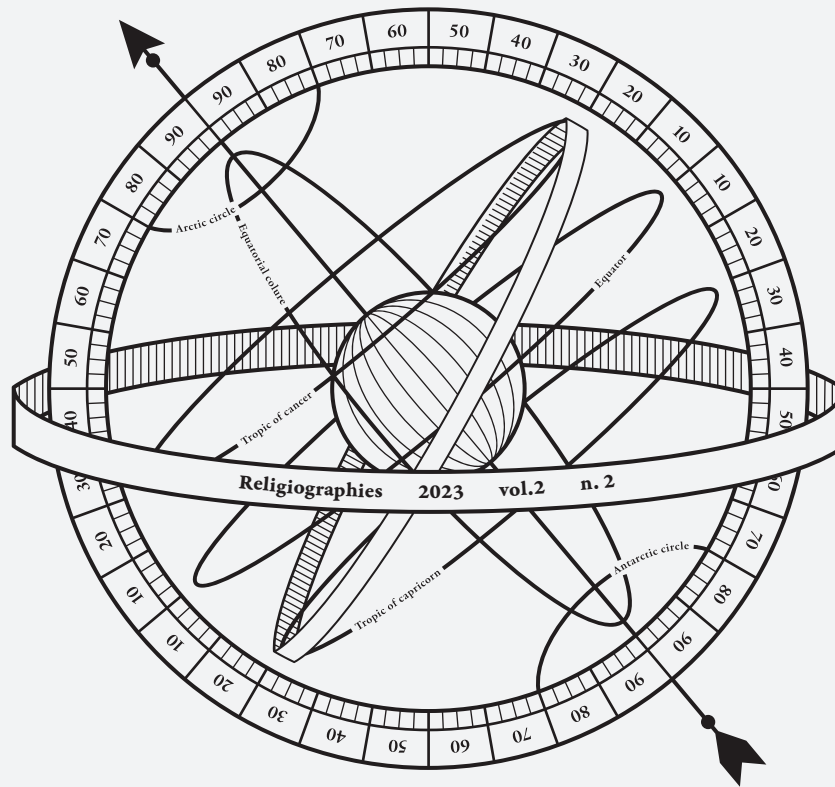


# Religiographies



Special Issue  
“Religious Dimensions of Nationalism”  
edited by  
Marios Hatzopoulos

*Andrzej Towiański. Between  
Catholic Esotericism and  
Political Messianism*  
Giulio Dalla Grana



CENTRO STUDI  
DI CIVILTÀ E SPIRITUALITÀ  
COMPARATE

*fondazione*  
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Giulio Dalla Grana  
University of Turin  
[giulio.dallagrana@unito.it](mailto:giulio.dallagrana@unito.it)  
University of Amsterdam  
[g.dallagrana@uva.nl](mailto:g.dallagrana@uva.nl)

Keywords:

Andrzej Towiański, Polish messianism, Catholic esotericism, Romantic nationalism, Political religion

To cite this:

Dalla Grana, Giulio. "Andrzej Towiański. Between Catholic Esotericism and Political Messianism." *Religiographies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2023): 38–57.

*Abstract*

The aim of this article is to show the relationship between Catholic Esotericism and Romantic nationalism through the study of Andrzej Towiański's thought. Towiański based his thought on a Messianic idea, promoting a nationalism sustained by a heterodox current of a faith often endorsed as a State religion. The esoteric features of Towiański's religious ideas placed his doctrine outside the typical Romantic nationalist frameworks. Towiański's doctrine intertwined the concepts of nation, nation-State, Roman Catholic Church, and Roman Catholic faith to form a particular, and controversial, political doctrine. In order to describe a religion-based approach to Romantic nationalism, this article analyses the main Towianist religious ideas, two instances of their nationalistic outcomes, and the political traits of Towiański's religious conceptions.

*Note on the authors:* Uncredited authors and native authors' names are included within square brackets.

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Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *Historia filozofii* [History of Philosophy] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2009), 2:259.

2

Andrzej Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism. The Case of Poland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 239–46.

3

Zygmunt Krasiński, "O stanowisku Polski z Bożych i ludzkich względów" [On the Status of Poland in the Divine and Human Regards], in *Pisma Zygmunta Krasińskiego. Wydanie jubileuszowe* [Zygmunt Krasiński's Collected Works. Anniversary Edition], vol. 7, *Pisma filozoficzne i polityczne* [Philosophical and Political Works] (Krakow: Gebethner i Spółka—Gebethner i Wolff, 1912), 71.

*1. Introduction: Andrzej Towiański and Polish Messianism*

Polish Romanticism can be seen as a period when philosophical, political, and religious ideas were seen as a response to the moral, social, and national hopes of Poles, a period that saw the emergence of a form of messianic thought promoted by several personalities who identified Poland as the "Christ of nations." Arising between the November Uprising of 1830 and the January Uprising of 1863, Polish messianism evolved from the "high spiritual aspirations of a politically deprived nation"<sup>1</sup> which, dismembered by Prussia, Russia, and Austria, saw itself as the Twelve Tribes of Israel: divided in their own country and exiled around Europe. The former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was understood by the Polish *inteligencja* as sharing the same suffering and expectations of the European national-liberal uprisings, but also as tasked with establishing a new reality in the post-Napoleonic order, redeeming humanity after all the grief caused and endured.<sup>2</sup>

In this context, the notion of nation can be expressed through Zygmunt Krasiński's words: "The name of nation can be only conferred to that aggregation of alive and associated spirits, which in itself construed of the goal towards which it struggles, this aim being humanity in the supreme sense of the term."<sup>3</sup> Unlike other political entities, nations were perceived as sentient beings created by God. Therefore, they possessed the concepts of past, present, and future and had existential purposes. However, these purposes could only be pursued through the immanent realisation of the nation as a political entity. What is national is subjected to the universal, but the universal progress of humanity is directly correlated with the establishment and progress of individual nations. This concept, the pillar of progressivist Romanticism, is perfectly explained in the 17th article of the Young Europe manifesto by Giuseppe Mazzini:

“Every people has its special mission, which will co-operate towards the fulfilment of the general mission of humanity. That mission constitutes its nationality. Nationality is sacred.”<sup>4</sup> Polish Messianism can be understood as a current of progressivist Romanticism, simplistically labelled by Hans Kohn as a “Romantic nationalism based on the veneration of a past without foundation in the present.”<sup>5</sup> This irrational component, almost overlooked by Eric J. Hobsbawm’s materialistic approach,<sup>6</sup> was the basis of the entire Polish intellectual production of both reactionary and progressivist thinkers, as Andrzej Walicki has underlined.<sup>7</sup>

In this historiosophical scenario, on the 27th of September 1841, Andrzej Towiański (1799–1878) delivered a speech before the Polish emigration gathered at Notre Dame de Paris, announcing the coming of a “Higher Christian Epoch,” identified by him as the intermediate step towards the Kingdom of God. The religious-political ideas and social structure of the Towianist community can be defined as a “mystical-chiliastic Christian heterodoxy.”<sup>8</sup> Concerning the subject of this study, however, it is worth noting that the strict adherence of Towiański’s thought to the philosophical category of Polish Messianism, and its messianic character, was questioned as early as 1918 by Maria Bersano Begey<sup>9</sup> and more recently by Marlis Lami.<sup>10</sup>



Xylography of Andrzej Towiański by Jan Styfi. Biblioteka Narodowa w Warszawie, G.28873/I.

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Joseph [Giuseppe] Mazzini, “Pact of Fraternity of the Young Europe,” in *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, vol. 3, *Autobiographical and Political* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1891), 33.

5

Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism. Its History and Ideology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 30.

6

Cf. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution. 1789–1848* (New York: New American Library, 1962). Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

7

Cf. Andrzej Walicki, *Między filozofią, religią i polityką. Studia o myśli polskiej epoki romantyzmu* [Between Philosophy, Religion, and Politics. Studies on Polish Thought of the Romantic Epoch] (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1983). Brian Porter, “Thy Kingdom Come. Patriotism, Prophecy, and the Catholic Hierarchy in Nineteenth-Century Poland,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 89, no. 2 (2003): 213–39.

8

Andrzej Walicki, “Millenaryzm i mesjanizm religijny a romantyczny mesjanizm polski. Zarys problematyki,” [Millenarianism and Religious Messianism versus Polish Romantic Messianism. Outlines of problems] *Pamiętnik Literacki* 64, no. 4 (1971): 30.

9

Maria Bersano Begey, *Vita e pensiero di Andrea Towiański (1799–1878)* [Life and Thought of Andrzej Towiański] (Milano: Editrice Milanese, 1918), 320–30.

10

Marlis Lami, “Mesjanizm bez mesjasza?” [Messianism without a Messiah?] 44. *Czterdzięści i Cztery. Magazyn Apokaliptyczny* 12 (2021): 203–26.



11

This name refers to two verses of the New Testament: “*Notum a saeculo est Domino opus suum*” (Acts, XV:18) and “*Dicit eis Jesus: Meus cibus est ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me, ut perficiam opus ejus*” (John, IV:34).

12

Alessandro Zussini, *Andrzej Towiański. Un riformatore polacco in Italia* [Andrzej Towiański. A Polish Reformer in Italy] (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 1970), 155–84.

13

Specifically on Towiański's thought, see Adam Sikora, *Towiański i rozterki romantyzmu* [Towiański and the Dilemmas of Romanticism] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Wiedza Powszechna, 1969). Walentyna Horoszkiewiczówna, *Etyka Towiańskiego. Jej źródła i promieniowanie* [Towiański's Ethics. Its Sources and Its Spread] (Wilno: Nakładem Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 1938).

14

Concerning this problematic definition, see Francesco Baroni, “Storia dell'esoterismo e storia delle religioni. Mappatura di un campo di ricerca e prospettive teoriche,” [History of Esotericism and History of Religions. Mapping of a Research Field and Theoretical Perspectives] *Egeria* 11, no. 16 (2022): 59–79. Helmut Zander, “What Is Esotericism? Does It Exist? How Can It Be Understood?,” in *Occult Roots of Religious Studies. On the Influence of Non-Hegemonic Currents on Academia around 1900*, ed. Yves Mühlematter and Helmut Zander (Oldenbourg: DeGruyter, 2021), 14–43.

15

[Paul] Sédir, *Le martyre de la Pologne* (Paris: Éditions Georges Crès et Cie, 1917), 37.

16

“André Towiański et le christianisme spirituel,” *Les Amitiés Spirituelles*, no. 37 (1937).

### 1.1. The Towianist Community

In 1828 and 1839, Towiański saw two Marian apparitions in the Bernardine Church of Wilno. These apparitions revealed to him the coming of a new epoch. In 1840, Towiański travelled to Paris, the centre of the Polish emigration after the November Uprising. Nonetheless, Towiański did not take part in the Polish revolution. He voluntarily left his fatherland to join his exiled compatriots and preach the divine message received in Wilno.

Towiański called his mission the Cause of God.<sup>11</sup> According to him, the Cause of God was started by Jesus Christ himself. But both the Church and humanity forgot his teachings. Towiański felt it was his duty to revive the mission of Jesus Christ and struggle for its accomplishment on earth. Nonetheless, to implement the divine design, he needed the support of other earthly forces: people who truly wanted to seek a perfect union with God, and specific nations identified as the depository of God's Will.

Between 1841 and 1842, a Towianist Circle composed of dozens of disciples took shape in Paris. Among Towiański's disciples were notable Polish personalities such as the poets Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849), and Seweryn Goszczyński (1801–1876); insurgents of the November Uprising, namely Ludwik Nabelak (1804–1883), Karol Różycki (1789–1870), and Mikołaj Kamieński (1799–1873); and the diplomat Aleksander Chodźko (1804–1891).

In the following years, Towiański's charisma attracted several Frenchmen, especially among the members of Pierre-Michel-Eugène Vintras' *Œuvre de la Miséricorde* (Cause of Mercy); numerous Italians belonging to the Piedmontese cultural élite; and Jews and Protestants who converted to Catholicism after having met Towiański. Three main Towianist Circles formed the core of the Towianist community, in Paris, Zurich, and Turin. Other minor Circles were present in Europe and were mostly connected to Towianist families or had a limited number of disciples. Notably, the Circles survived Towiański's death and even multiplied in Italy between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup>

Towiański promoted a doctrine that, although he always claimed its compliance with the Catholic faith, incorporated several religious concepts that can be found in Jewish mysticism and ancient Christian heterodox doctrines, alongside philosophical and social ideas of the late Enlightenment and the Romantic period.<sup>13</sup> Essentially, Towiański's doctrine aimed for social renewal through the strict observance of its principles. Towianism stressed the need to pursue spiritual perfectionism to achieve an improvement of reality from an eschatological perspective. According to Towiański, this spiritual perfectionism can only be attained through a total and intimate union with God, to awaken the “Christian tone” which can lead to the accomplishment of true Christian acts in private and public life.

Towiański's doctrine has several characteristics that fit into the concept of “Western” esotericism:<sup>14</sup> the initiatory nature of the Towianist community, the secrecy of Towiański's teachings, the divine intervention that produced a revelation, and the reprisal of a forgotten tradition. Already in the first decades of the twentieth century, Paul Sédir's *Les Amitiés Spirituelles* identified Towiański as a national initiator:<sup>15</sup> an archetype of “the emissaries of the Light”<sup>16</sup> who embodied ancient Rosicrucian knowledge.

### 1.2. Roman Catholic Church and Romantic Nationalism

The devotion to the Roman Catholic faith of the majority of the Polish emigration, alongside liberal-national Romantic ideas, inevitably produced tension with Rome.

After the French Revolution, the Church became aware of a new order that, under the pretext of affirming the rights of freedom and equality, wanted to eradicate Christianity. Following the Congress of Vienna, three main currents emerged in Europe: the alliance of throne and altar, which sought a balance between the jurisdictionalist policies of the States and the privileges of the clergy; an intransigent reactionary Catholicism, which saw in the papal theocracy the only remedy against revolutionary attempts; and a liberal-Catholic stance which considered liberal-nationalist ideas and the teachings of the Gospel to be compatible.

The Roman Curia of the nineteenth century included supporters of each of these currents. However, the first stance was the one promoted, pursued, and implemented by the Holy See. Gregorius XVI's encyclical *Cum primum* on the 9th of June 1832, which condemned the November Uprising, was the apex of this policy's results. The Church's endeavours to maintain the *status quo* in Europe after the Restoration clashed dramatically with Poland's national aspirations, and with those of other Catholic nations. Indeed, from the Church's perspective, being patriotic, which meant recognising the existence of nations and fighting for their political establishment, implied being against the State of the Church and in favour of the Italian nation.<sup>17</sup> Hence against the Holy Alliance, which guaranteed the State of the Church's territorial integrity and ruled over various nations which sought their independence. Promoting an end to the Pontifical temporal power was thus perceived as opposing the Roman Catholic Church and as supporting the earthly rule of people and nations instead of divinely inspired monarchies and the Church.

While progress, and the concept of nationality, were opposed by institutional Catholicism, Towiański believed that the teachings of Jesus Christ complied with these stances. Although Towiański also promoted religious concepts rather typical of reactionary Catholic thinkers, he could theoretically adhere to the liberal Catholic current. Nonetheless, Towiański was not a political philosopher. He saw himself as the depositary of a divine mission consecrated by a heavenly vision. In his writings, the absence of any form of explicit and systematic political thought is pervasive. In Towiański's thought, progress did not imply the simple earthly aspect promoted by the various progressivist political thinkers of the nineteenth century; it coincided with striving for the redemption and salvation of humanity. For Towiański, the progress of humanity and individual spiritual progress were deeply intertwined because the former was understood as the consequence of the latter. Towiański's doctrine thus expresses the conjunction of progressivist political aims and religious renewal: the political affirmation of nations and the inauguration of a Roman Church embodying the original teachings of Jesus Christ. Similar to other religious reformers of the nineteenth century, Towiański tried to obtain pontifical approval for his doctrine. Like his predecessors, he was opposed by the reactionary faction of the Roman Curia, which identified him as a promotor of dangerous heterodox doctrines<sup>18</sup> and as a political agitator. Although Towiański did not have the support of the Holy See, the Towianists believed that God was on their side.

17

Francesco Traniello, "Religione, nazione e sovranità nel Risorgimento italiano" [Religion, Nation, and Sovereignty in Italian Risorgimento] *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 28, no. 2 (1992): 319–68.

18

Initially, Towiański's main adversaries were the priests of the Congregation of the Resurrection. Later, several members of the Italian clergy also opposed Towiański. The main books that attacked Towiański were: Pierre [Piotr] Semenenko, *Towiański et sa doctrine jugés par l'enseignement de l'église* (Paris: Sagnier et Bray, 1850). Orazio Premoli, *Andrea Towianski (1799–1878). Contributo alla storia del misticismo contemporaneo* [Andrzej Towiański (1799–1878). A Contribution to the History of Contemporary Mysticism] (Roma: Libreria Editrice Religiosa Francesco Ferrari, 1914).

19

Marlis Lami analysed the Towianist publications and their editors in: Marlis Lami, *Andrzej Towiański (1799–1878). Ein religiöser Reformler im europäischen Kontext seiner Zeit* [Andrzej Towiański (1799–1878). A Religious Reformer in the European Context of His Time] (Göttingen: V&R Unipress—Vienna University Press, 2019), 23–100.

20

Giulio Dalla Grana, “Esoteric Resonances in Towiański’s Thought,” *The Polish Review* 65, no. 4 (2020): 3–22.

21

Lami, *Andrzej Towiański*, 224–30.

## 2. Exotericism and Esotericism in Towiański’s Teachings

During his life, Towiański never published anything in first person. Indeed, he devoted the last years of his life to revising the notes that expressed his teachings to his disciples. While Towiański was alive, however, his disciples published, in Turin and Paris, a few pamphlets on him and his mission. After his death, *Pisma Andrzeja Towiańskiego* (Andrzej Towiański’s Collected Works) and *Kilka aktów i dokumentów odnoszących się do działalności Andrzeja Towiańskiego* (Several Acts and Documents Concerning the Activities of Andrzej Towiański) were published, respectively in Turin and Rome.

Towiański’s teachings reveal exoteric and esoteric dimensions. The Towianists truly wanted to avoid any doctrinal-theological criticism from Church authorities, and they published Towiański’s teachings to expressly show their goodness and piety.<sup>19</sup> Although the Towianists tried to hide any heterodoxy in Towiański’s religious ideas, his esoteric doctrine is immediately recognisable in certain sentences and concepts<sup>20</sup> alongside certain ritualistic practices.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, since Towiański’s writings were published after his death by his closest adepts, his teachings could only be obtained via an oral tradition, according to which a few Towianists decided what should be disclosed.



A typical Towianist volume. Photograph © G.D.G. Biblioteca Erik Peterson, Fondo Towiansky, THEO7.24. This volume, owned by the Rostagno family, crossed three generations and was presumably crafted and edited between 1868 and 1934. It contains dozens of manuscripts, letters, pamphlets, and pictures. Usually, the Towianists transcribed and translated their letters and pamphlets in order to diffuse them to other members of the Circles. Successively, the material was bind together in large volumes or pocket books.

Towiański’s message attracted numerous followers, mainly among Poles, Frenchmen, Italians, and Jews. Towiański’s disciples were usually people striving for their national independence, seeking religious renewal, or frustrated by the social and political situation of nineteenth-century Europe. One of the reasons why Towiański’s teachings fascinated many people was certainly, alongside his religious doctrine, the role attributed to their nation, and, therefore, their active part in history to perfect and save humanity.

References to nations and their role can often and vaguely be found in Towianist publications. The main *corpus* of texts Towiański specifically dedicated to the topic is the first part of the third volume of his collected works, which is divided into five sections concerning Poland, Russia, France, Italy, and Israel. In order to shed some light on Towiański’s thought and on the relationship between Esoteric Catholicism and Romanic nationalism, we will analyse some Towianist extracts.

### 2.1. Polish Nation in Towiański's Paris Speeches

In the last months of 1841, Towiański appeared in public in Paris and gave two speeches. The first was given at the archcathedral of Notre Dame; the second, at the church of Saint Séverin.

In Notre Dame, Towiański's speech was attended by part of the Polish emigration. Due to its public nature, and because it was the first public appearance of Towiański in France, the speech reveals the main exoteric points of the message he allegedly received in Wilno.

“I come to announce to you the time of the Lord's Jubilee, in which it is easier for man to obtain God's Grace and, with its help, to free himself from slavery, to be reborn and live as a Christian. Let me announce to you the Higher Christian Epoch, which is opening in the world today, and the Cause of God that initiates man into this epoch. I come to introduce you to this work, to facilitate and to cooperate with you in fulfilling our important vocation that God destined in a ten-year retreat in a foreign land to prepare you as the sons of a superior Christian nation. [. . .] And you brothers, defenders, and martyrs of freedom, prepared by the sufferings of exile and wandering, you are the first to participate in this great Cause of God's mercy, the cause of salvation and progress of humankind!”<sup>22</sup>

Towiański defines the Cause of God as the “cause of salvation and progress of humankind.” Although he identifies Poles as the chosen people to accomplish his mission, he clearly points out that, to fulfil their “vocation,” they must accept his help. That being said, the reason for being chosen is related to something more than forced exile. Towiański concluded the speech with these words:

“In the Cause of God, the whole great future of Poland, our fatherland, is defined. Because our nation, which faithfully preserved Christianity in its souls through the ages, is called by the Cause of God to apply Christianity in its private and public life. [. . .] This vocation is shared by some other nations. However, Poland, as an outstanding part of the Slavic tribe, which preserved in its soul the treasure of Christ's fire, the treasure of love and feeling, more purely and vividly than other tribes, is the cornerstone of the rising Cause of God, the cause of the salvation of the world.”<sup>23</sup>

The particularity of the Polish people is underlined again in the speech delivered at the church of Saint Séverin. Towiański tasked one of his disciples, the painter Walenty Wańkowicz (1799–1842), with depicting Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn, and placed it in one of the church's chapels. During the inauguration, Towiański stated:

“Oh, Slavic soul! Because of your simplicity, you have the ability to understand the voice of the Lord. In the past ages, amid general contamination, you kept your Christian seed pure. Bear witness to that. And the merit of your fidelity to Christ, our Lord, will soon satisfy you.”<sup>24</sup>

When analysing these two speeches, it must be stressed that Towiański was

22

[Andrzej Towiański], “Słowa sługi Bożego” [The Words of the Servant of God], in *Pisma Andrzeja Towiańskiego* [Andrzej Towiański's Collected Works], ed. Stanisław Falkowski and Karol Baykowski (Turin: Nakładem Wydawców, 1882), 1:25–26.

23

[Towiański], “Słowa sługi Bożego,” 28.

24

[Towiański], “Wedzwane do emigracji polskiej” [The Call to the Polish Emigration] in *Pisma*, 1:30.



specifically addressing the Polish emigration, underlining the role that the Polish nation had in his revelation. That said, Towiański's message was not restricted to Poles only.

## 2. 2. *Biesiada and the Spiritual Battle*

The most known and criticised text by Towiański is *Biesiada* (The Banquet). The manuscript was drafted in Waterloo, during the Yuletide of 1840, for the initiation of General Jan Skrzynecki (1787–1860), former commander in chief of the November Uprising. In 1843, the Polish priest Aleksander Jelowicki obtained the manuscript from Skrzynecki and lithographed it to denounce Towiański's doctrine. Although Towiański recognised the authorship of the text, he did not stand by its contents since it consisted of loose notes that could not properly convey his ideas. The revised version of *Biesiada* was not published until 1882, in Towiański's collected works,<sup>25</sup> and it differed enormously from Jelowicki's lithographed version.

*Biesiada* expresses the Towianist cosmology and Towiański's fundamental concept of metempsychosis. In the pamphlet, Towiański explains that the world is surrounded by evil Lower Spirits organised in columns of darkness and good Higher Spirits directly descended from heaven through columns of light. For Towiański, man is able to attract those columns through evil or good actions. Thanks to the aid of these columns, man's soul could attain a new life depending on the column he attracted.

In the text, Towiański prophesied that a battle between the Lower and the Higher Spirits was soon to come, and that the descending column of light was going to illuminate the world.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, this heavenly column of light would not descend on all nations, only a chosen few.

“However, following the example of our terrestrial light which enlightens some [nations] while it leaves other countries in the twilight, and others still in the deepest darkness and cold; the celestial light will also undergo this destiny. Amid the jubilee of grace, the fire burning the chosen and prepared nations will not cast upon others even the faintest ray.”<sup>27</sup>

For Towiański, the battle that would cast the heavenly fire on earth through the Higher Spirits was guided by the spirit of an individual who had cast another kind of fire all over Europe a few decades before: “And you, spirit of Napoleon, by a special privilege, you are the one before the last [God] in this holy column. You are allowed to live, to act on earth, without ceasing to be a pure spirit.”<sup>28</sup> Napoleon, alongside other leaders such as Kościuszko, is a crucial figure in Towiański's thought. Napoleon is seen by Towiański as a precursor of the Cause of God. He was able to attract the column of light and began the fight against the Lower Spirits. Nevertheless, he was later corrupted by these Spirits, and he surrendered to their temptations. Instead of realising the Cause, he started to pursue personal interests. After Napoleon's death, his spirit began to redeem itself by contributing to the fight against darkness.<sup>29</sup>

In *Biesiada*, Towiański never mentions the Polish nation or any other political matter. However, from a national-revolutionary interpretation of Towiański's words, all the liberal-national insurrectionary attempts pursued after the Congress of Vienna can be perceived as intensifying the battle between the Higher and Lower Spirits, respectively identified as the people who were against the political order imposed by the Restoration. Napoleon,

25

[Towiański], “Biesiada z Janem Skrzyneckim” [The Banquet with Jan Skrzynecki] in *Pisma*, 1:1–21.

26

[Andrzej Towiański], *Banquet du 17 janvier 1841* (Paris: Libraire de N. Béchét fils, [1844]), 10–11. “It is in the middle of the nineteenth century that You, oh Lord, have reserved this honour, this joy, this phenomenon unknown to the world.”

27

[Towiański], *Banquet*, 11.

28

[Towiański], *Banquet*, 14.

29

[Adam Mickiewicz, Andrzej Towiański], *Współdział Adama Mickiewicza w sprawie Andrzeja Towiańskiego* [Adam Mickiewicz's Participation in the Cause of Andrzej Towiański] (Paris: Księgarnia Luxemburska, 1877), 2:293–338.

who forced an unnatural State-building process in Europe, was still pursuing the same mission. While the national aims of the European people were supported by the column of light, there is a curious synchronicity between the revolutionary attempts of 1848 and Towiański's prophecy. Indeed, Towiański's support for national causes is not a matter of interpretation. In *Biesiada*, three toasts conclude the text. The first toast asserts unequivocally the commitment of Towiański's doctrine to liberal-national struggles: "God! Allow this earthly expression of the Cause of the Spirit to be approved by your glory: [. . .] For the prosperity of the holiest cause of the people; for the prosperity of our fatherland!"<sup>30</sup>

30  
[Towiański], *Banquet*, 15.

### 2.3. *The Triple Sacrifice*

The Triple Sacrifice (or Christian Sacrifice) is another cornerstone of Towiański's doctrine. It can be identified as the main Towianist practice aimed at improving the spirit and its concrete outcome. Towiański always stressed the necessity of applying the law of Jesus Christ in private and public life, and the Triple Sacrifice was the means to do so. The actions and behaviour of the individual, one of the spirits that form the nation, are the main factors in shaping the community. In *Biesiada*, Towiański underlined the following: "For the merits of a single righteous man, God spares a country, a city. For this righteous one, because of his inner purity, [God] conveys a column of light which defends this country, this city from the deeds of evil."<sup>31</sup>

31  
[Towiański], *Banquet*, 13.

The sacrifice is trifold because it results from three different practices that involve spirit, body, and actions. The Triple Sacrifice is defined as:

"The movement of the Spirit into the Spirit, into the body, and into the action. According to how the spirit positions itself, the body becomes free, and it manifests itself through action. This is Christianity. This is the progressive accomplishment of the Divine Word made by simple people who became fool for Christ."<sup>32</sup>

32  
Andrzej Towiański, "Wielki Periood" [The Great Period], in *Wybór pism i nauk* [Selected Works and Teachings], ed. Stanisław Pigoń (Breslaw: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich—De Agostini Polska, 2004), 87.

33  
[Towiański], "Noty zebrane przez Adama Towiańskiego z kilku rozmów jego z ojcem" [Notes Collected by Adam Towiański from Several Conversations with His Father], in *Pisma*, 1:57.

34  
[Towiański], "Noty zebrane przez Adama Towiańskiego," 58.

The Triple Sacrifice is explained in a text that describes a meeting between Towiański and his son. The sacrifice of spirit is the first step towards the fulfilment of the Triple Sacrifice. It consists in progressively elevating the spirit through the power of loving God:

"Be strong in yourself, focus, lift and adjust your spirit to the tone that Christ the Lord has shown in his whole life and gave to man, so that he would rise to this tone for centuries. In this work, humble yourself, crumble before God, awake love, affection, tenderness, move, animate and enlighten yourself internally; reach calm, inner peace."<sup>33</sup>

The second step, the sacrifice of body, is to live according to the spirit, prepared and elevated by its sacrifice. In an Augustinian way, Towiański suggests: "Bring your spirit into the body, penetrate, enliven the body with this tone, these feelings, the life that you have awakened in your spirit."<sup>34</sup> The final step, the sacrifice of action, is the externalisation of the previous sacrifices. It represents the concrete Christianisation of life, the application of the teachings of Jesus Christ with body and soul in every aspect of existence, in every private moment, and in every social interaction.

Yet, the Triple Sacrifice is not merely a personal spiritual exercise.

Stanisław Szpotański, *Andrzej Towiański. Jego życie i nauka* [Andrzej Towiański. His Life and Teachings] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Kasy im. Mianowskiego, 1938), 70–95.

As Stanisław Szpotański observed through the analysis of Swedenborg's thought, the Triple Sacrifice can be understood as the concrete realisation of the biblical passage *love thy neighbour as thyself*.<sup>35</sup>

Love and sacrifice are two crucial interconnected points for Towianism. According to Towiański, the essential starting point is the love of God, because only love empowers one to endure any effort or pain. Love is the spiritual elevation that reaches toward the aim. Sacrifice is the product of love; it consists in any action that could concretely realise love. For Towiański, these two key points are the essence of Christianity. Love is what drives progress; sacrifice is the means by which it can be accomplished. In this way, the Triple Sacrifice can be understood as the Towianist practice that enables moving from the individual to the nation, and the related infusion of Christian values from the lower, individual-microcosmic level to the higher, national-macrocosmic level.

#### 2.4. *Wielki Period and the Three Israels*

The fundamental text that discloses Towiański's national conceptions is *Wielki Period* (The Great Epoch). While *Biesiada* was a small notebook given to a single individual, *Wielki Period* aimed at systematising the revelation received in Wilno and disclosing a further level of initiation into Towiański's doctrine for adepts. The manuscript was drafted by Towiański in Solothurn between 1843 and 1844, and it was successively destroyed by Towiański himself. The text was never published, and it could only be transmitted orally in Towianist meetings.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, it is possible to see in Mickiewicz's lectures at Collège de France numerous similarities with the topics discussed in the manuscript and those in *Biesiada*.<sup>37</sup>

In the first part of the text, Towiański stresses the importance of spiritual improvement realised through the Triple Sacrifice, affirming that humanity and the world can be improved only through a higher transformation in the individual spirit. According to Towiański, this world is merely a sphere interconnected with other spheres. In the lower sphere, *Wielki Period* identifies antagonist of humanity. Similar to a Manichean viewpoint, while the Higher Spirits, inhabiting the higher sphere, are emanations of light by God and intermediated by Jesus Christ, the Lower Spirits, corrupted by Satan and wandering in the lower sphere, are subordinated by the Spirit of the Earth. However, Towiański does not give any proper definition of the Spirit of the Earth. He merely states that it opposes the Cause of Jesus Christ.

The most important section of *Wielki Period* concerns Israel. Numerous points of Towiański's teachings present similarities with Kabbalist doctrines.<sup>38</sup> The Towianists had a very strong interest in the Jews, and they tried on several occasions to preach the Cause to them<sup>39</sup> because Israel was identified as the "first-born son"<sup>40</sup> of God. For Towiański, Israel had a metaphysical significance: "Israel, the higher part of the terrestrial globe, is predestined to march ahead on the path of the Lord. [. . .] The holy Cause will be realised for Israel and by Israel."<sup>41</sup> When Towiański writes about Israel, he does not mean a geographical territory. Israel is a feature of the spirit of certain nations. It can be intended as that part of the spirit which preserves the pure Christian spark, that part elected for a covenant with God.

Towiański describes how Israel was subjugated by the Spirit of the Earth over the centuries. But the coming of the Higher Christian Epoch

36

Towiański, "Wielki Period," 78–83.

37

Stanisław Pigoń, "'Biesiada' Towiańskiego i jej komentarz w IV kursie 'Prelekcji paryskich' Adama Mickiewicza" [Towiański's "The Banquet" and Its Commentary in the 4th Course of Mickiewicz's "Paris Lectures"], in *Z epoki Mickiewicza. Studja i szkice* [In Mickiewicz's Epoch. Studies and Outlines] (Leopold: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1922), 241–97.

38

Stanisław Pigoń, "Towiański na Litwie (II)" [Towiański in Lithuania], *Przegląd Współczesny*, no. 126 (1932): 66–68. Cf. Marlis Lami, *Andrzej Towiański und die jüdische Mystik des 19. Jahrhunderts* [Andrzej Towiański and the Jewish Mysticism of the Nineteenth Century] (Vienna: Polnische Akademie der Wissenschaften—Wissenschaftliches Zentrum in Wien, 2017).

39

Abraham G. Duker, "The Mystery of the Jew in Mickiewicz's Towianist Lectures on Slav Literature," *Polish Review* 7, no. 4 (1962): 40–66. Cf. Attila Begey, *Andrzej Towiański et Israël. Actes et documents (1842–1864)* (Rome: G. Romagna Et C., 1912).

40

[Towiański], "Trzy listy do Feliksa N." [Three Letters to Feliks N.], in *Pisma*, 3:77.

41

Towiański, "Wielki Period," 90–91.

was awakening Israel from its slumber. Towiański prophesied that “Israel will reveal itself on the true day, and it will become the foundation of the Kingdom of God on earth.”<sup>42</sup> According to Towiański, there are three Israels called Minister-Nations. These three nations are related to the concrete implementation of the Cause of God: Israel-Jew, which “does not cease to worship the Spirit of the Earth, it breaks the chains through the exaltation of the Lord, [ . . . ] and start to gather near the fireplace of the Lord”;<sup>43</sup> Israel-French, which “breaks the chains of the Spirit of the Earth, it comes back to a pure exaltation, [ . . . ] it realises the Cause”;<sup>44</sup> and Israel-Slav, which “releases itself from the entrapment of the body and of the Earth [ . . . ] exalts itself, and [ . . . ] dominates and elevates its land through the fruit of the exaltation.”<sup>45</sup> The concatenated action of the three Israels forms Israel-Universal. When Israel is finally freed from the Spirit of the Earth, its spirit will “lead Israel to the heavenly and earthly Jerusalem.”<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, Towiański outlines a list of duties that must be fulfilled by the Minister-Nations. Essentially, these duties concern the union of the three Israels and the spiritual elevation towards God. The fifth point is very relevant for understanding Towiański’s thought on nations: “Arrange, establish in these fireplaces of the fatherland a free life, in the private and public affairs according to the species of the spirit, and this love of the Fatherland and of freedom will be a praise to the Lord.”<sup>47</sup> Although the reference to the Christianisation of private and public life is widespread in all Towianist texts, it is noteworthy that this duty is explicitly reserved to the Minister-Nations.

### 3. Political Complications

While the Polish nation, alongside the French and Jewish nations, was perceived as the depository of God’s Will, the Towianists soon faced the political paradoxes of actions aimed at the concrete application of Jesus Christ’s law on earth. Concerning the national dialectic, Towiański’s doctrine faced two issues: Polish relations with Russia and the rise of the Italian question in European international politics.

#### 3.1. The Russian Dilemma

In the first pages of *Biesiada*, Towiański states, “Nowadays, a single Lower Spirit shakes and perturbs whole Russia.”<sup>48</sup> After the repression of the November Uprising, Russia was identified as Poland’s main enemy. Nevertheless, Towiański did not perceive Russia as an enemy, but as a nation corrupted by the Spirit of the Earth and unaware of the damage it was doing to the Polish nation. That being said, Russia, a Slavic nation, was part of Israel-Slav and was destined to fulfil the Cause of God alongside Poland. The Towianist view of Polish-Russian relations can be understood through the progression of the Triple Sacrifice. Russia was perceived as a neighbour to be elevated, as a brother to rescue from the wrong path. As Christian love had to be transmitted from the individual to the nation, it had to be transferred from one nation to another on an international level.

There are several Towianist writings concerning Russia and Polish-Russian relations. Russia’s nationhood and its role are clearly expressed in two Towianist documents: Alexander Chodźko’s 1844 letter to Tsar Nicholas I, and Karol Różycki’s *Powody* (Reasons) addressed to Tsar Alexander II in 1857.

42  
Towiański, “Wielki Period,” 113.

43  
Towiański, “Wielki Period,” 113.

44  
Towiański, “Wielki Period,” 113. In “Biesiada,” Towiański mentioned France on just one occasion: “And even today, France presents, if not a luminous point, at least a grey point amid the darkness of the globe. And this [France] is already the elementary, progressive development of Your merciful thought, oh God!”, *Banquet*, 11. By contrast, *Biesiada* published in *Pisma* devoted more space to the mission of France, identifying Napoleon as “the greatest Israel-man of modern times.” “Biesiada z Janem Skrzyneckim,” in *Pisma*, 1:13–6.

45  
Towiański, “Wielki Period,” 113.

46  
Towiański, “Wielki Period,” 114.

47  
Towiański, “Wielki Period,” 112.

48  
[Towiański], *Banquet*, 7.



[Towiański], "Écrit adressé par Alexandre Chodźko," in *Kilka aktów i dokumentów odnoszących się do działalności Andrzeja Towiańskiego* [Several Acts and Documents Concerning the Activities of Andrzej Towiański] (Rome: Forzani i Sp., 1898), 1:34.

[Towiański], "Écrit adressé par Alexandre Chodźko," 35.

[Towiański], "Écrit adressé par Alexandre Chodźko," 38.

[Karol Różycki], *Powody dla których amnestya przyjęta być nie może. Przedstawione przez część emigracyi polskiej Jego Cesarskiej Mości Alexandromi II* [Reasons Why the Amnesty Cannot Be Accepted. Presented by Part of the Polish Emigration to His Imperial Majesty Alexander II] (Paris: L. Martinet, 1857), 6.

Chodźko's letter was one of the first Towianist appeals to a monarch. The letter's publication caused wrath and discomfort within the Polish emigration and the Paris Circle. It expresses the Towianist concept of Israel-Slav to the tsar and how to concretely accomplish the duty of a Minister-Nation.

"Russia preserved, until this century, the primitive simplicity of its soul. The thought of God resides on it [. . .] The foundation of the Slavic soul preserved its purity until today. While the spark of Jesus Christ became obscured on earth, within the Slavs it is possible to find it again. [. . .] The banner of Jesus Christ is granted to the Slavic race, the massive core of the army of God. In due course, this banner, held by the people minister of the Word, must wave on the entire word."<sup>49</sup>

This letter is a call to the unity of the Slavic people, who must act together to revive the spark of Jesus Christ within them and accomplish the divine call of the Cause of God.

"The Word, which becomes listened to again, is calling the Slavic people to its duty. All the branches of the Slavic tree must be aligned and developed according to the primitive thought of God. [. . .] The time has come. In order to accomplish the goal that God determined for them [the Slavic nations], everyone, united in love, as it was never conceived and practiced before, must merge their efforts towards a great and common interest."<sup>50</sup>

In his letter, Chodźko identifies the tsar as the person capable of aligning the branches of the Slavic tree and of guiding the Slavic nations towards the accomplishment of their duty:

"Sire, your soul is great. [. . .] Sire, the health of millions is assigned to you. Nowadays, leading the Slavic people subjected to your sceptre, you are the greater instrument of God on earth. Sire, if you obey the call of God, your subjects faithful to God will be devoted to the thought of God deposited into you."<sup>51</sup>

Chodźko's letter is not merely a form of submission to the tsar. He underlines the primacy of spiritual authority over earthly power, and the primacy of God over politics. Chodźko calls on Nicholas I to become an instrument of God. Yet, to do so, the tsar must accept God's call, the Cause of God, whereby the tsar could use his sceptre to subjugate and lead Slavic people, but only if he submitted to Towiański and his mission.

Różycki's *Powody* was published in reply to the amnesty announced after Tsar Alexander II was crowned. Numerous Towianists fought in the November Uprising and, like their compatriots in Paris, they could not accept the Russian amnesty. The Towianist motivations were not purely political, Różycki points out: "In our actual position, we cannot take advantage of this pardon. We have the permission of the government, but we do not have the permission of God. Until now, we have not accomplished the duty that God assigned us."<sup>52</sup> Różycki uses Towiański's words to illustrate the reasons that supported the rejection of amnesty. These reasons are related to the Towianist concept of metempsychosis applied to a national level. The Towianists could not accept amnesty because the exile was a

means of expiation for the past sins of Poland. According to Różycki, during the Golden Liberty, Poles abused the love of God, and they did not live according to the Triple Sacrifice. Therefore, God punished them through exile and a foreign yoke. That is why “[Poland] suffers more than other nations. It rejected its main duty: to fulfil the role assigned in elevating and extending Christianity on earth.”<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, according to the Towianist perspective, exile is merely the condition for manifesting contrition. Sin can be expiated:

“Only through external action [the sacrifice of action], submission to force, servile obedience, [. . .] conciliating the duties towards God with the duties towards Authority. [. . .] Sire, this is the main truth on which we base our submission and our loyalty to You. This is the source from which our love, our sacrifice, and all our feelings for the Russian nation and its government spring.”<sup>54</sup>

For Różycki, to accept the amnesty would also be to condemn the Russian nation, because the decision went against God’s Will. Różycki does not mention a specific role for Russia, but he always stresses the necessity for the Polish nation to love its neighbour. While Różycki speaks of Poland, he speaks of Russia, too. His words were a warning to Russia. Just as Poland lost its freedom because it did not fulfil the Triple Sacrifice, Russia could lose its freedom if it continued to pursue un-Christian actions.

In 1863, the same stances taken in Chodźko’s letter and *Powody* were expressed in Różycki’s *Do rodaków* (‘To my Compatriots’). The book is a collection of Towiański’s writings addressed to Poles who took part in the January Uprising:

“God has opened to both nations a merrier future. In this future, the following direction was presented for them: You, Poland, accept true Christianity, and, through Christian force, recover the fatherland. You, Russia, come out of the darkness, arise pure and take your higher destiny. And you, Russian government, recognise the truth, the justice of God, and fulfil this truth, this justice towards the peoples subjected to your leadership!”<sup>55</sup>

Różycki’s *Do rodaków* was published in Paris so it could circulate among the Polish emigration. Towiański also wrote a letter to Alexander II directly. As Chodźko did in 1844, Towiański expressed the Cause of God to the tsar, explicitly writing that through it, “[You could] find aid in order to lead the people subjected to Your will towards the destined well-being.”<sup>56</sup> But the tsar never replied to the Towianist appeals.

### 3.2. *The Italian Question*

A member of the Giovine Italia, Giovanni Battista Scovazzi (1808–1893), brought Towiański’s message to Italy. Towiański appointed him “to take up the cross of Jesus Christ and bring it to Italy.”<sup>57</sup> Starting from 1848, Scovazzi gathered a few disciples and established a Towianist Circle in Turin. In Towiański’s first manuscripts and speeches, Italy is not mentioned. The only references to the Italian nation can be found in posthumous Towianist publications. Scovazzi gave the first definition of the mission of the Italian nation in 1848:

53  
[Różycki], *Powody*, 9.

54  
[Różycki], *Powody*, 11–12.

55  
[Karol Różycki], *Do rodaków tulacz kończący tulactwo* [To My Compatriots. A Wanderer at the End of His Wandering] (Paris: E. Martinet, 1863), 16.

56  
[Towiański], “Écrit adressé a S.M. l’Empereur Alexandre II,” in *Pisma*, 3:209.

57  
Tancredi Canonico, *Testimonianze di italiani su Andrea Towiański* [Testimonies of Italians on Andrzej Towiański] (Rome: Forzani e C. Tipografi del Senato, 1903), 29.

"Italy has the duty to resolve the religious question, the heart of the matter of human life. Italy is still materially weak, it must manifest on earth the power of the spirit, the power of heaven. The thought of God is upon Italy, and I believe that the Italians will fulfil it. They will continue the Christian apostleship that made Rome the centre of Christianity, the centre and unity of the Church, and the leader of the Christian movement in the world."<sup>58</sup>

Unlike the other Minister-Nations, Italy did not have any defined historical or political identity. Therefore, the concept of the Italian nation was interlinked with its political emancipation. Since the Italian Towianist Circle was formed by subjects of the Kingdom of Sardinia, the identity of Italy and the Italian nation was defined according to the Piedmontese political perspective. Indeed, after the Congress of Vienna, the Kingdom of Sardinia was the only Italian State able to pursue a foreign policy of territorial expansion. In the second half of the nineteenth century, it progressively occupied the Italian peninsula through military conflicts against the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1848, 1859, and 1866; the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1860; and the State of the Church in 1870.

The most significant Towianist document concerning Italy is the transcription of a meeting held in October 1860. At the time, Italy did not yet exist as a nation-State. However, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies soon capitulated under the invasion of the Sardinian army. A great political transformation of the Italian peninsula was perceived to be underway. Towiański addressed these words to his disciples:

"The Italians are among the higher nations, called to give the world an example of the true, living, Christianity practiced in every aspect of life. Moreover, according to the signs manifested by God in these last times, it is destined to be the first to manifest Christianity in public life, through the great action of its political regeneration."<sup>59</sup>

According to Towiański, Italy's specific role, revealed by God, was to enlighten the path for other nations and to save the Church from its degeneration:

"Every Italian has the duty to awake in himself the love for the true and living Church. [. . .] He has the duty to awake in himself the Christian disgust towards the false movement of the soul, which the Pharisees of our time hide under the forms of Jesus Christ and of his Church. [. . .] According to God's call, the Church will be purified from the men that introduced the false."<sup>60</sup>

In 1866, a public lecture given by the leader of the Turin Circle, Tancredi Canonico (1828–1908), professor of law at the University of Turin, expressed Italy's status in the Higher Christian Epoch. The Kingdom of Italy had been proclaimed five years before but lacked the Venetian provinces and Papal territories. According to Canonico, this incomplete Italy was perceived as God's Will. The Italians were not ready to benefit from the nation's political creation because their spirit was not aligned with Jesus Christ. Already in 1849, Scovazzi prayed during the first Sardinian war against Austria: "If, in order to prepare Italy for its providential mission in the world, it is necessary to be humiliated through a defeat; I will submissively accept this trial as long as my fatherland,

through this means, would get closer to the mission predestined by God's Will."<sup>61</sup> Canonico identifies the Papal withdrawal from the Sardinian-Austrian war as a missed chance to fulfil the Italian mission: "I believed that the time when Gospel and politics would not have been two separated and different worlds has come. One would have to compenetrare the other. Fatherland and Christianity, unified in the same higher flame, will shine of a more ardent and refulgent light."<sup>62</sup> In Canonico's lecture, it is clear that Italy, more than any other nation, was duty-bound to deal with the Church and its temporal power, in view of spiritually renewing it.

"God does not want a sanctimonious and ingenious Italy. However, He will never permit a sceptical and materialist Italy. The true Church is inseparable from our true national life. If it is crystalised in doctrine and forms, it provokes indignation and pain. If it will revive and live in our hearts, it will be the inexhaustible source of true Italian greatness."<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, Canonico states that Italy has a role, linking its destiny to its national metempsychosis.

"There is justice for the people's guilt as there is one for the individuals. Italy suffered centuries of misfortune and serfdom due to the slavery and the pain imposed by the Roman domination on the world. [. . .] We must find the force to elevate ourselves to the place that God destined us: to be the vanguard of nations."<sup>64</sup>

A few years later, Towiański also stressed the role of Italy. He wrote to King Victor Emmanuel II during the Kingdom of Italy's formal annexation of the Papal territories. Towiański simply warned the king: "The Roman question is presented in front of His Majesty as an inevitable field of action on which Italy must produce the fruits of its Christian vocation, the fruits of its active loyalty to the true Church of Jesus Christ."<sup>65</sup>

According to the words of Towiański and his Italian disciples, we can see that the pivot of the entire Italian nation did not concern Italy itself but had a more European, universalistic dimension. Although Italy was not labelled as a Minister-Nation, it had the role of leading the Minister-Nations to the concrete realisation of the Higher Christian Epoch. Moreover, the most important duty of the Italian nation was solving the Roman question. Italy was perceived as the only country that could deal with the Papacy and the only one that could re-establish the Church of Jesus Christ over the Roman Catholic Church, corrupted by the Spirit of the Earth.

#### 4. Conclusions: Soteriology of the Nation

In Towiański's thought, nationalism and religion are deeply intertwined from a Catholic esoteric perspective.

The highly spiritualistic nature of Towiański's doctrine is the same as that of Pietism, Jansenism, and other heterodox doctrines that, according to Carlton J. H. Hayes, ensured a spiritual basis for the development of nationalism through the predestination of man and nations.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Towiański's first Italian opponents accused his doctrine of renewing the ideas of Pietism, Jansenism, and Quietism,<sup>67</sup> which a few decades before had started to recirculate on the Italian peninsula.<sup>68</sup>

61

Canonico, *Testimonianze*, 103.

62

Tancredi Canonico, *I tempi attuali e la missione di Andrea Towiański* [The Present Time and the Mission of Andrzej Towiański] (Turin: Stamperia dell'unione tipografico-editrice, 1866), 10.

63

Canonico, *I tempi attuali*, 30.

64

Canonico, *I tempi attuali*, 31.

65

[Towiański], "Écrit adressé à S.M. le Roi Victor-Emanuel II," in *Pisma*, 3:288.

66

Carlton J. H. Hayes, *Nationalism: A Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), 46–48.

67

"Andrea Towianski, nuovo inviato di Dio," [Andrzej Towiański. The New Envoy of God] *L'Armonia* 7, no. 140 (21/11/1854). "Propagazione di una nuova setta in Torino" [Diffusion of a New Sect in Turin], *L'Armonia* 8, no. 267 (22/11/1855).

68

Cf. Pietro Stella, *Il giansenismo in Italia*, [Jansenism in Italy] 3 vols., (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2006–2007). Ettore Rota, "Il giansenismo in Lombardia ed i prodromi del risorgimento italiano" [Jansenism in Lombardy and the Prelude of Italian Risorgimento], in *Raccolta di scritti storici in onore del prof. Giacinto Romano nel suo XXV anno di insegnamento* [Collection of Historical Writings in Honour of prof. Giacinto Romano in His 25th Year of Professorship] (Pavia: Successori Fusi, 1907), 363–626.



The esoteric traits of Towiański's religious doctrine produced a form of political thought with a strong Messianic approach. Although Towiański's preaching shared the goal proclaimed by the various European liberal-national movements, the religious basis of his doctrine was substantially different in the *praxis* required to achieve a nation's political recognition and renewal. Nevertheless, political powers, and their revolutionary nemesis, reacted dichotomously to Towiański's teachings. Towiański was aware of the reluctance to accept his message, but on numerous occasions, he and his disciples wrote to various political and cultural personalities trying to persuade them to help save humanity through the acceptance of the Cause of God. This behaviour can be explained through Jacob L. Talmon's words about the messianic approach to history: "Leaders are not prompted by ambition and grope for purposes. They are instruments of destiny. Victory or defeat become verdicts of History: the assertion of a higher right or the proof of exhaustion."<sup>69</sup> However, due to the living nature of nations, Towiański conceived of leaders as both individuals and nations.

#### 4.1 Subversion of Progressivist Nationalism

In the material presented, we can see a variation, a progression in Towiański's conception of the nations involved in the fulfilment of the Higher Christian Epoch. Initially, Towiański focused his preaching on the Polish nation and on France, represented by Napoleon. In *Wielki Periodek*, he tried to systematise a triple scheme with the insertion of the Jewish nation. Moreover, he called upon the Russian nation in the same period. Towiański thus focused more of his thought on Italy.

What can be perceived as incoherent and contradictory could be explained by the progressive nature of revelation. For Towiański, progress, as perceived by numerous Romantic thinkers, relies on a series of revelations disclosed by God in every epoch. This concept was well explained by Mickiewicz in his Towianist lectures. According to him, Christianity makes it possible to "receive successive revelations, that must complete Christianity itself. [. . .] Humanity has never progressed in any other way. It will never advance except by a series of revelations."<sup>70</sup> Therefore, Towiański's preaching to different nations could be understood as his willingness to successively disclose the revelation he allegedly received in Wilno in separate historical moments. Nevertheless, since the Towianists stressed to the Minister-Nations the need to pursue their missions during periods of political tension, this explanation can also be interpreted as Towiański's need to adapt his preaching to the various political scenarios and their evolution. That said, according to a Towianist manuscript, and contrary to the Towianist publications depicting Towiański as interested in the Italian nation from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, Towiański had already identified Italy as a Minister-Nation (excluding the Jewish and the Russian nations) in 1844. This manuscript maintains that, when Towiański met Scovazzi for the first time, he stated, "Italy, Poland, and France [. . .] These are the people leaders. These are the first called."<sup>71</sup>

The linear progression according to the revelations presents three intertwined features that clash with the mainstream Romantic progressivist conception of history and humanity: the Millenarian perspective, metempsychosis, and the Minister-Nations.

The Millenarian perspective abolishes the *repetitio ad infinitum* of history.<sup>72</sup> Messianism thus undermines the illusion of eternal progress

70

Adam Mickiewicz, *L'Église officielle et le messianisme* (Paris: Imprimeurs-Unis, 1845), 9.

71

THEO.16, 1844. *Prime parole del Servo di Dio al f. llo Scovazzi*, [The First Words of the Servant of God to Brother Scovazzi] Fondo Towiansky, Biblioteca Erik Peterson, Turin, Italy.

72

Mircea Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour. Archétypes et répétition* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 159.

sprung from the Enlightenment, supported by the national revolutionary movements, and perpetuated by positivism. Towiański's concept of metempsychosis shares the same perspective, focused on progress through perpetual spiritual perfectionism. The columns of light and darkness permit the soul and nations to either improve or decompensate. In this way, progress, both for the individual and for nations, is not assured by Towiański's doctrine. Earthly progress can only be attained through the exercise of Jesus Christ's law, but the refusal of Christian principles will surely arrest progress and push humanity backward. Finally, the conception of Minister-Nations directly attacks the conception of progressivist egalitarian-democracy in favour of a spiritual aristocracy. In Towiański's thought, only selected nations have the duty, and the capacity, to participate in leading other nations and humanity into the Higher Christian Epoch. Towiański clearly stated, "All three branches of Israel live in a new tone. They govern and they occupy a social place according to their kind of spirit. The Minister-Nations raise as the columns of God's Word."<sup>73</sup> As a result, Towiański first distinguishes between nations that lead and nations that cannot intervene on their own in the process of achieving progress. Secondly, although nominally equal, Minister-Nations are formally ordered by a spiritual hierarchy according to their duty and their potential. Towiański's thought bears witness to the breakdown of the Romantic concept that every nation participates, according to its *geist*, in achieving the intra-historical goal of progress through its own mission. Only certain nations preserve the Christian qualities to guide others, while the majority of nations are still waiting to be enlightened because they abandoned or never truly accepted God's Word.

The chosenness of Minister-Nations and their divine mandate to lead other nations towards progress is reflected in the Higher Spirits, which Slowacki called "King-Spirits." According to Towiański's doctrine, the column of light can create new Higher Spirits through turning man's soul towards the Good. Each nation produces personalities greater than others who, through their spirit, inspire and lead the nation toward higher virtues. These King-Spirits often appear in the Towianist exoteric writings, and they are subjected to sacralisation. In the European nineteenth century, the King-Spirits were clearly identified by Towiański as people of action: "The Frenchmen have their ideal in Napoleon I. The Poles have it in Kościuszko. Nowadays, the Italians have it in Garibaldi."<sup>74</sup> In Towiański's thought, the equality of individuals succumbs by dint of a heroic attitude, producing what Anthony Smith called, concerning the sacralisation of national heroes, an "elite nationalism [. . .] focused primarily on representations of the virtuous actions of charismatic individuals and groups, both past and present."<sup>75</sup> The Towianist journals<sup>76</sup> include lists of these "charismatic individuals," such as personalities in the political, cultural, and religious spheres, like Julius Caesar, Sigismund I the Old, Washington, Luther, Zwingli, Goethe, Bach, and Beethoven.

Again, the progression stressed by the Triple Sacrifice helps to understand this spiritual hierarchy. In Towiański's thought, we notice a triple scheme: there are the three Sacrifices, which aim to prepare the individual in three fields of life, and the three Israels, which have three duties to progressively accomplish to fully implement the Higher Christian Epoch. Through this scheme, three couples can be obtained: Israel-Jew / Sacrifice of Spirit, Israel-French / Sacrifice of Body, and Israel-Slav / Sacrifice of Action. Since the Triple Sacrifice needs the sequential accomplishment of

73  
Towiański, "Wielki Period," 113.

74  
[Towiański], "Extraits d'un entretien avec Tancrede C.," in *Pisma*, 3:257.

75  
Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen People. Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 223.

76  
*Kalendarz* [Journal] in 95/55, 96/55, 97/55, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, Krakow, Poland.

every sacrifice to attain individual perfection, the duties of the three Minister-Nations must be attained in the right order, according to their hierarchy of the spirit, to receive the benefits of the Higher Christian Epoch.

#### 4.2 Nations as Messiah

The progressive conception of history denotes that the main ideal promoted by Towiański's doctrine is a striving for a progressive, and perpetual, spiritual perfectionism. Nonetheless, for Towiański, the only possible perfection could be achieved through exercising the law of Jesus Christ on earth. Nevertheless, the mere application of the teachings of Jesus Christ would not directly re-establish the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, nor any other nation-State. The nation, which was a living creature created by God, would only be politically realised, and consecrated by God, through the total submission of the people to God's Will. Thus, God's Will was to be manifested only through meeting two criteria: the Pauline earthly acceptance of the current political situation and the heaven-inspired willingness to pursue human progress through the concrete application of the law of Jesus Christ. Meeting these two apparently contradicting criteria transmutes the nation into a Christian nation.

The Towianist concept of a Christian nation identifies the political manifestation of the establishment or renewal of the nation-State as the fulfilment of God's Will, thereby attaining a state similar to the Kingdom of God on earth. Differing from numerous Romantic thinkers who strove for the earthly establishment of the Kingdom of God, the Higher Christian Epoch preached by Towiański was an earthly state necessary to attain, after death, the heavenly Kingdom of God in heaven. For the Towianists, the Christian nation was the preliminary step of earthly redemption prior to heavenly salvation.

Although the Towianist preaching involved the resurrection of Poland and concrete actions around Italian unity, Towiański's messianism is not resolved in the mere political recognition of the nation as a nation-State. Towiański's Minister-Nations have a more profound religious significance that collides with their political outcomes. Israel-Jew is identified in the Jewish nation as the depository of the Covenant, and not as a political entity with geographical borders. Israel-French does not correspond to the already existing French nation but to an anointed political actor operating for the concrete implementation of the Second Covenant. As for Israel-Slav, it is vaguely identified with the Slavic people. In Towiański's speeches, Poland preserved the spark of Jesus Christ to a higher degree of purity than any other nation. Nonetheless, Russia was the nation that, once it broke the yoke of the Spirit of the Earth, should lead the Slavic nations toward Christian progress. Finally, Italy resides outside the Towianist triple scheme. The Romantic irredentist movements in Italy and Poland are often compared since they are both nations without a State. Nonetheless, the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania had a centenary history that helped identify what was part of the nation and what was not.<sup>77</sup> By contrast, Italy never existed as a political entity.<sup>78</sup> This meant that the Italian nation represented the establishment of the nation-State through the conquest of the Italian territories by the Kingdom of Sardinia, congruent with its religious mission culminating in the occupation of the State of the Church. This mission was devoted to the *renovatio* of the Church-Institution of the Pope-Kings to promote the Church-Living Body of Jesus Christ; the latter was identified as the earthly implementation of Towiański's Cause of God.

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Serhiy Bilenyk, "Reconsidering Nationality: Poland," in *Romantic Nationalism in Eastern Europe. Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian Political Imaginations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 103–81.

78

Cf. Duccio Balestracci, *Medioevo e Risorgimento. L'invenzione dell'identità italiana nell'Ottocento* [Middle Age and Risorgimento. The Invention of Italian Identity in the Nineteenth Century] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2015). Angela De Benedictis, Irene Fosi, and Luca Mannori, eds., *Nazioni d'Italia. Identità politiche e appartenenze regionali fra Settecento e Ottocento* [Nations of Italy. Political Identities and Regional Affiliation between the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth Centuries] (Roma: Viella, 2012).





Photograph © G.D.G. Biblioteca Reale di Torino, Archivio Begey, 30. “Andrea Fossombrone da Zara,” 8. This drawing was made by the Towianist painter Andrea Fossombrone during or a few years after the Great War. The Great War was particularly considered by the Towianists since it was perceived as an occurrence that could finally unify the territories identified as part of the Italian nation and freed the Polish nation from foreign yokes.

Towiański’s doctrine perceived the Minister-Nations, Italy included, as a collective *Ha-Mashiach* that pursued the needs of justice, liberation, and renewal typical of every historical age.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, three perspectives of the nation can be identified in Towiański’s thought: 1) the nation according to the Romantic concept of a living entity created by God; 2) the nation as an institutional and geopolitical nation-State; and 3) the nation as a Christian nation, a political actor that operates according to the law of Jesus Christ. Thus, nations present two predominantly religious characteristics. First, *transcendence*: nations live and develop through time and space, moving beyond States’ political borders and shaping reality through their will, becoming a bridge between God and individuals. Second, *renewal*: nations, politically recognised or not, must accept God’s Will and practice the law of Jesus Christ, overcoming their earthly desires to regenerate themselves through the Higher Christian Epoch. The paligenetic Romantic idea promoted by Towiański is different from the other Romantic nationalistic conception which, in the following century, would partially degenerate into totalitarian nationalistic manifestations.<sup>80</sup> Towiański’s idea is purely religious and based on an actual belief in metempsychosis and in the

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Emmanuel Lévinas, “Commentaires. Textes messianiques,” in *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1963), 95–149.

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Blandine Kriegel, “Romanticism and Totalitarianism,” in *The State and the Rule of Law*, trans. by Marc A. LePain and Jeffrey C. Cohen, foreword by Donald R. Kelley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 99–105. Alberto Mario Banti, *Sublime madre nostra. La nazione italiana dal Risorgimento al fascismo* [Our Magnificent Mother. The Italian Nation from Risorgimento to Fascism] (Roma: Laterza, 2014), VI–IX.



progressive improvement of the spirit of individuals through their successive lives.

In conclusion, Towiański's concept of nation embodied the soteriological aspect belonging to Millenarianism. Nations do not have to be politically constructed because they are already created by God. According to Towiański, the political recognition of nations is useless if they do not follow the path traced by Jesus Christ. Nations and nation-States must be infused with new Christian life and develop their political and social life according to God's Will. This process, which implies the passive acceptance of God's Will, the revolutionary exercise of the law of Jesus Christ, and the total acceptance and implementation of the Cause of God, is the only way nations without States and States without nations can be born. Through the Triple Sacrifice and the perpetual perfectionism of metempsychosis, Towiański aimed for a total Christianisation of the individual, society, nation, and international relations.