

**Habsburg H-Net Discussion Network
Bishop Strossmayer to Gladstone, 1876**

From: <http://www.h-net.org/~habsweb/sourcetexts/stross1.htm>

**Letter of Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer to Mr. William E. Gladstone,
October 1, 1876**

[The following letter is reproduced from Seton-Watson, R.W. *The Southern Slav Question and the Habsburg Monarchy*. London: Constable and Co., 1911. The pagination and all punctuation has been retained from the original.]

(Page 417)

I. Bishop Strossmayer to Mr. Gladstone. October 1, 1876.

(Written in German.)

[All the other letters I have myself translated from the originals, but this version is transcribed from a MS., on the back of which are the words, "Translation in Lord Acton's hand." Needless to say, Lord Acton's version is at once scholarly and accurate. R.W.S.W.]

Allow me to thank you from my inmost soul for the generous initiative you have taken,(506) before your own glorious nation and the whole civilized world, for the rights of humanity and freedom, for which the unfortunate Southern Slavs are suffering so much and are pouring forth their blood in an unequal conflict. We have rejoiced at it the more, because of our sincere admiration for your country, which has succeeded so well in reconciling order and stability with liberty and with every description of progress, and the noble movement which has recently taken possession of a part of the English people (507) fills us with hope, because the force of public opinion is irresistible when it is directed towards noble ends, and is guided by men of your services and reputation. Therefore I thank you again heartily, and will add a few words, not to say anything that is new, but to relieve the pressure that is on my heart.

The Koran has manifested before God and man its absolute incapacity to govern Christian nations, by making itself the basis not only of religious but of social and political life. Its fatal purpose is either to force Islamism upon them, or to deprive them for ever of political rights, and to plunge them into an intolerable oppression. No power in the world can change this inherent mission of the Koran, for it comes, in the belief of the Moslem, from God Himself. To rule and aggrandise, and to indulge undisturbed in all those unnatural vices which, before they bring about the death of nations. are always the source of dreadful cruelties, that is the appointed mission which the Mussulman has received from God. Between the slavery of the Koran and all other slavery there is this difference, that the one is commonly the result of evil custom, of vice and passion, of causes that are destitute of divine sanction, whilst the other claims

(506) Mr. Gladstone's famous pamphlet on The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East, appeared on September 5, 1876.

(507) Through the correspondence both Strossmayer and Gladstone invariably use the words "England" and "English" for "Britain" and "British."

(Page 418)

to be directly sanctioned by God Himself, and must therefore be unchangeable and perpetual. Hence the evident truth, that all attempted reforms are fruitful of nothing but increase of suffering to the Christian. The Turks have the right to say that they must obey the voice of God rather than the precepts of human policy. They regard compulsory reforms as sacrilegious follies, calculated to disturb the rights and enjoyments assured to them by Heaven, and take their revenge on the Christians who occasion the demand for reform. They are cunning enough to abound with treacherous promises in the hour of trouble; but we can truly say of such hollow pledges--"mentita est iniquitas sibi" and "quae societas lucis cum tenebris aut Christi cum Belial." It is impossible that their promises should ever be sincere.* It is pitiful that there should be men who have the courage to allow themselves to be so openly deceived; and it is sad especially that the European diplomacy should be among them. Diplomacy ought to be the highest and safest tribunal, full of wisdom and experience; but it exhibits itself now in a light that does not deserve the confidence of the world. Instead of simplifying problems it makes them obscure, and supplies solutions which instead of peace and tranquillity produce new complications, new delusions, new animosities and new conflicts. Of this kind are assuredly all the reforms now spoken of.

To make the situation of the Christians in some measure bearable, it is requisite that the Turkish Government should be able to give them securities for their personal safety, for intellectual progress, and for a decently upright administration. Turkey is manifestly unable to satisfy any one of these requirements. Not the first, for Turkey cannot grant to Christians the right of serving with Mohammedans in the regular army.* The Christian cannot remain a slave whose liberty, property and life are at the disposal of his Turkish master. He must be unarmed, because he is not his own master, and has no country of his own. In consequence of the undeserved protection it enjoys, and perhaps of secret suggestions, Turkey intends to create an universal militia or Landwehr, to deliver it once and for all from European influence and from proposals of reform. If, to the disgrace of Europe, this should be accomplished, then woe to the Christians! God knows whether in that event the self-constituted protectors and advisers would not afterwards suffer for it themselves.

Turkey cannot satisfy the second requirement, because it absolutely contradicts its nature and its divinely appointed mission to pay for Christian schools and institutions. Islam regards this as the greatest crime, whereas the destruction of the Alexandrian library was a holy and religious work. Lastly, the Turkish administration is the incurable spot in the

Turkish State. We know by our own experience, the character of the Asiatic bureaucracy which the Turks have, for many years, sent into our Slavonic provinces. They

(Page 419)

have not an atom of the laboriousness and integrity necessary to a decent administrative system. They are so covetous and so vicious that they can only be compared to swarms of locusts that devastate a country, and leave nothing but desolation and disease behind; and I cannot help observing the contrast between the Arabs, who left splendid traces of their mental activity in Europe, and the Turkish race, which is utterly incapable of creating anything and is only skilful to destroy. They will leave nothing behind them in the fairest regions of Europe, after four centuries of occupation, but destitution and misery, without a sign of any loftier or better purpose.* All that is spoken about reform is an illusion, founded very often on bad faith. For there are men who foolishly conceive that the resurrection of the Slavonic race in these parts would be the ruin of their own people. (508) Hence the cry, that the Slavonians must not be free, that the germs of an independent commonwealth must not be suffered to take root in that country. These men are blind to the truth that, by a providential law, the deliverance and revival of an oppressed nation is a pledge of future benefit for others.* That is the true secret of the solidarity of nations. That must be a truly wretched and intolerable existence, which requires as its condition, that a neighbouring people should be crushed and enslaved. There is a process of union going on among the Slavonian people, which, in spite of many obstacles and errors, God seems to have taken in His hands. The issue is a secret of Providence. But I hope with my whole heart that it will be for the advantage of the state to which I belong, and which seems to have the exalted mission of interponing between great nations, to prevent conflict and to bring about a solution of the most intricate questions, that shall be for the advantage and happiness of Europe. The result depends on this: whether that Power remains true without swerving to that law of justice which is the daily bread of the nations that live for the achievement of great ends. We Croats can truly say, that in this little group of Slavonian brethren, we represent the Tuscan element. Under great difficulties and in a short course of years, we have called into existence institutions which justify us in claiming the lead in the path of intellectual progress and of high ideals. We have a great duty to perform, and we are conscious of our function in this region, and in the questions which are stirring the world. It is in the power of others either to frustrate our action, or to free and consolidate us.

The Bulgarians are an extremely quiet, sensible and hardworking people, rich in domestic virtues. A moral and hardworking people is eo ipso fit for self-government.* An independent administration, if it was granted to this fine Slavonian race, would set free forces that would soon do much for material and for moral civilization; and ecclesiastical self-government, partially introduced, would serve them as a school for political self-government.*

(508) A reference to the popular view prevalent among the Magyars.

(Page 420)

The Servians are a warlike and very enterprising race, full of vitality. It would be a just reward of their sanguinary sacrifices in a sacred cause, to put the autonomy of Bosnia under the protection of their energy and their fifty years' experience. A valuable security for the success of Bosnian self-government would be due provision for the moral influences which are never more important than in a primitive condition of society. A good Catholic and Orthodox Bishop could do a great work in that country.

Such a system of self-government in its European provinces would suit the true interest of Turkey far better than the continual intervention of Europe in its internal affairs, which is injurious to its honour and reputation. I am thoroughly convinced that any solution of the Eastern question which does not include full administrative autonomy in the European provinces of Turkey will increase the confusion and the danger.

Once more I thank you most sincerely, and hope that I shall soon be able to thank you personally and to shake you warmly by the hand. Two distinguished Englishmen, Dr. Liddon and Mr. Malcolm MacColl, visited me lately, and gave me courage to write to you. I need not say that if you should ever visit this country, you will find the heartiest and most fraternal reception at my house.

STROSSMAYER, Bishop of Bosnia.

DIAKOVO, October 1, 1876

Copied with permission from the Habsburg H-Net Discussion Network
<http://www.h-net.org/~habsweb/>

Contact James Niessen for questions about the Habsburg website:
niessen@mail.h-net.msu.edu