

World Order

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The Unsuspected Effects of Religion on Your Personality

By JAMES J. KEENE

RELIGION as commonly understood and practiced has become a most prolific source of contention and confusion. It is not only the clergyman who is baffled. As old-time religion recedes before the onrush of industrial civilization, sociologists and psychologists, too, disagree among themselves about its role in the life of modern man.

For example, Freud thought that religion was an illusion about reality which stunts personality growth and which therefore must be discarded. In contrast the famous psychologist Carl Jung thought that notions such as sacrifice and rebirth, which are universals in religion, are involved in the most basic processes of personality development. In general, some social scientists think that religion is an integrating and constructive influence on human endeavor and an important and meaningful force in its own right, while others think that religion is a disintegrating and destructive phenomenon, or merely a secondary one, that can only be understood in terms of "more basic" events, such as the exchange of libido or economic goods. Nor is confusion confined to social scientists: laymen—rich, middle class, or poor; next-door neighbor and all—are skeptical, confused, or uncertain about the effects of their own religious activity on their lives.

Since today's confusion is a cumulative consequence of centuries of religious speculation, there was a need for a reasoned, sci-

entific analysis of the interaction of the religious activity and the personal well-being of an individual. With the help of systematic methods in the social sciences, I examined information from almost 700 people in five religious groups about 35 aspects of their religious life, such as praying, attending services, and believing in God, and about 74 facets of their personalities and social relationships. With a little addition ($35 + 74 = 109$) and multiplication ($109 \times 700 = 76,300$), it is easy to see that this amounts to over 70,000 bits of information about the religious, personal, and social activity of a great many people. If one tried to analyze and understand all of the possible relationships among the religious and psychosocial activities that were studied, one would have to deal with some 5,886 relationships ($109 \times 108/2 = 5,886$). With this suggestion of the immensity and complexity of religious phenomena, it is easy to imagine how individuals can differ widely in their perception and understanding of religion.

In an effort to develop a few simple, yet basic concepts about religion in their lives, people try to condense and summarize in their minds surely much more than 70,000 bits of human experience. However, a person often gives attention to a small selection or only one aspect of religious experience—that consistent with his own personal biases or preconceptions about what religion should be

like. The result is that this partial selection of experience relevant to religion leads to an incomplete conception or mistaken understanding of religion in all its aspects. This is usually true of popular concepts of religion and generalizations about religion, which are therefore bound to conflict with experience sooner or later, and to differ greatly among individuals.

This research¹ is objective and scientific not in any exclusion of important and meaningful human experiences, but in its empirical analysis of such experiences without personal biases and preconceptions. Done on a computer with mathematical precision, the project employed a statistical technique called factor analysis which does just what it says. It *analyzed* all of the 5,886 relationships based on the 70,000 bits of experience and identified the *factors*, trends, or *issues* which best describe all facets of the phenomenon. By examining the interrelationships among these factors in each of five religious groups, I have tried to construct a more comprehensive and comprehensible picture of the interaction of religion and personality than, to my knowledge, has been done in the past. It is important, then, for the reader considering these findings to realize that this study does not necessarily deal with the views and concepts of the recognized exponents of any of the religious groups studied here. Rather, it is based on the actual life experiences and observations of practitioners of these religions, my objective having been to discover the effects that religious behavior *actually* seems to have on personality and social groups.

FOUR IMPORTANT issues (or factors) in the life of modern man were found and are described with the following short-hand labels.

¹ All the findings of this research which are reviewed below are documented in my "Religious Behavior and Neuroticism, Spontaneity, and Worldmindedness" in *Sociometry*, Vol. 30, No. 2, June, 1967; and "Baha'i World Faith: Redefinition of Religion" in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, October, 1967. The author will provide upon request documentation of the few statements in this article which are not documented in these two reports.

1. *Neurotic/Adaptive*. More than one half of the individuals currently in hospitals are there because of some behavior disorder. The mental health problem is both a personal and a social issue. For the individual it is continuous and integrated development of his talents and capacities through widening interests and insight into his own life, versus self-defeat in which a person unknowingly puts himself through the torture of his own fragmented, narrow, and petty concerns. Many people consistently fail to face directly the tensions or challenges that they encounter, and so their energy is squandered in the conflict itself or dissipated in attempts to avoid the challenge. Behavior indicative of this lack of growth will be called *neurotic*. The healthy person is not necessarily the one who is without conflicts, but the one who is able to deal with conflict and anxiety by channeling, through conscious exertion, the energy involved into constructive activity.

For society the issue of mental health is social integration in which the society and individual are mutually growth-fostering, versus social disorganization in the form of war, mass persecutions, divorce, delinquency, and life-time commitment to mental institutions.

2. *Spontaneous/Inhibited*. Spontaneity is the expression of emotional or unconscious experiences, such as a laugh, a feeling of warmth or joy, a sudden inspiration or new idea. When associated with adaptive behavior, spontaneity is perhaps best characterized as creativity. When connected with neuroticism, spontaneous expression of feeling at its best may represent attempts to make internal, adaptive reorganizations in the personality. At its worst the spontaneity associated with neuroticism, as seen in undisciplined sex, the unsupervised use of drugs, and thrill seeking, is merely escape. The opposite of spontaneity is psychological and social rigidity and inhibition, and fear of an inability to deal with the non-rational side of life.

3. *Worldminded/Ethnocentric*. This key issue facing modern man at the present stage in his social evolution is developing a con-



sciousness of himself as a citizen of the world as opposed to identifying solely with just one nation, religion, or race.

4. *Self-accommodating / Group-accommodating.* This is a cultural issue in the relation between the individual and the group. Self-accommodating behavior involves competition, individuality, independence, and freedom of expression, while group-accommodation involves cooperation, efforts to live up to group standards, interdependence, and discipline of emotion. Self- and group-accommodation can each be desirable or undesirable depending on the situation. Self-accommodation at its worst is seen, for example, in anti-social behavior by which a person

does something that he wants to, in spite of the fact that this may have negative consequences for others. Self-accommodation at its best is involved in standing up for what one thinks is right in spite of group pressure. Most will agree that group-accommodation is undesirable when it involves loss of personal identity through extreme conformity or mob action and is desirable in the form of kindness, courtesy, and concern for others. We might say that the best interests of both the individual and group are realized in personalities which embody the positive aspects of both self- and group-accommodation. It shall be seen later how the conflict between the individual and his society, which is prom-

inent in much of the popular philosophy of the day, is resolved in one of the religious groups studied.

It was found that the way people resolve these four psychosocial issues in their daily lives was closely related to (1) the kinds of religious activity in which they participate and (2) the religious group with which they are affiliated. What follows is a description of my basic findings as they might be seen from the point of view of a reader interested in the unsuspected effects that his own religious activity may have on his personality and social relationships. The odds are that what was found to be true for the 700 people studied is also true for any reader of this article.

What Is Religion?

BEFORE THE EFFECT of religion on personality can be clarified one needs to know what is producing these effects. What indeed is religion? A great diversity of beliefs and practices has been called religious by many people in many places. These findings indicate that religion is more different in different religious groups than people may think.

For example, Catholics tend to believe in the afterlife, the soul, and God and to participate in religious activity that they perceive as primarily doctrine, creed, and ritual. In spite of this general activity, Catholics tend to be skeptical of religion. Protestants are as skeptical of religion as Catholics. However, Protestants do not believe in the afterlife, the soul, and God as strongly, participate in religious activity as much, or value doctrine and ritual as highly. A conception of religion which emphasizes doctrine, creed, and ritual is almost as prevalent among Jews as among Catholics. However, Jews tend to participate in religious activity, believe in the afterlife, the soul, and God, and question the validity of religion less than Catholics.

Among Jews, Catholics, and Protestants were found four main issues or areas of disagreement about religion:

1. Should one participate in religious activity?

2. Should one accept the intangible notions invariably associated with religious activity, such as the afterlife, the soul, and God?

3. Should there be religion at all?

4. Should religious participation be based on doctrine, creed, and ritual or on personal, inner experience? I have described this last issue as an *orthodox* as opposed to a personal approach to religion. The term *orthodox* ordinarily refers to agreement with the accepted standards of a religious group. I use the term with a restricted meaning in my research to refer to compliance with, or valuing of, outward religious forms—doctrines and rituals—to such an extent that an understanding of the essential purpose of the religion seated in personal experience and conviction is sacrificed.

THESE FOUR issues refer to the areas of religious life about which there is the greatest controversy, the greatest difference of opinion or practice. Each evoked varying degrees of agreement or disagreement among the several religious groups studied. Take, for instance, the first issue: should one participate in religious activity. It was found that neither Jews, Catholics nor Protestants agreed among themselves on it.

Furthermore, Jews and Protestants each tend to disagree among themselves on the religious issues about which Catholics tend to agree most. For both Jews and Protestants, there is little agreement on whether they should accept or reject the afterlife, the soul, and God, and on whether they should adopt an orthodox or a personal approach to religion. Yet, Catholics are in relative agreement that they should believe in the afterlife, the soul, and God and should value positively doctrine, creed, and ritual as the most important part of their religion. It is curious that the Catholics disagree among themselves more than Jews and Protestants on whether they should participate in religious activity, in spite of their relatively definite position on the soul, God, and the importance of doctrine and ritual.

Thus various religious groups differ in the religious activities and beliefs (1) in which a member would most typically take part, and (2) about which he would encounter the most controversy or difference of practice among his fellow members. These differences are important for understanding the psychosocial effects of religion, because a person's particular resolution of the religious issues identified above will have different consequences for his personality and social relationships depending on his religious affiliation.

Professional Well-Being in an Old Established Religion

LET US CONSIDER a typical member of the Jewish group. If he values mostly the doctrine, creed, and ritual of the religion in which he participates, and believes in the afterlife, the soul, and God, more often than not he will also be group-accommodating, ethnocentric, and inhibited. However, if he decides to give up his orthodox conception of religion, as well as his belief in the afterlife, the soul, and God and his religious participation, he will tend to be more self-accommodating, worldminded, and spontaneous. Hence, the choice is between full religious participation and worldminded attitudes.

The situation of a typical Catholic is somewhat different and perhaps surprising. His participation in religious activity fosters adaptive behavior in him, yet his orthodox valuing of doctrine, creed, and ritual fosters neuroticism and a provincial outlook on the world. Hence, the growth of his personality is caught between the opposite influences of his orthodox outlook and his religious participation. A good deal of the motivation behind current ecumenism is probably an effort to reduce this intrinsic tension in contemporary Catholicism.

Indeed, there does not seem to be evidence in my data that the ordinary Catholic is handling this conflict within his religion very well. It is characteristic for Catholics to "live with" this conflict by maintaining reli-

gious participation, with full acceptance of doctrine and ritual and with belief in the afterlife, the soul, and God. This pattern of religious activity is usually accompanied by a combination of ethnocentric, group-accommodating, neurotic, and spontaneous behaviors. This adjustment seems unsatisfactory because its neurotic and ethnocentric components indicate that the negative influence of the orthodox conception of religion has prevailed.

Another approach to this conflict, which a good many Catholics take, is to continue to view doctrine and ritual as the most important part of their religion, but to decrease greatly their religious participation and to lose faith in the afterlife, the soul, and God. These Catholics tend to have a neurotic, self-accommodating, ethnocentric, and inhibited character pattern. In this clearly undesirable adjustment, the negative effects of the orthodox outlook are again prevalent. In sum, these data suggest that the personal welfare of Catholics is contingent on *decreased emphasis* of doctrine and ritual. This implies that the ecumenical movement might improve the life of the rank and file Catholic, not by merely changing one doctrine or ritual to another, but by decreasing the importance of doctrine and ritual in general in the eyes of Catholics.

The major consequence of the religious activity of a Protestant lies in his social relationships as described by the self- versus group-accommodation issue. If he participates in religious activity, believes in the afterlife, the soul, and God, approves of religion, and has a personal approach to religion, he will probably be a group-accommodating kind of person. If self-accommodation is his major mode of social adjustment, he will probably question both his belief in the afterlife, the soul, and God and his religious participation, which for this kind of person is irrelevant and perceived as doctrine, creed, and ritual. Perhaps the most important thing for a Protestant to think about is why his religious activity is *not* directly relevant to the other

three core issues: mental health, spontaneity, and worldmindedness.

ALL IN ALL, in spite of published idealistic theories, most Jews, Catholics, and Protestants tend to view religion as primarily doctrine and ritual and to have an ethnocentric view of the world, regardless of the extent to which they participate in their respective religions. Two variations tend to occur within this context. First, those for whom religion is irrelevant and questionable tend to be also neurotic and self-accommodating. Second, those who participate in and approve of their religion and believe in the afterlife, the soul, and God, are also group-accommodating. This is the most accurate description that can be made on the basis of my data. In the context of the doctrine, ritual, and ethnocentrism of an old established religion, an individual's personal well-being turns either (1) toward self-accommodating neuroticism if he lapses into a skeptical lack of religious participation, or (2) toward a group-accommodation which tends to exclude other groups due to the accompanying ethnocentric attitude, if he continues to participate in the religion.

Religion Itself in Purgatory

SINCE THE CENTRAL dynamics of the old established religions operate in the context of doctrine, ritual, and ethnocentrism, individuals who no longer affiliate with these religions are probably seeking a more personal orientation to religion or a more world-minded outlook. It is not surprising that a person would prefer to discontinue formal affiliation with a religion if his skeptical lack of participation brings him self-accommodating neuroticism in return, or if he was not satisfied with the exclusive social activity which accompanied his participation because of the prevailing ethnocentric attitudes.

For non-affiliates, then, religion and the intangible notions associated with it are questioned and have become irrelevant, since non-affiliates and members of the old estab-

lished religions pervade all of our data, and seem to reflect a larger cultural condition in which the foundations of major religious organizations are being undermined by excessive materialism and rationalism born of the industrial and scientific revolutions.

Religion as an active force in men's lives has been temporarily banished and condemned to purgatory, the intermediate state where not only the soul, but now religion itself, is made fit for future life by expiatory suffering. The journey through purgatory begins when the soul has departed from this life, as religion indeed has departed from the life of non-affiliates. Then, as the story goes, the soul as well as the religion of love, unity and justice, cannot be reborn in the life of modern man until it has been cleansed and purified of what in the judgment of non-affiliates are the "sins" of excessive doctrine, ritual, and ethnocentrism. In this sense, the old established religions themselves have entered purgatory, where they are suffering to modify their doctrine and ritual in such a way that they might again be fit for the "paradise" of playing a crucial role in the lives of men.

In the light of my data, it does not seem either coincidental or inappropriate that the concept of purgatory was invented in the religious group which is making the most publicized efforts to change its doctrine, and in which was observed the most conflicting operation of religion in the personal lives of its members. An orthodox outlook was found to conflict with religious participation, because each has opposite effects on the adaptivity of Catholics.

Thus the first issue between the religious groups studied is whether there should be religion at all. The old established religions say yes, and the disenchanters say no. While the banished religions are struggling to save themselves from the purgatory into which they have been placed by the forces of modern society, the non-affiliate can be world-minded, and enjoy some adaptivity even though he tends to disbelieve in the notions of the afterlife, the soul, and God so closely

associated with the orthodox religion that he has rejected.

However, the following reasoning suggests that this common adjustment among non-affiliates may not be the most inviting solution to the problem. In the experience of the non-affiliate, the belief in the afterlife, the soul, and God has been consistently associated with an unacceptable ethnocentrism and orthodoxy in the old established religions. But these same beliefs are also related to his spontaneous expression of feeling. Hence, when the self-accommodating adjustment typical among non-affiliates is coupled with the emotional inhibition associated with his disbelief in the afterlife, the soul, and God, the result may be to stifle his relationships with other people.

Remaking Yourself Through Remaking Religion: A Personal Note

A SECOND DIFFERENCE among the religious groups that I studied reappears in every data analysis that was made and distinguishes between members of the old established religions and members of the Bahá'í World Faith. Bahá'ís consistently differed from Jews, Catholics, and Protestants in the following ways.

1. Although the Bahá'ís studied were more diverse than the other religious groups in race, nationality, and religious background, there was little disagreement among Bahá'ís on the two major issues for the other groups: should one participate in religious activity and should one believe in the afterlife, the soul, and God. Thus the Bahá'ís show greater religious unity amid their greater demographic diversity.

2. Bahá'ís display greater strength in their relatively unified position. In the Bahá'í Faith, individual participation in religious activity is much greater, belief in the afterlife, the soul, and God is stronger, skepticism of both one's own and others' religion is much less, and the approach to religion is more personal.

3. Adaptive behavior is associated with the Bahá'í approach to religion which is per-

sonal by de-emphasizing doctrine, creed, and ritual.

This list will have to be completed later after more detailed treatment of some of my findings. However, since the Bahá'í Faith is a new religion historically with a large proportion of first-generation members, the above three ways in which it differs from old established religions are enough to suggest that an alternative to the baby-and-bathwater rejection of religion by many non-affiliates is the construction of a *new* life through a *new* world religion. My major findings about the Bahá'ís are most simply described in the context of the new kind of social organization as well as the transformation of individual life in this new religion. The Bahá'í community which results from the synthesis of these innovations on the social and individual levels has the characteristics of a living organism.

What are the parts of this new organism? Just as one needs a strong heart, a good pair of lungs, a stout pair of legs, and so on to function well physically, what does a new religion need to assure its social and spiritual efficacy in a society which is threatening to move the old established religions from "purgatory" to "eternal hell"? I found empirically that the Bahá'ís differentiate among more parts of their religious activity than the other religious groups do. This is fortunate because the five components of religion that distinguish the Bahá'ís in my analysis can help us to understand what kinds of religious activity are necessary to make a new religion which is also a society and way of life.

FIRST, I found a *cognitive* component which involves ideas and concepts commonly held by Bahá'ís, particularly the belief in the soul and God. One thing that the belief in the soul asserts for Bahá'ís is that man in pursuing his destiny can choose to make high aspirations and noble qualities such as love, justice, and mercy take precedence over the motivations described in purely economic, sexual, or power-struggle theories of man. Bahá'ís believe in a non-anthropomorphic God Who is unknowable in essence. How-

ever, since empirical investigation alone is insufficient to solve world problems, Bahá'ís feel that God provides the necessary knowledge and authority through great religious teachers, such as the founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

A second distinguishable ingredient in this new religion is the *meditative* aspect of religious life. The Bahá'ís are the only religious group studied in which the members pray and meditate frequently in addition to believing in God.

Bahá'ís are also distinguished by two aspects of their religious participation. The *administrative* component involves participation in Bahá'í community life, such as taking

of this new religion have been identified, it remains to be known what each part does and why it is necessary. Since circulation, respiration, and all of the other systems in a living organism like a man are interrelated and interdependent, it was not too surprising to find that the above five components of Bahá'í religious life are also functionally interrelated in another living organism, namely a new religion.

The self-defining component functions to increase the membership of the Bahá'í Faith and to introduce new members to the functioning of the other four components. This involves an individual's active decision to rise above limiting identifications, such as

Figure 1

| | Organizational | Emotional |
|----------|----------------|--------------|
| Personal | COGNITIVE | EXPERIENTIAL |
| Social | ADMINISTRATIVE | MEDITATIVE |

part in certain regular Bahá'í meetings, contributing to the Bahá'í fund, voting, and serving on elected or appointed administrative bodies. On the other hand, religion for Bahá'ís also deals with problems and solutions which are primarily daily and personal. This *experiential* mode of religious participation reflects the Bahá'í belief that the value of Bahá'í teachings can be demonstrated most effectively to those who are skeptical when these teachings operate to improve and enrich the personal lives of those who uphold them.

The fifth major ingredient in this new religion is simply people who are willing to put the four given components into action. I call this the *self-defining* component of a new religion because it involves the process by which its members have adopted their religion by sacrificing old ties and ideas when necessary and establishing new commitments to expanding and developing the Bahá'í world community at the international, national, and local levels.

Now that the major parts of the anatomy

with only one race, social class, or nation, and to discover his own potential and identity by experiencing the joy in the achievement of Bahá'í goals, as well as the difficulty in working for them.

FIGURE 1 illustrates the four emphases that we found in the psychosocial functions of the four remaining components of Bahá'í religious life. Perhaps the major function of the administrative component of the Bahá'í community is social organization. Bahá'ís who participate in the administrative aspect of Bahá'í life tend to develop an identity as a citizen of the world, to live as they please rather than as someone else pleases, to feel friendly toward people, to put others at ease, and to get enough praise. The belief in the soul and God in the cognitive component was found to organize, control, and discipline the behavior of an individual, so that he did *not* consistently, for example, do things that damage his sense of self-respect, get upset easily, have spells of the blues, nor waste time. Within the context of the per-

sonal organization fostered by the cognitive component, the experiential aspect of religious activity, which includes the serious attempt to live Bahá'í teachings, deals with the flow of emotional energy and creativity in day by day personal development. The meditative component is associated in this analysis with a sense of strength, independence, confidence, and peace of mind in social relationships. Thus, somewhat to my surprise, I found that the meditative aspect of religious life functioned mainly to increase the effectiveness of the individual in social situations by consolidating his emotional forces.

This brief summary suggests what each of the Bahá'í religion components does in the lives of Bahá'ís. These functions of the religion components can combine so that collections of individuals can develop into creative communities when their members are active in *all* of the five Bahá'í religion components. The reason why each component is necessary is that a deficit in any one of the religion components results in a breakdown of the organic integrity of the community. Social upheavals and increasing mental illness are just two symptoms of such deficits and community pathology.

Thus a full community life requires the integration of the organizational and emotional components on both the personal and social levels (see Figure 1), so that the individual and group function together harmoniously. Such a balanced community life characterized by activity on all five religion components is a new religious phenomenon because it was found only among Bahá'ís. Furthermore, this total religious participation has a unique consequence for the manner in which Bahá'ís are able to resolve the four psychosocial issues discussed earlier, namely by becoming at once worldminded, spontaneous, and adaptive! This personal orientation, which tends to emerge as Bahá'ís develop total religious participation, is not typically found in the other religious groups, and hence is a unique characteristic of the Bahá'ís. All in all, Bahá'ís are remaking themselves through remaking religion. By

developing aspects of their character which were not generally as apparent when they first began working together, Bahá'ís are assembling in their lives today the parts of the new religion designed over a century ago by Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

THIS NEW RELIGION will reach its maturity as more and more people work together to build it and are transformed in the process. If you are contemplating remaking yourself through remaking religion, one last finding will be of interest. If you overlook putting any one of the Bahá'í religion components into action in your life, the unique pattern of worldminded, spontaneous, and adaptive behaviors is less likely to emerge in your personality. It makes sense that the energy generated by the emotional components would lack context and goal orientation without the direction provided by the organizational components. On the other hand, without the emotional components, you might not see meaning in the organization and might not be strongly motivated to achieve your goals. If the personal religion components operate to improve your personal organization and functioning, the absence of these components would probably lower your effectiveness in Bahá'í group life. Without the social components, the Bahá'í Faith could probably have little effect on society. Thus the total effect is lost if any religion component is missing.

Having said all that, I can return to the summary of the differences that were found between members of the Bahá'í Faith and members of old established religions (see page 43).

4. Bahá'ís give more differentiated attention to various aspects of their religious behavior as described by the cognitive, experiential, self-defining, administrative, and meditative components.

5. These aspects of religious behavior play unique roles in the lives of Bahá'ís. For example, only in the Bahá'í Faith is belief in the afterlife, the soul, and God associated with adaptive behavior. With the absence of

this positive relationship in the old established religions, it is no wonder that belief in man's spiritual nature and in God is dying out in these religions and among non-affiliates.

In addition, only in the Bahá'í Faith are meditative and administrative religious activities associated with worldminded attitudes. Thus, far from resisting trends toward world unity, the Bahá'í Faith is the only religious group in this study which is actively promoting, both in its social structure (administrative) and in the deepest aspirations of its members (meditative), a consciousness of the full oneness of mankind.

6. Participation in all five religion components at once—total, balanced religious activity—was found only in the Bahá'í Faith.

7. Bahá'ís are characterized by a unique personality-religion interaction in which their total religious participation fosters a pattern of worldminded, spontaneous, and adaptive behaviors. A deviation from this total religious participation is associated with disruption of this unique personality pattern, and vice versa.

8. Total, balanced religious participation is the basis for creative communities in the Bahá'í Faith. Deficits in community life or community pathology can be traced to inadequate performance of one or more of the Bahá'í religion components.

THIS IS a condensed list of the ways in which Bahá'ís were found to differ from the old established religions. "I can't believe *that* . . . one can't believe in impossible things" you may say, as Alice did to the Queen in *Through the Looking-Glass*. Our reply would be something like the Queen's to Alice, "I daresay you haven't much practice . . . Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." By their unique characteristics, Bahá'ís re-define religion. I have simply reported what I found empirically, so if it sounds impossible, you have stumbled as I did over a religion which does the impossible.

The Bahá'í Faith does impossible things not through the looking-glass, but in the real world. These are things which at least seem impossible before they are actually done by people who can believe in temporarily "impossible" things. If you have ever dropped in on a group therapy session, you have heard many Alices who were sad because they thought their personal improvement was impossible, at least until they had improved. In addition, you can read of popular opinion that world peace is one of those impossible things. The Bahá'ís are people who hold the considered opinion that it is worth your effort to try to do the impossible for the world and for yourself.

The Greeting

Sun at the door today: "Found you!"
 But who ever thought escape? I just
 wanted the dark if it was the truth,
 and it's good here at the door again, the sun.
 Sun at the door today: Welcome.

William Stafford