

Periodicals

plot,” would have had a special meaning for Catholics familiar with the church’s Easter liturgy, of which the last act contains myriad echoes—“moonlight, a single candle dispelling the darkness, music, the repeated phrase ‘in such a night.’” Asquith says that a close look at the whole play discloses a coded appeal to Queen Elizabeth “to look mercifully on her suffering subjects and lift the ban on their native religion.”

The plea evidently fell on deaf ears, and the court dramatist may have been cautioned. But he persisted. In *Much Ado About Nothing*’s first

scene, for example, the bafflingly obscure teasing of Benedick for his misogyny “conceals a skein of allusions associating Benedick with the thousands of ‘don’t knows’ who were beginning to regret their conformity to the state religion.”

Benedick’s friends joke that if he ever falls in love, he will sign a letter on “the sixth of July.” The date would have meant nothing to Protestants, but to Elizabethan Catholics, says Asquith, it was “highly significant”: July 6 was when Henry VIII executed Sir Thomas More for refusing to acknowledge Henry as the supreme head of the church in England.

OTHER NATIONS

Israel’s Two Zionisms

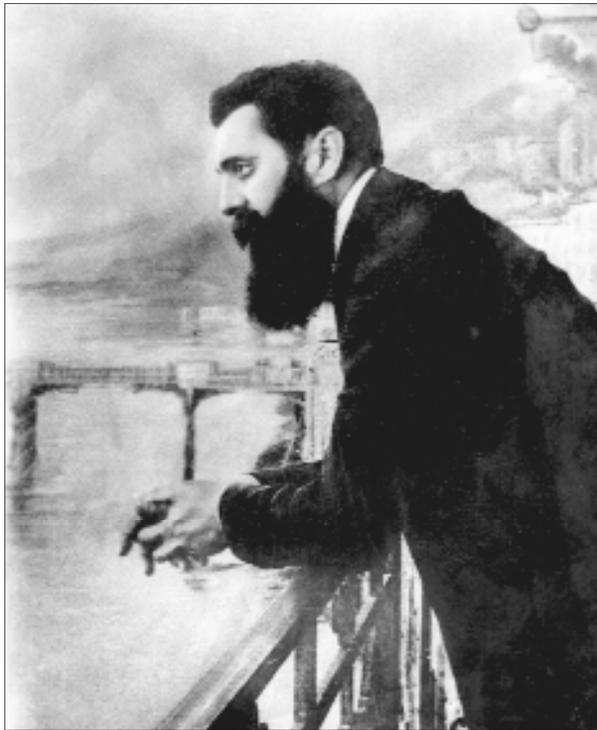
“The Political Legacy of Theodor Herzl” by Natan Sharansky, in *Azure* (Summer 2005),
13 Yehoshua Bin-Nun St., P.O. Box 8787, Jerusalem 93145 Israel.

Natan Sharansky, the former Soviet refusenik who earlier this year quit his Israeli government post as minister of Jerusalem and Diaspora affairs, fears that his adopted country is losing its Jewish character. The remedy, he

believes, can be found in the neglected vision of Zionism’s principal founder, Austrian writer Theodor Herzl (1860–1904).

Israel has started down the road to becoming “a ‘state of all its citizens,’ with no specific national identity.” The principle of absolute equality increasingly trumps maintaining the state’s Jewish character. Symptomatic of the trend was the Israeli Supreme Court’s landmark decision in 2000 declaring that the government could not favor Jews over Israeli Arabs in its allocation of state-owned land. If Israel continues down this path, says Sharansky, “it will no longer consider itself responsible for the fate of Jews everywhere, nor grant Jews the unconditional right to immigrate to Israel. It will certainly not try to promote Jewish culture and heritage or the Hebrew language among Jews around the world. It will provide education, health, and social services to its taxpayers, and little else.”

When Israel was founded in 1948, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, drawing on the revolutionary socialist tradition, “sought to create a new Jew out of the Di-



Theodor Herzl chaired the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland in 1897, but it would take more than 50 years for his followers to establish the Jewish state of Israel.

aspora ‘Jewish dust.’” He wanted Jews to shed their long exile experience and traditions, connect with their ancient biblical past, craft new forms of cultural expression, and, through the schools, the military, fresh ceremonies, myths, and monuments, “forge the new nation in a fiery melting pot.”

This revolutionary Zionist outlook—which upstaged the more conservative vision of Herzl—may have been necessary in Israel’s early years, but the cost rapidly grew too high, says Sharansky. The demand that exile traditions be abandoned pushed Orthodox Jews to the margins of Israeli society and aroused profound resentments among Jews from Arab lands. The effort to create “a new Jew” held little appeal for Sharansky or the million new immigrants in the 1990s from the collapsed Soviet Union, where the Communist effort to create “a new man” had had such tragic results.

In his novel *Altneuland* (1902), Herzl repeatedly described how the Jewish state “would incorporate the best of what each of its citizens’ lands of origin had to offer,” says Sharansky. Instead of creating a “new Jew” or a new Judaism, or erasing traditions that had sustained Jews during thousands of years of exile, the Jews would make out of their various languages and cultures “a splendid mosaic that would, in itself, be *sui generis*.”

The gradual rejection of the “Hebrew” identity that Ben-Gurion and his generation of Zionist leaders crafted has left “a cultural void” in Israel, says Sharansky. “Without Jewish history, and without Jewish culture, it is impossible to make a mosaic. What is being produced in Israel instead is a society made up of distinct groups that tend to keep mostly to themselves, put sectarian interests above national ones, and compete for control of the country.”

Africa’s Weak Giants

“Building Democracy in Africa’s Weak States” by Michael Bratton, in *Democracy at Large* (2005: No. 3), 1101 15th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

Though elections have become commonplace in sub-Saharan Africa since 1990, only a minority of that region’s states qualify as genuine democracies. Why? Bratton, a political scientist at Michigan State University, points to two explanations.

The first is population size: Small is better. Eleven (or 23 percent) of sub-Saharan Africa’s 48 countries are functioning democracies. And six of those 11 have populations under two million. Among the large countries, with populations of 30 million or more, only South Africa can claim to be fully democratic.

Though the small sub-Saharan states may not be as tiny as the ancient Greek city-states, they’re still small enough, Bratton says, to encourage direct communication between rulers and ruled. They’re also “likely to be socially and culturally homogeneous (like Botswana and Lesotho), thus preempting ethnic conflict.” And three of the small democracies (Cape Verde, Mauritius, and São Tomé and Príncipe) are on islands, with no worries about secessionists or irredentists.

Most sub-Saharan Africans, however, live not in the subcontinent’s 14 small countries

but in its seven large or 27 medium-sized ones. Sub-Saharan Africa’s six other large countries are either “partly free” (Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Nigeria) or “not free” (Congo-Kinshasa and Sudan). Indeed, when viewed in terms of people rather than countries, the condition of democracy on the subcontinent appears even bleaker: Only 15 percent of its residents live in freedom.

However much it affects a state’s democratic status, says Bratton, population size is not nearly as significant a factor as what he terms the state’s “strength.” Using the World Bank Institute’s numerical gauges of political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption in each country, Bratton created a total state strength score for each sub-Saharan African country. On a scale of -2.0 to +2.0, the countries varied widely: from -1.84 for medium-sized Somalia to +0.78 for small Botswana (which boasts an exceptionally honest and effective civil service). The median sub-Saharan state (represented by Tanzania and Eritrea) scored -0.67. All 11 full-fledged democracies in the subcontinent were above that median.