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Fight and Contemplation. The Towianists amid the European Revolutions of 1848

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to show the European diffusion of an esoteric doctrine that originated in Lithuania in the nineteenth century and its circulation during the European uprisings of 1848. The article focuses on a case study of heterodox Catholic thought promoted by Andrzej Towiański. Towianism was diffused in Central and Eastern Europe and consolidated its presence in Western and Southern Europe. The Towianists acted to influence politics and participated in several key historical events of the nineteenth century. Using archival sources, the article investigates the relationship between Romantic nationalism and esotericism, its transnational nature, and its contribution to a turning point in European history.

KEYWORDS: *Polish messianism, Catholic esotericism, Romantic nationalism, Andrzej Towiański*

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: *polski mesjanizm, ezoteryzm katolicki, nacjonalizm romantyczny, Andrzej Towiański*

The article shows two opposite developments generated by the same esoteric doctrine prior to a significant historical event. Using archival documentation, the article focuses on the case study of Towianism, the heterodox Catholic doctrine promoted by the Polish religious leader Andrzej Towiański (1799–1878) (Bersano Begey 1918; Lami 2019).

Towianism presents a transnational nature that initially led to its diffusion from Lithuania to Central and Eastern Europe and latterly consolidated its presence in Western and Southern Europe. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Towianists could be found in several European cities, especially in France, Italy, Switzerland, and Poland.

It is difficult to identify the temporal duration of Towianism. While the beginning of the movement can be dated to the second decade of the nineteenth century, it is problematic to assert the period of its dissolution. Towianist documents preserved in the archives of the Biblioteca Reale of Turin, Biblioteka Jagiellońska in Krakow, and Biblioteka Wróblewskich in Wilno show Towianist correspondence dating to the middle of the twentieth century.

Although the elitist nature of the movement, which, in the middle of the nineteenth century, included a few dozen of people, and, in the first years of the twentieth century consisted of some two hundred people, the Towianists acted in order to influence the higher-level spheres of politics and participated in several historical key episodes of the liberal-national struggles that took place during the nineteenth century. Notably, the Towianists took part in various key historical events such as the Parisian February Revolution, the Franco-Prussian War, the Polish January Uprising, and the various Kingdom of Sardinia's wars of Italian conquest.

The article specifically focuses on Towianist attitudes before the European uprisings of 1848. The Spring of Nations provoked a division within Towianism, and two groups became interpreters of the same doctrine: a faction oriented towards an active involvement in the revolutions through political activism and military campaigns and another focused on contemplative spiritual work and an anti-belligerent stance. An introductory section will show the transnational dimension and the nationalistic nature of Towiański's doctrine; a main descriptive section will narrate Towianist efforts during the February Revolution and the Milan uprising; a concluding section will analyse the relationship between the esoteric traits of Towianism and its involvement in the European uprisings.



1. Introduction. The transnational dimension

Andrzej Towiański was born in 1799 in the village of Antoszwinięcie, near Wilno. After his graduation from the University of Wilno, he began a brilliant career in the judiciary of the city. According to the Towianist narrative, on the 11th of May 1828, Towiański experienced a Marian apparition in the Bernardine Church of Wilno. The apparition motivated Towiański to accomplish a divine mission: the Cause of God; the continuation of the mission started by Jesus Christ. According to Towiański, Jesus Christ's teachings had been forgotten both by the Church and humankind. Towiański felt the duty to follow this mission and struggle for its accomplishment on earth.

After the Marian apparition, Towiański travelled to Saint Petersburg and, after his expulsion from the city, visited Dresden, Karlovy Vary, and Warsaw. Nonetheless, Towiański's travels in Central and Eastern Europe have not been deeply studied due to a lack of documentation (Szpotański 1938, 99-142). During that period, he became acquainted with notable figures such as the Russian State Councillor Michaił Sperański, the Chief in Command of the November Uprising Jan Skrzynecki, and the poet Edward Odyniec. Towiański's visits were made with the intention of familiarising himself with political, military, and cultural personalities scattered across Central and Eastern Europe, in order to find disciples and supporters for the accomplishment of his mission both in the soul and in the concrete life of humankind.

1.1. From Wilno to Paris, from Switzerland to Piedmont

On the 23rd of July 1840, Towiański had another vision: a white cross in the sky of Antoszwinięcie. He interpreted that event as the signal to relocate to Paris, the centre of the Polish emigration after the defeat of the November Uprising. The Towianist narrative reports that, after a journey that touched the Napoleonic battlefields and received the blessing of Archbishop Dunin, Primate of Poland, Towiański arrived in Paris on the 15th of December 1840, when Napoleon's ashes arrived in the French capital. In Paris, Towiański became acquainted with Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), at the time regarded as the main cultural representative of Polish nationalism after the November Uprising (Koropeczyj 2008). Towiański was able to heal Mickiewicz's wife Celina Szymanowska, who had been confined to an asylum. The poet was touched by Towiański's charisma and became his most zealous disciple and the most influential promoter of his doctrine.

On the 27th of September 1841, in Notre Dame de Paris, Towiański announced the arrival of the Higher Christian Epoch, a new epoch imbued by



God's grace. According to his speech, the Polish nation had a prominent role in the transition towards the new epoch since it was the keeper of the true flame of Christianity. Thanks to the support of Adam Mickiewicz and other notable figures of the Polish emigration, such as the poets Juliusz Słowacki and Seweryn Goszczyński, and the insurgents of the November Uprising Ludwik Nabelak, Karol Różycki, and Mikołaj Kamieński, a Towianist Circle, composed of dozens of disciples, took shape in Paris.

Nevertheless, the Polish emigration did not welcome the new group, particularly because of its messianic nature. At the time, the Polish emigration in Paris was mainly divided into three major political factions: a socialist-republican faction represented by the Towarzystwo Demokratyczne Polskie (Polish Democratic Society); a conservative-monarchic faction represented by the Poles gathering at the Hôtel Lambert; and a Catholic faction, virtually apolitical, represented by the Congregation of the Resurrection and its supporters. Every faction identified Towiański's disciples as visionaries detached from the concrete problems of Poland and promoters of religious heterodox ideas incompatible with the Roman Catholic Church. Indeed, the Towianist spiritual message was not considered by most of the Polish emigration, who was focused on, and afflicted by, the social and political problems related to the exile. On the other hand, the Paris Circle avoided any involvement in political debates because they were identified as the expression of the mere human earthly nature.

On the 13th of July 1842, Towiański was expelled from France, and Mickiewicz became the Paris Circle's leader. Towiański felt that the expulsion was a divine sign to disclose his mission to a higher level. His next goals were obtaining the support of the Rothschild family and the Pope. The meeting in Frankfurt with Rothschild did not lead to anything (Begey 1912, 84-88). On the other hand, in Rome, Towiański's efforts to obtain a Papal audience ended with an order of expulsion issued at the end of October 1843 (*Pisma*, 1, 43-46).

Leaving Rome, unable to come back to France, and targeted by a Russian order of seizure, Towiański decided to reside in Switzerland, establishing the centre of all Towianist activity there. In 1844, in Lausanne, Towiański met Giovanni Battista Scovazzi (1808-1893), an Italian member of Giuseppe Mazzini's revolutionary association Giovine Italia (Ajres 2017). Scovazzi was initiated into Towiański's teachings and was appointed as the 'Apostle of Italy'. Between 1844 and 1847, part of the Towianist efforts focused on the diffusion of Towiański's message in the Canton of Valais, a place considered by Mickiewicz as 'Swiss Poland or Lithuania' (*Współudział*, 1, 167; Begey 1913, 1-37).



But the turning point for the diffusion of Towianism happened in 1848. In that year, Scovazzi came back to Turin and established a Towianist Circle there. Unlike the Polish and French Towianists, who limited their operations to a few selected areas in France and Switzerland, the Turin Circle diffused Towianism in small and longevous Circles in several cities across the Italian peninsula between the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century (Zussini 1970).

The Towianists focused their efforts on the recruitment of those perceived as moved by pure Christian feelings. On the other hand, future Towiański's disciples approached the Towianists usually because they were amazed by their Christian behaviour. If the initiates demonstrated the willingness to improve their spirit, they were introduced to Towiański's revelation and started a path of spiritual exercises and tests oriented towards the exertion of the Gospel's message in their own lives.

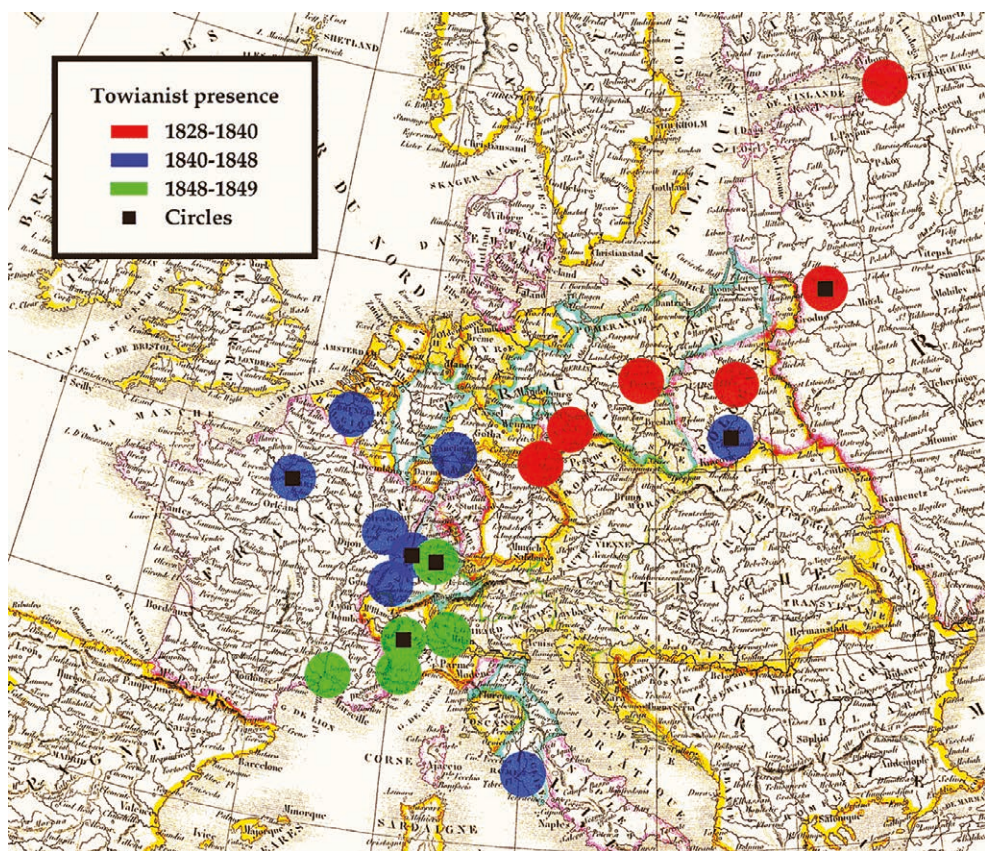


Illustration 1. *The diffusion of Towianism between 1828 and 1849 (Map by GDG)*



Towiański's disciples were attracted by Towiański's messianic message and aimed at a social and political renewal. Generally, they supported liberal Catholic ideas alongside fervent patriotic feelings. Numerous Poles were part of the Towarzystwo Demokratyczne Polskie; several Frenchmen were former followers of Pierre-Michel-Eugène Vintras and advocates of the emancipation of Jews and slaves; many Italians were supporters and members of Giovine Italia, of the Italian Spiritist Society, and, later, exponents of Catholic Modernist ideas.

1.2. Esoteric Romantic nationalism

Towiański's doctrine was focused on the total submission to God's Will, on the acceptance of the suffering and subjugation of Poland and all European nations as God's punishment, and on the implementation of the teachings of Jesus Christ as the only possible solution to resolve the European moral and political situation. In order to accept the burden and fulfil these duties, Towiański professed the necessity of accomplishing what he called 'Christian Sacrifice'. The Sacrifice consisted in three interlinked steps (Spirit-Body-Action), aiming at discovery the love of God, living accordingly to His Will, and accomplish His Will, through His love, in public life (*Pisma*, 1, 49-79; Horoszkiewiczówna 1938, 92-119; Lami 2019, 224-230). Nonetheless, alongside the exoteric Christian aspect, Towiański's doctrine presented an esoteric feature (Dalla Grana 2020). Towiański preached metempsychosis, the supernatural intervention of columns of light and darkness besides individual's actions, the temporality of Hell's punishments, the primacy of the Gnosis over religious institutional practices, and the communication with the saints and the dead.

The key to Towiański's doctrine consisted in the belief of constant interventions of spiritual forces in the physical world. According to him, these spiritual forces manifested themselves in columns of light and darkness, formed respectively by Superior (good) Spirits, residing in Heaven, and Inferior (evil) Spirits, surrounding the earth. Humankind was both affected by the influence of these spirits and able to attract their power for its own purposes. Nonetheless, engagement with these columns marked the human soul, leading it, after bodily death, towards a successive benign or despicable life in relation to the column attracted. According to Towiański, this was the 'supreme law' that guided the universe and the reason why nineteenth-century Europe was in such miserable state (*Banquet*, 7).

And just as individuals were subjected to this law, nations were subjected to the same rule too. Indeed, one of the cornerstones of Towianism



was the identification of specific nations, called Minister-Nations, in the accomplishment of the Cause of God (Dalla Grana 2023a). These Minister-Nations, namely Israel, France, Slavdom, and Italy, had different roles and missions to accomplish in order to fulfil the prerequisites requested by the Higher Christian Epoch. For the Towianists, the Minister-Nations had to renew their spirit through the implementation of the laws of Jesus Christ in order to reach their spiritual and political independence, and to subvert their moral and social degradation derived from their progressive entrance into modernity.

Towiański's soteriological message concerning nations does not resolve itself in the mere political recognition of the nation as a nation-State. According to Romantic historical and philosophical tenets, nations were entities created by God, living an existence formed by past, present, and future, experiencing suffering, joy, and aspirations (Walicki 1975). Towiański's Minister-Nations, however, have a more profound religious significance. Israel was identified as the depository of the Covenants. France was perceived as the political actor in charge of realising the Cause of God. Slavdom had to lead humankind toward the Higher Christian Epoch (Towiański 2004, 77-114). Italy was indicated as the only nation able to deal with the Papacy, in order to give new life to the Church of Jesus Christ (*Pisma*, 2, 19-50; Canonico 1903, 40).

The tension between the ideal and reality was always problematic for the Towianists. After Towiański's speech at Notre Dame, their first struggle consisted in reconciling his esoteric doctrine with Catholic dogma. Nevertheless, they found the priests of the Congregation of the Resurrection to be unbreakable opponents (Smolikowski 1896, 4, 1-157). Their second aim was to realise the spiritual renewal of the Minister-Nations.

After several failures in preaching the Cause of God to the Polish emigration in Paris, the Towianists decided to concentrate their efforts on their own spiritual improvement. Nonetheless, they opted for a different tactic in order to induce the Minister-Nations to fulfil their duties. Operating through a hierocratic approach, Towiański and his disciples wrote to various political leaders and cultural personalities, identified as notable representants bearing the spirit of their nations, trying to persuade them to pursue the path of salvation of humankind through the acceptance of the Cause of God (*Pisma*, 3, 192-288; ABJ, 7162 III; ABJ, 102/55). Nevertheless, the Towianist appeals were always ignored by the political power, and Towiański was often identified as a seditious person by different governments (Bersano Begey 1918, 65-67; Canonico 1903, 175-190; Szpotański 1938, 176-177). Only in the first years of the twentieth century, the Italian Towianists became politically involved



in the Christian-democratic party Lega Democratica Nazionale (National Democratic League) (Sokołowski 2012, 130-184).

The most controversial point among the Towianists consisted in preaching the Cause to the Slavic nations. According to Towiański, the Polish nation was the one that preserved more purely the 'spark' of Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, due to its nonexistence as a nation-State, it could not operate in the realm of politics. Therefore, the only possible representative of Slavdom able to act decisively was Russia. In 1844, an appeal to the tsar caused the desertion from the Paris Circle of Słowacki and Kamieński (*Kilka aktów*, 1, 31-39). On the other hand, Italy was intertwined with its political emancipation. Since the Turin Circle was formed by subjects of the Kingdom of Sardinia, the Italian nation was identified accordingly to the House of Savoy's territorial expansion plan.

In February 1846, the insurrection of Krakow placed the Towianists on the horns of a dilemma. While the Polish emigration unequivocally supported its compatriots, Towiański viewed the event from a different perspective. According to him, the Galician uprising was the product of the Polish desire to obtain the Kingdom of God on earth. The insurgents were seeking earthly satisfaction: they were not guided by heavenly purposes, nor did they accept God's Will that subjugated them to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (*Współudział*, 2, 27-33; Mickiewicz 1890-1895, 3, 422-423).

Towiański was always reluctant to support any violent subversion of political power. His attitude demonstrated to Mickiewicz the impossibility of obtaining Towiański's support in favour of every present and future insurgent. This, alongside tensions and conflicts among the members of the Paris Circle, led Mickiewicz to break with Towiański in April 1846. Without renouncing to Towiański's teachings, Mickiewicz and some other twenty Towianists formed their own Circle in order to pursue another way to realise Towiański's messianic message. On the other hand, the majority of the Paris Circle, now headed by Różycki and Goszczyński (*Współudział*, 2, 240-246), continued to be loyal to the contemplative approach of Towiański, focusing almost exclusively to spiritual work oriented towards the attraction of the columns of light.

2. The European Revolutions of 1848

The Parisian February Revolution was wholeheartedly welcomed by the Polish emigration, which hoped for a change in the French-Russian alliance. The Towianists were also involved in republican demonstrations. The revolutions



of 1848, however, presented two sides of Towianism. While Towiański and his disciples continued to promote the primacy of spiritual work, Mickiewicz and the Towianist dissidents pursued a more concrete action, directly participating in military campaigns.

2.1. Mickiewicz's Legion

At the outbreak of the revolution, Mickiewicz resided in Rome. Two years before, he was fired by the French government due to his Towianist lectures at the Collège de France (Lednicki 1956, 132–156). In Rome, he wanted to accomplish what Towiański had not been able to achieve five years before: to receive the Pontifical approval of his doctrine. Nonetheless, in the following days, the news of revolutions which had broken out in Central Europe and Northern Italy changed Mickiewicz's plans. The poet came up with the idea of a Polish legion to support the uprisings and fight for re-establishing the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the meantime, the Polish government in exile also identified the necessity to form an armed force for supporting the Polish cause in the military operations against the armies of the Holy Alliance, looking especially to sustain the Greater Poland Uprising.

On the 23rd of March 1848, after the declaration of war on the Austro-Hungarian Empire by the Kingdom of Sardinia, Northern Italy became the largest area of military operations. In the face of the European uprisings, the new French government did not want to subvert its former foreign policy. It continued to promote a formal sympathy for the Polish cause but prohibited the establishment of a Polish armed force beyond its territory in order not to cause any diplomatic rupture with the Russian Empire. Therefore, the Polish government in exile began to address the Poles residing in Rome, aiming to receive official permission from the State of the Church to form a Polish military contingent.

On the Annunciation of 1848, the Resurrectionists obtained a Papal audience in order to discuss the matter. That day, representatives of every Polish political faction, alongside Mickiewicz, were received by Pius IX. The Pope could not allow the establishment of a Polish contingent, but he did not oppose the project. Two days later, the Polish community in Rome gathered in order to nominate the leader of the contingent. Mickiewicz's proposal disclosed his intentions in Rome. When he proposed Różycki as the commander of the Polish armed force, the meeting broke down. Mickiewicz was accused of organising a Towianist legion, and his proposal was opposed by the almost everyone present at the meeting. Curiously, fifteen years later, during the January Uprising, the Polish National Government appointed Różycki



and his son, Edmund, as military commanders. While Karol Różycki did not accept the assignment, his son took part in the operations (ABJ, 86/55).

Thirteen men decided to follow Mickiewicz in the enterprise (Mickiewicz 1877-1909-1910; Koropecy 2008, 382-402). On the 29th of March 1848, Mickiewicz drafted the founding act of his Legion: *Skład zasad*, his prototype of the future Polish constitution. Alongside chapters devoted to civil and political rights, such as the emancipation of women and Jews, an independent and elected judiciary, and the freedom of speech, confession and association, other points specifically stressed a religious and political aspect typical of Towiański's teachings. In the document, God's Word was identified as the future State law and the fatherland was conceived as God's emanation. Poland was addressed as the Gospel's servant resurrected, the Slavic people were recognised as a brotherhood, and all nations bound by Christian mutual assistance. Mickiewicz printed the act in Italian, under the name *Simbolo politico polacco* (Polish Political Symbol), with the *nihil obstat* of the Vatican censor, Gioacchino Ventura (Mickiewicz 1877-1909-1910, 1, 69-70, 501-502; *Współudział*, 2, 105-106; *Korespondencya*, 2, 4-6). According to Mickiewicz's plan, the Legion had to defend Milan, head to Bohemia, and thus move to Krakow. Nevertheless, before taking part in any military operation, the Legion needed political recognition: that of the Pope was the most suitable for Mickiewicz's spiritual revolution through Towianism. The occasion was given by a special ceremony for the skull of Saint Andrew. On the 5th of April, Mickiewicz's legionnaires took part in the ceremony with other religious congregations and had their banner blessed by the Pope with the skull of the Apostle of the Slavic people. The Legion was not recognised by the State of the Church, but the Pontiff's blessing was sufficient for Mickiewicz's aims.

On the 10th of April, the Legion left Rome without weapons, money, and equipment. Nonetheless, the Italian newspapers covered the Legion's march, and the Legion was welcomed with military honours on its road to Milan. The Resurrectionists accused Mickiewicz of having formed a Towianist legion, while the Polish government did not recognise the Legion as a Polish armed force. In the meantime, in Paris, Celina Szymanowska, assisted by several Towianists, managed a recruitment office in her apartment. Kamiński replied to their call, identifying the poet as the one who "has indicated the road that we [the Polish emigration] must take" (MCRR, B.0242, 41). He published an apology to the Towianists brothers (*Współudział*, 2, 253-254), he made an appeal to the French government for the constitution of a Polish contingent, and he started a march to Milan ahead of one hundred and fifty volunteers (MCRR, B.0242, 40). On the 1st of May, the Legion reached Milan. The reluctance of the Polish government in exile, that preferred to support the



Greater Poland Uprising, was not sufficient to prevent the Towianist efforts to participate in the Milan uprising. The recruiting of Polish volunteers from France, Germany, and Algeria, and the legitimisation of the Polish Legion as part of the Lombard army (*Korespondencya*, 2, 14-17, 19-20, 25-27, 33-34), transformed the Northern Italian battleground into a key area to promote the Polish cause. Fourteen men and a paper listing Towianist concepts contributed to one of the most relevant events in Italian nineteenth-century history.

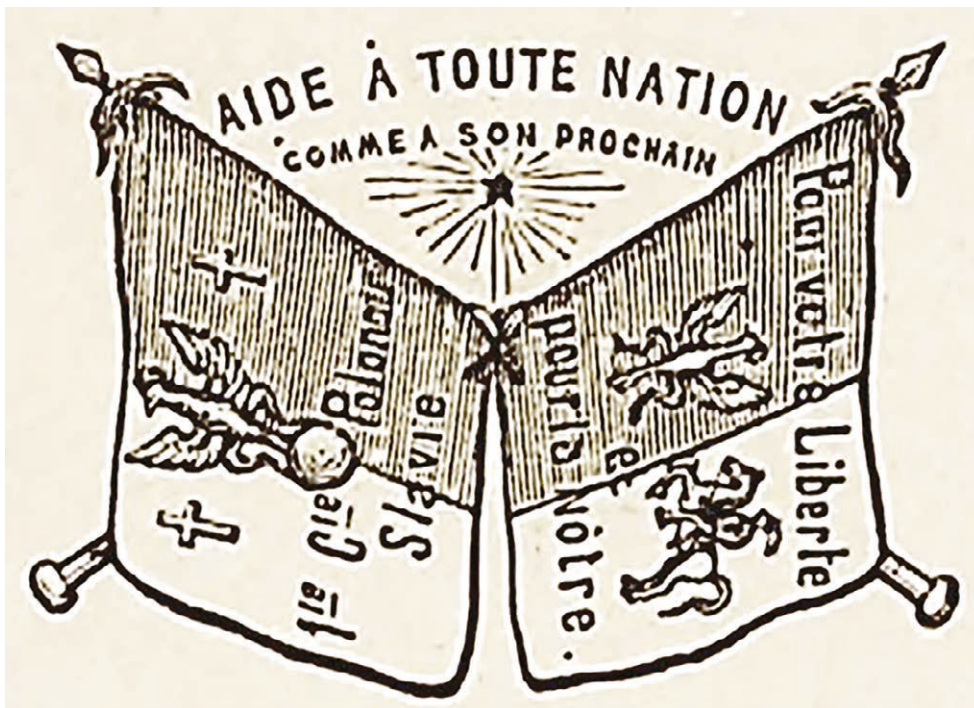


Illustration 2. *The banner of Mickiewicz's Legion*

2.2. Towiański's primacy of spiritual work

A couple of weeks after the February Revolution, a delegation of the Paris Circle reached Binningen in order to persuade Towiański to return to the French capital. The Towianists perceived the revolution as a providential design for the revitalisation of the Cause of God, and a group of them was already disposed to leave Switzerland for France. Between the 9th and the 12th of March, Towiański redacted four notes explaining the conduct that his disciples had to follow upon their arrival in Paris (BRAB, F47, FOR.IA, XVIII-XXI):



Accomplish the Sacrifice and show the path of [its] accomplishment [to]: 1. Circle; 2. Emigration; 3. France. Give the ideal for the service. [...] Now, a new Epoch commences. Take the littlest spark and enlighten it. (BRAB, F47, FOR.I.A, XX)

Towiański described how to approach and deal with the French people and the Towianists. He affirmed that if they were questioned concerning the reasons why they did not serve Italy as Mickiewicz was doing, they should reply that France must be served first.

On the 21st of March, numerous Towianists residing in Switzerland left for Paris. Towiański gave them a letter for the Paris Circle in which he recognised the revolution as an event “on the path of the Cause of God, that will regenerate one branch of Israel for the life of whole Israel” (*Współudział*, 2, 102). Scovazzi appeared among those Towianists. He drafted a personal note addressed to Mickiewicz’s disciples and to Mazzini. The Towianists perceived Mazzini as unknowingly fighting for the Cause of God. Indeed, in 1846, Scovazzi had already tried to persuade him to accept Towiański’s teachings (Dalla Grana 2023b). Nonetheless, the revolutionary leader never replied to Scovazzi’s appeals. In a letter, he affirmed: “Scovazzi went crazy” (Mazzini 1906–1943, 30, 217–218). In 1848, Scovazzi wrote to him:

The Catholic idea, the Christian idea has been obscured, it laid in darkness. Now it is enlightened. You have done well in not accepting this distorted and passive Christian doctrine that arrests progress instead of servitude. Now, J. Christ is in a truthful light. Darkness has been dispersed. Now, God will be worshipped in spirit and truth. (BRAB, F47, FOR.I.A, XXI bis)

Scovazzi felt the need to reach Italy, participate in the republican insurrections, and involve his former leader. In Easter 1848, he came back to Binnigen in order to ask Towiański’s blessing for his enterprise. But Towiański was against any involvement in the bloodshed and oriented towards uncompromising spiritual work. He warned Scovazzi:

Jesus Christ has accomplished the Eternal Father’s Will without communion with man. During the Christian Epochs, Jesus Christ’s Servants must accomplish God’s Will in Christian union with their brothers, who are called to be Apostles of God’s Word, to be servants of their neighbour and of their fatherland. (BRAB, F49, FOR.I.A, XXII)

For Towiański, the Italian question was not exclusively related to the war but to a structural spiritual problem:



The spiritual life in Italy is difficult. [...] It is difficult to be a good Christian. Through adoration [of earthly pleasures], Evil keeps man enslaved. [...] Do not elevate the Spirit of the Earth. Man cannot reach the Father. (BRAB, F47, FOR.I.A, XXIV)

Towiański's words persuaded Scovazzi to stay in Switzerland.

In the meantime, the Towianists were acting in Paris. On the 17th of April, Jacques Malvesin and Dominik Iwanowski published *L'Homme de L'Époque* (*Współudział*, 2, 260-264; *Quelques actes*, 46-49). On the 26th of April, a Towianist delegation was received by the French provisional government (*Quelques actes*, 50-56). On the 16th of May, Karol Baykowski delivered an appeal to the Russian embassy (*Kilka aktów*, 1, 43-46). The Paris Circle aimed at persuading the Parisian masses, the French government, and the Russian diplomats to accept the Towianist spiritual renovation through accomplishing the brotherly love promoted by the Gospel and without pursuing violent earthly means.

On the 26th of May, Towiański arrived in Paris. Three days later, a plenary meeting of the Paris Circle took place, aiming at reuniting Mickiewicz's faction. Nonetheless, Towiański's efforts were unfruitful. On the 10th of July, Mickiewicz arrived in Paris. The day after, when Towiański was preparing an appeal to the French Parliament, he was arrested and interned at the Conciergerie accused of political crimes related to the June Days. In the first days of August, the Parisian newspapers published the news that Towiański was condemned to be deported to Cayenne. After that event, Mickiewicz decided to act together with his former brethren for obtaining Towiański's release. While the Paris Circle dealt with the newspapers and prepared appeals; Mickiewicz, alongside Victor Hugo and Edgar Quinet, presented a letter to the Chief of Executive Power, Eugène Cavaignac. Despite their efforts, Celina Szymanowska arranged a meeting with Cavaignac and persuaded him to release her former Master (*Współudział*, 2, 117-120; *Kilka aktów*, 1, 41-43; *Korespondencya*, 2, 47-49; *Quelques actes*, 56-76; BRAB, F3, ATT.I.24; BRAB, F34, CAN.III.a, 366, 368-370).

Although Mickiewicz's family helped Towiański and the Paris Circle, the two factions never reunited again.

3. Conclusions. Esotericism before a change of epoch

The article shows Towiański's religious ideas spreading from Wilno across Central and Eastern Europe, and finally coming to fruition in Paris, Switzerland,



and North-Western Italy. In the process of diffusion of Towianism, Towiański's speech at Notre Dame can be identified as the watershed of two phases. The first sees Towiański personally involved in gathering disciples; the second sees Towiański's disciples actively spreading their Master's teachings. But Towianism did not simply spread in one direction. The Towianist Circles present in France, Italy, Switzerland, and Poland communicated with each other, and their members often visited brethren in foreign countries. This transnational feature permitted the consolidation of Towianism in certain cities and, through proselytization, extended its influence.

In 1848, the outbreak of the revolutions caused Towianists to intensify their networking and preaching. The necessity to act in that precise historical moment was not dictated by the same motivations of all the various European revolutionary groups. The Towianists were detached from every political faction, and they were not part of any political conspiracy. For the Towianists, the uprisings were perceived as a sign of an epochal change. In 1841, Towiański prophesied: "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" (*Banquet*, 15). On that occasion, Towiański argued that an army of Superior Spirits will descend on the earth. Indeed, he recognised the French revolution as an event confirming the progress of the Cause and, unlike the stance held during the Galician uprising, Towianist literature does not condemn any revolution that happened in 1848. Albeit Towiański's unwillingness to participate in battles, his silence during the European revolts of 1848 confirmed the identification of the uprisings as they were allowed, and supported, by God's Will.

Therefore, the Towianist endeavours (Mickiewicz's ones included) during the Spring of Nations were an attempt to facilitate the realisation of Towiański's messianic message. The Towianists, who recognised in the European uprisings an inaugural point of the coming of the Higher Christian Epoch, acted in order to facilitate the Minister-Nations' missions. If France was identified as the nation in charge of realising the Cause of God, and Slavdom the one that had to inaugurate the new epoch, the Towianists loyal to Towiański were still acting towards the accomplishment of France's mission, while Mickiewicz and his followers felt that the time for implementing Slavdom's mission arrived. Moreover, the imprisonment of Towiański did not halt these efforts. Towiański regarded his captivity as the necessary suffering in order to prepare him for the new epoch. Indeed, a few weeks after his release, he started another journey to Rome in order to try again to obtain an audience with the Pope. Nevertheless, the proclamation of the Roman Republic and the escape of Pius IX from Rome neutralised his efforts.



In a moment of historical tension identified as an epochal change, Towianism can be seen as an example of how the same esoteric doctrine can produce dichotomous outcomes. Apart from the various personal attitudes concerning the revolutionary activity, both Mickiewicz and Towiański identified their actions as instruments to operate in reality according to Towianist teachings. While Mickiewicz opted to physically intervene through a bottom-up involvement in the nineteenth-century political scenario; Towiański continued to persevere in a top-down approach aimed at persuading the political powers. Mickiewicz always supported every instance that aimed at the liberation of nations from foreign powers, and Towiański's passivity could not be effective in a moment identified as a conflict imbued with Manichean aspects.

But a question remains: if Mickiewicz and Towiański were moved by the same principles, why did these different reactions occur?

3.1. Two fields of action

Explanations to this question can be found in the rupture of Towiański's charismatic authority and in the reception of the Towianist teachings.

Although Mickiewicz did not renounce Towiański's doctrine and continued to identify him as God's messenger, he did not recognise him as his leader anymore. A motivation that presumably played a consistent role in Mickiewicz's decision-making process and in his recognition as a parallel leader of the Cause was his personal belief of having received a heavenly mandate (Desmettre 1947, 1, 127-179; Kępiński 1980, 292-334). Mickiewicz actions could be pursued because he became independent from his Master and because, through the authority received by the routinisation of charisma during the leadership of the Paris Circle, some of the Towianists recognised his legitimacy in accomplishing the implementation of the Cause of God. Therefore, Mickiewicz's stay in Rome can be understood not only as another attempt to persuade the Pope to accept the Cause of God, but to receive the Papal recognition as the legitimate representative of the Cause or to replace Towiański with Pius IX as its earthly leader. Nonetheless, Mickiewicz's proposal of Różycki as the leader of the Polish battalion demonstrates that Pius IX did not recognise Mickiewicz as possessing any sort of religious authority, and that Mickiewicz consequently identified Towiański as the official leader of the Cause. Furthermore, due to the authority gained by Mickiewicz among his followers, he had to continue the same policy towards the Roman Church adopted by his former Master. The Papal blessing to the Polish Legion and the *nihil obstat* of Ventura were perceived by the poet as milestones in the path of the acceptance of the Cause by the Church



because, as Władysław Mickiewicz stressed: “the composition of the principles was a summary of Towiański’s teachings. Then, this fact proved their compliance with the teaching of the Church” (Mickiewicz 1890–1895, 4, 73). Indeed, Mickiewicz’s need to print *Skład zasad* with the State of the Church’s approval, aimed at proving the Church’s political endorsement of his enterprise. Thanks to the blessing and the permission received, Mickiewicz was able to bond Towianism with active participation in the cause for national independence under Papal permission, subverting the original pacifist and strictly contemplative stance of Towiański.

On the other hand, the Towianists loyal to Towiański did not experience the break with the Master’s charismatic leadership. It is during the meeting between Towiański and Scovazzi that the routinisation of charisma directed to the diffusion of Towianism in Italy happened, consecrating Scovazzi as the Apostle of Italy and bonding him to the future diffusion of the original teaching of Towiański. At Easter 1848, Towiański told him:

In your chamber, your body is more exhausted than in battle. The words said during the Sacrifice are more [important] than the battles won. The battle is an abrasion of the matter, it is the animal, inferior, progress. God destined you to become Apostle of Italy. (BRAB, F47, FOR.I.A, XXIII)

According to this extract, the Towianist stance in relation to the involvement in any violent manifestation is clear. Towiański’s words are even more grave because, apart stressing the greater importance of the contemplative aspect over winning battles, he directly links the prohibition of violent acts to Towianist apostleship.

In conclusion, the reception of Towiański’s doctrine by Mickiewicz and his followers was not different from the teachings that were driving the actions of the Towianists loyal to Towiański. Therefore, the *praxis* is the same because both the Towianists and Mickiewicz were trying to realise the identical Minister-Nations’ missions during the opening of the Higher Christian Epoch and the imminent descent of the Spirits of light. The only divergence resides in the *modus operandi* adopted because the two groups were acting to accomplish two different missions affirmed by the same doctrine. The routinisation of charismatic leadership played a fundamental role in determining the correct actions to pursue and the right leader to follow. Mickiewicz obtained the Papal blessing that, replacing Towiański’s leadership and (unintentionally) authorising his teachings, granted Mickiewicz’s authority to commit un-Christian acts forbidden by Towiański. On the other hand, the Towianists loyal to Towiański could not act like Mickiewicz’s followers because their Master was the only



recognised authority and continued, as Scovazzi's example demonstrates, the routinisation of charisma according to the original source.

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 - ◇ 369: *Idem al Generale Bertrand 19/7/48.*
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 - F47 : Carte Forni.
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 - F49: Carte Forni .
 - FOR.I.A
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- MCRR: Central Museum of the Risorgimento in Rome.



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◇40. Strasbourg, 03/05/1848.

◇40. Strasbourg, 18/05/1848.

◇41. Strasbourg, 19/05/1848.

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