

it is well-documented that, six months after that initial meeting in 1926 Ford has officially joined the Baha'i faith.

The combined power of Ford and the emerging Baha'i movement was remarkable. The end of the 1920s saw Americans reach new levels of despair, but the support of the two men led to the eventual election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the first of four terms at the White House in 1932, at the height of the Great Depression. In 1937, Shoghi Effendi invited to America the daughter of the Polish Dr. Lazarus (Eliezer) Ludwig Zamenhof, inventor of the now-standard Esperanto language. Lidia Zamenhof arrived in the U.S in 1937, and began to teach both Shoghi Effendi and Ford the new language.

At the time, Ford was already experimenting with teaching a standard language, English, to his multilingual employees, but he and the Guardian took to the new language of Esperanto quickly and with an overwhelming enthusiasm. It began to be taught in Ford's language schools and, following its success there, the teaching of Esperanto was initiated as a country-wide program by FDR in 1939. In that year, too, the Baha'i temple in Washington D.C. was built, to the same design of concentric rings. Baha'i missions and temples were erected in most major cities and in many of the smaller towns of continental USA.

The arrival of Zamenhoff coincided with another significant encounter of minds, when a young, virtually-unknown writer called John W. Campbell Jr. took over the editorship of a pulp magazine called Astounding Science Fiction. There is nothing to suggest that the Guardian was in any way exposed, in the past, to the new form of literature known as scientification or science-fiction before Campbell took over Astounding, but he was soon profoundly interested in the new genre (which he saw as echoing, in its interest in science and technology and the betterment of mankind, the tenets of his own faith of the Baha'i) and before long Campbell was meeting with the Guardian regularly, until he, too, converted to the Baha'i faith in the winter of 1939. Campbell soon took to promoting his new faith through the magazine, shaping a new generation of writers who wrote what can be termed Baha'i-influenced science fiction stories, amongst them Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov and the British Arthur C. Clarke, though few were converts. In 1945 the magazine, along with many publications in the USA, began publishing exclusively in Esperanto. This era is known to historians of the genre as the Golden Age of science fiction, though it can be argued the Golden Age has never ended: the majority of science fiction today is still predominantly Baha'i in its outlook and vision.

Meanwhile, the signs of war in Europe were unmistakable. FDR (with help from both Shoghi Effendi and Ford) designed a new kind of organization which he called the United Nations, or UN, but it was obvious by then that without military intervention such a grand vision of world peace could never be realized. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor America joined the war, and won it in 1945.

The extreme human sufferings endured during the war have affected the Guardian deeply. Shoghi Effendi swore that such a thing must never happen again: the

United Nations was set up as a first attempt at world governance, though its internal division made it less than ideal; American soldiers brought with them the new religion — Baha’i — and the new language — Esperanto — to Europe and the Guardian decided an intensive missionary and expansion program must be initiated beyond the shores of America.

By 1947 Ford was dead, and his manufacture empire controlled entirely by the Universal House of Justice under Shoghi Effendi. Yet luck, or perhaps, as the Guardian often suggested, divine intervention, brought him face to face with just the man for the job of taking the Baha’i faith and its principles to the larger world. In 1947, attending a meeting of science fiction professionals in New York (all now working for the new Futurist Institute founded in 1945 by the Guardian) Shoghi Effendi met a charismatic author and a recent convert to the faith: a man by the name of L. Ron Hubbard. Hubbard has been a writer for some time, and a successful one, but Shoghi Effendi was struck by his commitment to the faith, by his charm and by his charisma. In 1947 the Guardian appointed Hubbard as the head of the missionary arm of the faith, responsible for initiating a Baha’i presence — including schools and temples — in Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia and South America.

Based in the UK, Hubbard soon transformed what was, until then, a movement restricted mainly to the American continent and parts of Persia and Palestine (now Israel, and the official seat, in the city of Haifa, of the Baha’i Universal House of Justice, the place of Bahá'u'lláh’s grave) into a truly global presence, being particularly successful in the Soviet Union, where in 1955 - and following the death of Joseph Stalin - the USSR’s new leader Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev publicly converted to the Baha’i faith and made the famous flight to Washington, D.C. where he and the American president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, signed the historic Friendship Accord between the two super-powers. By the 1960s, Baha’i accounted for an astonishing one quarter of the Earth’s population, and the United Nations first dreamt of by FDR and the Guardian has become the first World Government, with charismatic young American president John F. Kennedy taking the first seat of World President in 1961.

Kennedy set the Futurist Institute the goal of coordinating a successful space program, and put one of the key people of the institute, Robert A. Heinlein, at its head. Heinlein amalgamated NASA with the RKA (the Russian Space Agency) and the newly-formed ESRO (European Space Research Organization) with impressive results: the first landing on the moon took place on July 20th, 1969, when American Neil Armstrong and Russian Yuri Gagarin touched down on its surface simultaneously. It was, as the devout Baha’i Gagarin had said, “one small step for man”, but “one giant leap for mankind”. On Earth, millions watched the landing on television screens and celebrated in the streets. The age of space had arrived.

The moon landing was followed by the first international colony on the moon; by the 1980s the World Government’s influence extended not only to the moon but to major parts of the asteroid belt, and the successful 1984 manned mission to

Mars confirmed Earth's growing peaceful dominance of the solar system.

Today, as we approach the new millennium in peace and prosperity, knowing that the guiding hand of the Universal House of Justice extends over us all, whether on the moon or in the most remote parts of Earth, it is worth remembering that, barring a series of small, seemingly-random events, the world could have been a much darker, different place. Had Shoghi Effendi gone to Britain and not America for his post-graduate studies he would never have met Ford; The Baha'i faith may never have grown beyond five or so million people; Esperanto may never have been spoken; indeed, imagine the possibility that there would be no lunar colony, no international space program, no manned mission to Mars!

As John W. Campbell Jr. said, all those years ago in his milestone editorial: "I have seen the future, and the future is Baha'i."

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