveal the greatness of God but also may fade in significance, according to their relevance to a specific culture. Symbols are not an end in themselves; they serve to express

mysteries that cannot be grasped by the normal processes of reasoning. It is clearly implied that these mysteries not only reflect inner states of consciousness but reveal truths about God's world, even though the ways those truths are expressed may differ among individuals and cultures. I remember the day when Noirin ni Riain, the well-known Irish vocalist, Joa Bolendas, and I went to church and prayed. Quite spontaneously Noirin began to sing the hymns of Joa. I was struck by the beauty and deep Celtic resonance of Noirin's interpretation. Joa was impressed by the quality of Noirin's singing but upset because her songs were not sung in the way she had received them. As we continued to listen, Joa passed me a note containing the following words of a saint:

It is the Irish soul that sings your hymns in this way. In Africa you will experience them in still more different ways – with drums and movements of the body. Give thanks!

Some of Joa's visions refer to coming events. Here it is impossible to make a definite judgment about them, for we as human beings cannot know the future; only God does. These predictions anticipate what lies ahead and therefore are to be understood as possibilities that may or may not come true. Rather than interpreting these prophecies as giving precise information about the future, it is wiser to understand them as exhortations to prayer. We are told that prayer changes the world. We are to struggle so that God's world comes to earth, whereby heaven and earth are linked, thus giving individuals and the different cultures the opportunity of recognizing and cultivating this link according to their own understanding.

This work has much to say about our attitude toward religious experience. We are exhorted not to cleave to the traditional laws of men but to recognize the signs of the times and the signs of the living God, who meets us in so many unexpected ways. We learn that prayer is not prattle but a struggle with darkness. Joa Bolendas receives instructions to pray that wars, violence, famine, and natural disasters do not ravish humankind. She is specifically instructed to pray for a particular land or group of people who are in danger. This task remains a heavy burden for her to carry. Throughout her visionary life, Joa Bolendas has continued to struggle daily until her prayers are heard and she sees God's light descending on the people, bringing relief to the suffering and distressed.

*Called to this living source, we creatures still
Darkly may feed hereon and take our fill,
Although it is night.*

This poem by John of the Cross¹ seems to reflect much of Joa's approach to spiritual life. In the struggle with darkness, she too has been accompanied by God's light, visible in those who have risen from the dead. Already in 1966, in the last vision noted down in her journals, she beheld the figures of heaven clothed in black. In anguish she asked why they were all in black, and the answer was: "Light is within us. We suffer for humankind." And Joa responded: "I bend before you, and I will remain with you."

The new theology contained in these visions assures us that sacramental life is not to be confined within narrow definitions. The spirit of baptism is understood in a simple, direct way. In repentance and reconciliation, we are to ask our brother or sister to pray to Christ for forgiveness. The ordination of a priest should be simplified so that it will bring forth many wonderful fruits. The faith must not become sterile. We are not to make laws about what comes first or what comes last. We are to remember that there are many who are far away from the churches, yet close to Christ. By returning to the basic Christian truths, the many words that separate will fall away. We can no longer limit these truths to their dogmatic formulations. They are an expression of an encounter with the living God – an expression of the dynamic, ongoing process of creation itself. They are far greater and more mysterious than their formulation or ritualistic enactment. Mary Magdalene tells us, through Joa Bolendas, not to be small-minded but rather open and generous. John the Evangelist relates to us how from the ancient Greeks he learned to stay in the midst of life and discuss religious experiences in an unprejudiced way. Let us see with our eyes and listen with our ears to God's presence in the whispers of the human soul. The Christian faith is a living faith: a faith lived with the body, soul, and spirit—with the whole human being.

Faith and Experience

When I started my training as a Jungian analyst, I was afraid that the analyst I chose would expose my faith as a fraud or a massive defense system. I feared that I would be unable to articulate or defend my own religious belief. To my surprise, these fears were alleviated by the unconscious itself, which came to my own rescue by means of a dream. In this dream I saw a large stone altar surrounded by four pillars supporting a roof, a simple version of the baldachin of St. Peter's, Rome, which was in need of repair. A voice said, "The altar is religion, the four pillars are psychology." When I awoke, the holy atmosphere surrounding the altar impressed upon me the necessity of maintaining my religious perspective, and I understood the altar to be a symbol of my own immediate relationship with God. I recognized the mandala structure of the baldachin as a symbol of the wholeness of the personality. This would be the subject matter of analysis. It could be renewed and strengthened so as to act as a support, protection, and means of communication of the altar mysteries, which at times were too powerful to be contained and expressed through faulty structures of my personality. This dream has remained with me throughout my life, pointing to a distinction between religion and psychology and the need to recognize their complementarity.

Up to recent times, faith has been largely a matter of tradition that has allowed little space for personal experience. Today faith has become taboo. People find it difficult to speak about this subject. On the one hand, people are critical and unimpressed by the authority of parents, state, or any religious institution. In discussions, knowledge of facts and an ability to reason are decisive. Faith is regarded as naive, childish, sometimes illusory. On the other hand, the longing for security, trust, and love render people without roots susceptible to all kinds of irrational experiences. There is a hunger for spiritual meaning and a turning toward the Unconditional, as understood by Paul Tillich.² This hunger can be manipulated by secular or religious sectarianism.

Yet it cannot be overlooked that often in the most bizarre experiences many encounter the reality of the soul – the reality of themselves. Religious institutions cannot overlook these social and psychological upheavals. Religious traditions can no longer ignore the discoveries of depth psychology and its tolerance of inner transcendent experiences.

I have been asked to write a Jungian commentary on these visions, in this short foreword. For various reasons, I will not attempt an interpretation of them. Considering the openness of Jungian psychology to this kind of phenomenon, I would prefer to sketch a possible attitude that Jung might have had to this material. C. G. Jung's reflections on his earliest religious impressions anticipated many of today's problems in this area. At an early age, Jung, like so many people of our time, could no longer follow the example of his father, who told him not to question the theology prescribed by the traditions handed down by his forefathers. He understood his earliest religious experiences as a reaction to this lifeless theology. God revealed himself to Jung as an archaic, vital subterranean force, visiting him in the mysteries of nature or the images of dreams. God was a psychological reality, an immediate, living experience which, in the last instance, remained unknown and indefinable. Like those of Joa Bolendas, Jung's religious experiences taught him that God refuses to abide by the traditions of men:

I was certain that this was the wrong way to reach God, for I knew, knew from experience, that this grace was accorded only to one who fulfilled the will of God without reservation. This was preached from the pulpit, too, but always on the assumption that revelation had made the will of God plain. To me, on the other hand, it seemed the most obscure and unknown thing of all. To me it seemed that one's duty was to explore daily the will of God.³

These early impressions remained with him throughout his life, and he always reacted strongly against an intellectual belief that was divorced from a personal experience of God. Faith should not forestall such experiences.

Jung was critical of any claim to a universal truth, not because of its content but because of the inherent human tendency to presume to possess the truth and so exclude the validity of religious experiences of other people and other cultures. He was well aware of the destructive aspect of power in religious thinking and how it limits the freedom of the human spirit. Many of the followers of religious traditions, who have not sufficiently recognized split-off parts of the psyche within themselves, are all too disposed to project evil onto others who are not in agreement with their own religious thinking. As a psychiatrist, Jung was also aware of the overwhelming power of the unconscious and its capacity to destroy the individual personality.

It is with caution that I invoke the spirit of Jung, and in doing so I do not imply that Jung's and Joa Bolendas's anticipations of the future of Christianity are identical. Jung took to task a Christianity that emphasized the light principle because of the inherent human tendency to deny the darker, unrecognized or unwanted parts of the self. Joa's concept of light is not equivalent to the light of a one-sided attitude of the conscious mind, nor does it signify a rational approach to religion, often the target of Jung's critique of religious practices. Primal light, according to the

Johannine teachings in Joa's texts, approximates to the transcendental and metaphysical light of the mystics; it is an expression of the very essence of God and all of creation, including the darkness of night.

Despite these reservations, I have little doubt that Jung, as a man who foresaw the religious predicaments of our times, would have been convinced of the importance of these visions as private revelations. For Joa Bolendas did not blindly follow the traditions of her faith but had the courage to act upon her own religious experiences. She did not interpret the experiences so as to fit collective expectations. At no point has her personality been absorbed in the numinosity of her visions. She has retained her individuality and with it a recognition of her failings and limitations. She has maintained her role as mother, pastor's wife, and active member of a busy community.

Jung would have recognized not only the personal but also the collective significance of this work. I believe he would have taken seriously a vision of Christianity that is not just a matter of human opinion but a direct experience of the original mystery of God's relationship to humankind. He would have welcomed a message that asks the churches to move with the spirit of the times and encourages each individual to seek the truth in his or her own way. He would have certainly supported the attitude of ecumenical tolerance expressed through Mary's words in the section, "Risen from the Dead":

Hold on to this: The new church, the unified church, is all that makes men and women into people of light! Holy Scripture and the truth of the Old and New Testament will remain. The church that has grown and developed will remain. Repentance and reconciliation, baptism and the eucharistic meal, will remain. To be left open are the ways in which different types of people will develop. Do not be small-minded; be open and generous! You will discern all things through love!

A Message of Hope

Reflecting on the difference between an illusion and a healing religious experience, Jung⁴ came to the conclusion that no one can know what these ultimate things are:

We must therefore take them as we experience them. And if such experience helps to make life healthier, more beautiful, more complete, and more satisfactory to your self and to those you love, you may safely say: "This was the grace of God."

That was the same conclusion that Gebhard Frei, the well-known Catholic theologian who had the privilege of knowing Carl Jung and Joa Bolendas, reached in his assessment of her private journals in 1962. Following the criteria of John of the Cross, Frei found no evidence for disintegration of the personality. On the contrary, he was moved by this woman's love and active work for her family, parish, and fellow human beings. He was impressed by the courage, energy,

and strength that she gained from her religious experiences to deal with the troubles, fears, and concerns of daily life; by her ability to accept sacrifice and suffering; by her prayerful attitude toward those who were near as well as important issues in the community, the church, and the world. Regarding the content of these visions, he asked:

*How can this Protestant woman arrive at insights and convictions which at times contradict those assimilated in her youth, or, better said: which extend so thoroughly her image of Christianity that they could not have come from her personal unconscious?*⁵

He found Joa Bolendas's writings on Christ, Mary, the Mass, and life after death in accord with the teachings of the Orthodox and Roman Churches. Frei was convinced that this Protestant woman had been predisposed toward an inner living Christian mysticism. He concluded that her journals reflect the experience of a spiritual reality, which in its dynamism as a living organism expresses the mystery of Christ's love for humankind.

What has been said about the journals in 1962 might well apply to the present work. Joa Bolendas's religious formation in the journals now finds its flowering in *So That You May Be One*. The message of this book is a plea to Christians and Jews to return to the origins of their faith, to their first love, and from that basis to begin again and find the one rock—the coming unifying church. The reader does not have to accept everything in this work, but is asked to read it critically. In Joa's commentaries on the Old Testament, an angel commends us to discern between what belongs to the spirit of the times and what is of God's Spirit. When Joa inquired about the tribe of Jit, an angel answered that it was not important to argue over this matter. We are not expected simply to believe, but are invited to open ourselves to the reality of faith and to the experience of God's immense love for humankind, for all creatures, for the entire living cosmos. We are not expected to follow blindly the traditions of the past, but are invited to seek the truth and participate in the ongoing process of creation. The Johannine teaching of this book tells us that the wholeness of the human being is a process – the history of human spirit relating to God's Spirit. We are not to become resigned and isolated or think that we alone possess the truth. In a true and authentic way and in the freedom of spirit, we are to pray, ask for forgiveness, live in community with our fellow humans and those risen from the dead, and be receptive to God's primal light so that the mystery of God's word may abide in us and be passed on to all the peoples of the earth. This is a message of hope and renewal for the individual, the churches, and the cultures of the world.

Such may be the intimations of this book. The impact of Joa Bolendas's visions on the future remains to be seen. In this critical age of doubt and disbelief, we may ask if heaven itself has come to its own rescue? Has the ultimate source of being spoken to humankind through the words of a woman, trained as a secretary, whose soul and spirit seem to have been called to a higher purpose? Do the Evangelists continue to speak to us at a time when contemporary historical criticism is questioning their existence? Do the words of Joa Bolendas testify to the ongoing transformative truth contained in the Old and New Testaments? These among others will be the questions for the future. Perhaps in the end there is no proof or disproof, only the hope that

through Joa Bolendas's visions, the living source of all life may work on the human soul, bringing it and the world one step closer to a recognition of truth and fulfillment.

This Translation

The original German text, *Fin Fels*, was privately printed in 1988 and finally published in 1992. Although I have used that text as the basis for the present translation, the English version differs in two ways: "The Rosary" and "Risen from the Dead," as well as some additional material in "From My Journals," have been included; and some visions have been extended by Joa Bolendas from answers received to questions about this translation.

Joa Bolendas's style of writing is direct, spontaneous, and at times telegraphic. Its beauty lies in its simplicity. It is not the language of the Greek or Latin theologians. It is not a language of definitions, nor does it use the notion of substance. Joa Bolendas receives answers that explain not just what things are but also what they do. According to Hans Kung,⁶ this kind of language is closer to the spoken language of biblical times. Wherever possible, I have tried to retain this original style. Changes have been made only where the full meaning could not be contained in a direct rendering of the German text – and these changes only with the permission and help of the author. It should be noted that words in bracketed italic print were not directly spoken in the visions but were implied. It is also important to remember that much space lies between these words. I have often sat in a church with Joa Bolendas for more than an hour, during which time she wrote down a mere five to ten lines of vision. Most of this time was spent in beholding a spiritual presence in prayer and silence.

This translation would not have been possible without the help of Christopher Mason, Lela Fischli, Franziska Piderman, Liza Burr, and AnneMarie Hill.

Educated in Dublin and at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., John Hill is a Jungian analyst in private practice in Zurich, Switzerland. He is the author of numerous articles on Jungian themes and is a lecturer at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich.

NOTES

1. E. Allison Peers, *Saint John of the Cross* (Hertfordshire: Anthony Clark, 1974), p. 432.
2. Paul Tillich, *What Is Religion?* (New York: Harper, 1973), p. 76.
3. Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage, 1963), p. 46.
4. Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, coll. works, vol. 11 (New York: Bollingen Series XX, 1969), p. 103.
5. Gebhard Frei, *Beurteilung*, unpublished, p. 3.
6. Hans Kung, *On Being a Christian* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1983), p. 323.