



## Polish Messianism

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### Introduction

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The idea of a historical mission of the Polish nation was not unusual in the European international arena. The English, Russians, and French, among others, considered themselves instruments chosen by God to change the world. However, in many cases, such a mission was strongly linked to the past. Thus, Russian Slavophiles in the nineteenth century were looking for an old Russian Orthodoxy uncontaminated by external influences that had been maintained to great extent by peasants (Бердяев 1955, 20–23). Adherence to the faith of the ancestors was supposed to provide successful opposition to the Antichrist, who looked for opportunities to deceive those who had not yet abandoned the true faith. It was believed that the Latin Church after the Great Schism of the eleventh century CE became the servant of Satan and took over the Polish state in order to deprive the Ruthenians (an exonym of Latin origin used to describe Eastern Slavs, particularly Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Rusyns) of the true faith (Przybył 1999, 47). A related concept was in turn created in Poland. The country was conceived of as *Antemurale Christianitatis* (Bulwark of Christendom). It was admitted that there was a Christian nation east of Poland, but it was deemed to be schismatic, rebelling against the power of Peter's successor, the Bishop of Rome (Tazbir 2004, 21). 'Polish Messianism,' a term coined by Józef Maria Hoene-Wroński (1776–1853), arose in the nineteenth century and was not a continuation of these concepts. It did not look into the past, or at least it did not limit itself to attempts to restore the past, but it looked ahead to the future. As Andrzej Walicki stated, it was a millenarian structure with soteriological and eschatological goals (Walicki 1977, 84).

### The Emergence of Polish Messianism in the Nineteenth Century

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Nineteenth-century Polish Messianism grew out of the ashes of the November Uprising (1830–1831), when the Poles failed to throw off the yoke of Russian occupation and regain independence. As a result of the unsuccessful uprising, many of the Polish intelligentsia were forced to seek refuge in Western European countries, especially in France. It was there that they found fertile soil for the development of their religious and social ideas.

This was helped by the French who had developed certain philosophical and religious concepts after the

French Revolution which the Poles used and creatively adapted to understand their own situation. As we will see below, in an attempt to rationalise military defeat, they borrowed from the conservative philosopher Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821) his theory of expiatory sacrifice (Bradley 2001, 66–67).

Influential Polish thinkers came to the conclusion that the defeat in the November Uprising had a profound symbolic and religious significance. As mentioned above, there was a Polish tradition that saw the Poles as the bulwark of Christianity, behind which spread the Christian but schismatic Orthodox Russia. Russians, in turn, accused the Poles of being in bondage to the Latin Church, which they understood as governed by the Antichrist. In this situation, the Poles expected the unlimited support of the Bishop of Rome, but Pope Gregory XVI (r. 1831–1846) condemned their national uprising. The reasons behind the condemnation are complex and numerous. One of them was the conviction that the health of the Catholic Church in Poland depended on the attitude of the clergy towards the Russian government (Banaszak 1991, 92). The Pope's reasoning was presented as pragmatic, while the Polish Messianists were largely understood as idealists.

The theory of de Maistre helped the Poles to believe that even in a situation where the Pope did not understand the mission of Poland, the Poles still fitted into God's historical and salvatory plan, which is unchangeable by its nature. They knew that de Maistre also had to swallow a bitter pill when the French Revolution destroyed the social order he had known and appreciated. Trying to connect the French Revolution with the idea of Providence, de Maistre came to the conclusion that the social and political upheavals in French society were best understood in terms of mystical sacrifice, purification, and salvation through the shedding of blood (Walicki 1978, 4). Both de Maistre and the Poles wanted to see in military defeats something that would assure them that the sacrifices made by their nations served a greater purpose.

Another important voice from France turned out to be Hugues-Félicité Robert de Lamennais (1782–1854), a Catholic priest and philosopher who was dissatisfied with Gregory XVI's position on the November Uprising. Initially, de Lamennais was a staunch ultramontanist (a believer in strong papal authority in temporal and spiritual matters) who underwent a surprising intellectual transformation, ending life outside the Catholic Church. He came to believe that ideals should precede cold, selfish calculations in international affairs. According to him, the Bishop of Rome unfortunately followed the latter (McMillan 2006, 222). Considering all this, it is not surprising that Poles began to see similarities between their situation and Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. From a pragmatic perspective, Jesus's mission was a failure: he was crucified by the Romans, seen to be spurned by fellow Jews, and abandoned by his closest disciples. However, as time passed, he was declared victorious. The Poles hoped that God would act in exactly the same way in their case, and that their sacrifice would bring historical change. The only difference they saw between the sacrifice of Jesus and that of the Polish nation was that Jesus was to save individuals because his sacrifice was individual, but in the case of the Polish nation it was to bring salvation to the nations and the renewal of international sociopolitical relations.

## Poland and Sacrificial Change

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As mentioned above, Polish Messianists expected certain world changes that were to take place as a result of the sacrifice of the Polish nation. But what were those changes? Here, the Messianists also referred to concepts developed by French thinkers.

French Utopian socialists believed that the French Revolution would lead to the reign of the Holy Spirit, to whom access would henceforth be available to all and the mediation of earthly superiors would become redundant (Crossley 1993, 238). After the sacrifice that Poland made, it was also expected that people would start to follow directives coming directly from the Spirit and, in the long run, the institution of spiritual intermediaries would likewise become superfluous. Polish Messianists assumed that people would reach a higher level of spiritual development. This was closely related to the theory of metempsychosis, namely the transmigration of the soul. Beings with a higher level of spiritual advancement were obliged to lead the less advanced ones until the latter themselves reached a higher level (Mickiewicz 1914, 10).

It was firmly believed that various dualities would be overcome. Primarily, this concerned dualism between the material and spiritual worlds (Starzyńska-Kościuszko 2016, 54). However, the dualism of the male and female sexes was not forgotten either. It was imagined that the spirits that passed through their incarnations were inherently sexless, and so earthly sex played a marginal role. Therefore, it was argued that the emancipation of women should begin with Christian communities on a spiritual level (Przysiecki 1937, 329–30).

The new epoch, which Polish Messianists eagerly awaited, had various names, such as the kingdom of God or the epoch of the Holy Spirit. It is worth noting that such ideas were nothing new in the Christian West. Among the most famous of the precursors were the concepts of Joachim de Fiore (1135–1202), who was convinced of the coming of the third century or epoch in which the Spirit would speak to all humanity, making it a universal charismatic community (Riedl 2018, 293). However, all such borrowings did not make Polish Messianism merely imitative. Its distinctive features involved the idea of a nation state and, besides, it should be remembered that this concept among Polish messianists did not stand for one idea, but many different, sometimes conflicting, concepts.

## Characteristics of the Most Important Representatives of Polish Messianism

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As noted above, the term 'Polish Messianism' was coined by Józef Maria Hoene-Wroński. Far from being a mystic, he represented what he saw as a rational messianism, a philosophical system that owed much to German idealism. Paradoxically, it all began with some sort of a mystical vision he claimed to receive on 15 August 1803, at an event on the occasion of Napoleon's birthday. There he was seized by a double feeling of fear and certainty that he would be able to discover the secret of the beginning of the universe and understand the laws that governed it (Goodrick-Clarke 2008, 192–93).

In his theory, the role of the Messiah was assigned to philosophy, not to the nation. Only the philosophical Messiah had the potential to lead people to a better future by uniting concepts of good, truth, science, and religion. Hoene-Wroński dreamed of the complete reform of philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, technology, and other sciences in an ultimate manner—that is, they would reach a state such that nothing further could be added to them (Tatarkiewicz 2007, 259). Despite extensive correspondence with major figures in science, his ideas were not appreciated by them, and he was dismissed from the Marseille Observatory. Near the end of his life his theories found favour with the French occultist Eliphas Levi (1810–1875).

Hoene-Wroński believed in the imminent realisation of the kingdom of God on earth, in which human knowledge would become consistent with the truths revealed by religion. Such a philosophy was aimed at capturing the Absolute (i.e., the idea of a primordial, unconditioned and unlimited being) and explaining the essence of creation. Hoene-Wroński's activity is an early stage of Polish Messianism, in which certain elements had not yet been developed, especially those related to the Polish nation, which became the basis of Polish Messianism in later years.

The most sophisticated form of Polish Messianism developed in the 1840s and was closely associated with the figures of Andrzej Towiański (1799–1878), Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849), Zygmunt Krasiński (1812–1859), and August Cieszkowski (1814–1894). We can now outline their main concepts.

## Andrzej Towiański

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Towiański decided to act as God's messenger under the influence of his purported mystical experiences. He had his first revelation on 11 May 1828 in the Bernardine church in Vilnius. It confirmed his intuition that the political situation could not be improved by armed struggle; a global change could only arrive if European elites were to begin following certain moral principles in international affairs. In 1839, a second apparition took place in which the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary urged him to act as a messenger of the Apocalypse (Weber 2000, 128). Now he was waiting for a sign from the heavens that would come soon.

In 1840, he saw a white cross appear over the Lithuanian village, Antoszwince, where he was born, and the Mother of God extended her arms towards France. Towiański took this as a sign calling him to head to France, where he would gather around himself representatives of the Polish emigration. On 27 September 1841, after a mass in the Notre-Dame Cathedral, he gave a speech to the Poles in which he confirmed that he had been sent by God to announce that suffering would soon end, and people would begin to be guided by the Gospel. These were the beginnings of a movement called Koło Sprawy Bożej (the Circle of God's Cause) (Koropeczyk 2008, 284–91).

Towiański won the trust of many Polish émigrés, although he presented his teachings in a mystical way incomprehensible to many who listened to him, especially his Polish audience. He taught about the seven ages and about the messengers sent by Providence, whose mission was to remind humanity of God and his message. The number of seven ages was very enigmatic because Towiański took this number for granted and did not try to explain the whole scheme. Most likely, it was related to the seven seals of God mentioned in the book of Revelation. The first epoch was initiated by Jesus, and the second by Towiański. At the end of the seventh epoch, the kingdom of God would come upon earth, but sadly we have no data on the meaning of the other epochs that would follow the one begun by Towiański (Bystrzycki 1900, 35). The mystic imagined the earth surrounded by cordons of spirits, incarnating in earthly beings, though not necessarily in people. The members of the Circle were supposed to ignite an inner light by improving their own moral behaviour. This 'spark of Christ's fire' was to help them break through the hosts of evil spirits and enable direct communication with God (Urbanowicz 2019, 48–49).

Towiański rejected the institution of the Catholic Church in its nineteenth-century shape, demanding an internal Church focused on spiritual matters. This does not mean, however, that he negated everything

that the Church preached. In line with Pope Gregory XVI (p. 1831–1846), Towiański rejected armed revolution. According to him, salvation would come only through moral improvement based on humble suffering (Witkowska 1989, 12).

For many Polish patriots, the idea of the primacy of the cause of God over the cause of the nation's independence was unacceptable. Towiański was aware that nations often, at least in the initial phase, reject their prophets. As a consequence, disturbances appear in social life, and evil and intellectual chaos spread. According to Towiański, it was precisely the lack of nurturing spiritual values that led to the collapse of statehood—that is, the loss of political independence. He believed, however, that a nation ennobled by suffering would eventually be reborn. Not everyone took to this process enthusiastically. Towiański urged people to see one's neighbour even in a political enemy. For this reason, he began to be accused of a lack of patriotism. There were even allegations that he was deliberately sent by the tsar's authorities to France to sow discord among representatives of the Polish emigration (Hertz 1953, 158). However, research conducted by Samuel Fizman in the Mickiewicz Archives showed that Towiański was not a tsar's agent. As it turned out, another figure bearing exactly the same name served as a spy for the Russians. Towiański's opponents, consciously or not, combined biographies of both individuals (Horoszkiewiczówna 1935, 3–21).

Towiański strongly believed that in the process of world transformation, three nations—i.e., Jews, French, and Poles (although he often meant Slavs in general)—would play a leading role. When it came to individuals, Towiański looked at Napoleon with admiration, which probably prompted Louis Philippe to expel him from France in 1842. The mystic settled in Zurich, where he conducted his activity until the end of his life, trying unsuccessfully to convince Pope Pius IX (p. 1846–1878) other church officials to undertake a Christian revolution that would introduce evangelical principles into the world of international relations (Weber 2000, 128).

## Adam Mickiewicz

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Mickiewicz, a poet and mystic, made known his messianism for the first time in 1832 in *The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation*. This work is one of the foundations of Polish Messianism. The author compared the partitions of Poland to the passion of Jesus, and its liberation to his resurrection.

Over time Mickiewicz's messianism, especially under the influence of Towiański, began to subordinate national elements to universalist elements. Mickiewicz's messianism of the 1840s ceased to be exclusively Polish and became French-Slavic (Walicki 1978, 1). At that time, regaining national independence ceased to be an end in itself, as the nation began to be perceived by Mickiewicz as a tool that enabled individuals to incorporate the truths they received from God. The fight for a free Poland was significant only because it had a certain historic (even cosmic) mission to fulfil (Mickiewicz 1933, 341).

This was nonetheless closely related to how Mickiewicz and his contemporary Messianists perceived the nation. For them, the nation was above all a union of spiritual beings who pursued a common goal of spiritual progress. The concept of reincarnation (palingenesis) played a major role in this. Each spirit went through various incarnations aimed at causing its progress on the way to spiritual perfection. The more developed spirits were obliged to lead the less developed ones (Mickiewicz 1914, 10).

Mickiewicz tried to go beyond both rationalist philosophy and tradition. Progress in his understanding was associated with breaking conventions, which is why this approach is often referred to as revolutionary messianism. For Mickiewicz the Enlightenment brought about a number of social harms, such as excessive intellectualism, hedonism, utilitarianism, separation of knowledge from morality, and far-reaching individualism. He was also convinced that authentic reforms have never resulted from the progress of knowledge alone (Mickiewicz 1935, 425–26). Tradition was still close to his heart because it resulted from divine revelation, but, if used badly, it could seriously hinder spiritual development. This approach allowed him to draw inspiration from various sources. He admired Martin Luther (1483–1546) and Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), who, through spiritual work and rejection of their own egos, were able to open communication with heaven (Kowalski 1909, 154). He also drew inspiration from representatives of French Utopian Socialism and thinkers such as J. G. Fichte (1762–1814) and F. W. J. Schelling (1775–1854), who proclaimed that the mind is capable of grasping knowledge without the mediation of the senses (Tilliette 2015).

Mickiewicz was convinced of the coming of a new era in which more developed spirits would lead others to direct contact with God. However, the victory of love had to be preceded by wars and disasters. In this configuration, Poland's martyrdom appeared as the culmination of wrongs and political crimes committed by nations. Mickiewicz believed that the European nations had been gradually exhausting their spiritual strength and piety for a long time. Inept lawyers and theologians who had no living contact with heaven had replaced God's lawgivers, apostles, and miracle workers, possessed by the spirit of God. The church became a bureaucratic institution and morality collapsed. Moreover, exaggerated intellectualism began to develop (Mickiewicz 1845, 16–17).

This did not mean, however, that the antidote to this situation was provided by a return to the past. Mickiewicz, together with Russian Slavophiles and German representatives of conservative Romanticism, criticised intellectualism, but he did not seek refuge in traditional forms like the others (Walicki 1968, 156). The Polish bard believed in a revolution that would lead to the advent of a new spiritual era and new forms of piety. The road to this kingdom was to be cleared, as has already been indicated, by the Slavs and the French. The Slavs were the least contaminated with sin and had vivid memories of their spiritual homeland, despite the fact that they adopted Christianity later than the French or Germans. They resisted the virus of rationalism and industrialisation for the longest (Kowalski 1909, 171). The French, in turn, represented mobility. Thanks to their spiritual development, they retained the greatest divine spark. The leadership among the Slavs should fall to Poland, which humbly endured suffering like Christ and at the same time was able to positively assess the values of revolutionary France (Walicki 1978, 7).

The kingdom of God was to consist of unselfish individuals who would be able to communicate with God through revelation (Mickiewicz 1955, 409–10). These entities went through a series of incarnations, were ready for sacrifices, and did not need intermediaries. Mickiewicz expected the appearance of an ideal man who would combine the zeal of the first apostles, the sacrifice of the martyrs, the simplicity of the monks, and the courage of the French soldiers (Mickiewicz 1845, 247). This man was supposed to be immune to the temptations of rationalism and industrialisation, and he was not burdened by the past (Szymański 2017, 5). The whole concept could symbolise an individual or an entire nation, as was often the case in Jewish thought (Brueggemann 1998, 143).

Although Mickiewicz was a student of Towiański, their paths eventually parted. The Polish bard turned out to be too revolutionary, while his religious master recommended passivity and waiting. Towiański believed

that the fulfilment of a mission is conditioned by an internal (spiritual) transformation. It could not be a militant action, for only continuous moral improvement can hasten the realisation of God's kingdom on earth. Mickiewicz could not agree with this idea (Starzyńska-Kościuszko 2016, 58).

## Juliusz Słowacki

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Słowacki was another member of Towiański's circle. Like Mickiewicz, he was an eclectic thinker, drawing inspiration from theosophy, German idealism and Catholic thought. He also shared with Mickiewicz the idea of revolutionary messianism. According to his ideas, the laws governing spiritual progress were ruthless and implied a combination of voluntary suffering and heroism. In his vision, Poland played the role of a new Israel which, thanks to its revolutionary heroism, was able to establish a new Jerusalem (Walicki 1978, 8-9).

An important role in his theory was played by the above-mentioned idea of reincarnation (social palingenesis). Słowacki opposed elitism. In his thought, there was no connection between the more advanced spirits and the socially or economically privileged class. For this reason, he opposed already established forms of hierarchy. He believed in the spiritual potential of the masses, which had to be finally released in order for the kingdom of God to be brought about on earth (Porter 2000, 35).

It should not come as a surprise that Słowacki highly valued the liberum veto, which guaranteed the freedom of higher spirits, even if they were in the minority. The veto was a systemic principle of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, giving the right to each of the deputies participating in the Sejm (the lower house of the bicameral parliament) sessions to break it immediately and annul the resolutions adopted therein. It was enough for someone to cry out "Sisto activitatem!" (Latin for "I stop working!" or "I do not allow!"). In theory, the idea was to achieve unanimity, but in practice it often made it impossible for the Sejm to debate. For Słowacki, it was not only a political tool, but also a religious one. According to him, the majority of deputies were spirits that were highly developed spiritually, but nevertheless they could not impose their opinion on the minority. The latter could see some spiritual truths that the majority did not see.

Słowacki was of the opinion that progress on the spiritual path requires sacrifice and shedding of blood. The role of Poland in his system was connected with this grand idea. The spirit of the Poles was tested because they went through a lot and distinguished themselves on the international arena when it comes to heroism and holiness.

Like Mickiewicz, Słowacki was suspicious of the Catholic Church and tradition. He wrote about the fall of Rome and openly criticised the role of the Roman Church, although his words were often difficult to decipher and ambiguous (Słowacki 1909, 57). The concept of a Slavic pope appeared in his mind. According to Anna Dziędzic, Słowacki imagined the Slavic pope as a person who would break with the old system and officially support the Polish cause of freedom. It is possible that the Slavic pope did not represent one person but the whole nation, making Poland the redeemer and herald of a new order based on freedom and brotherhood (Dziędzic and Diatłowicki 2010).

Unlike Mickiewicz, Słowacki's messianism was exclusively Polish. He did not like the French and did not

intend to give them spiritual leadership (Walicki 1978, 9).

## Zygmunt Krasiński

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Unlike Mickiewicz or Słowacki, Krasiński did not show a positive attitude towards the revolution. Instead, he idealised the past and tradition. He appreciated the piety of Poles, especially that of the nobility, who were accompanied by love for freedom and tolerance. He explained social inequalities by means of spiritual development and reincarnation. The more advanced spiritual beings constituted an aristocracy in his system. They earned their social position through their work and sacrifices that took place over a number of incarnations (Walicki 1977, 95).

Krasiński developed a relationship between Poland and Christ. For him, Christ was the archetype of the sanctity of the individual and immortality, and Poland was the archetype of the nation's immortality. The sacrifice of Jesus was followed by the resurrection and the opening of the gates of heaven for individuals and, after the death of Poland, there was to be a resurrection, which would mean collective salvation for all nations in the kingdom of God on earth. Just as Jesus assumed the form of a servant, Poland had a servant role to fulfil. Writing that the whole world must become Poland, Krasiński wanted to emphasise that Poland was to set an example to other nations. Just as Jesus taught his disciples readiness for sacrifice, so Poland was to teach other nations the same readiness (Walicki 1977, 103).

The coming of the kingdom did not mean the end of progress for the poet. He believed that ghosts, after completing their earthly mission, would become angels, and their further progress towards God would not be interrupted by death (Walicki 1978, 9).

## August Cieszkowski

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Cieszkowski was a friend of Krasiński and a great supporter of evolutionary messianism. In his view, progress was possible only through systematic and long-term changes. Cieszkowski's philosophy did not, then, assume a revolution, but an evolutionary idea of social progress. The road to the kingdom of God assumed the introduction of changes in every aspect of life—in politics, social relations, economy, education, art, and in private life. According to Cieszkowski, revolutionary social upheavals lead only to disasters. He was convinced that revolutionaries do not believe that the course of history is guided by providence and want to change it themselves, which in turn made them heretics. He was of the view that people must cooperate with God, not work without or against him. This cooperation is best expressed through the development and sacralisation of social relations (Sajdek 2008, 82).

Cieszkowski taught that the saving mission of Jesus has not yet come to an end, and it will only be attained when the words of the Lord's Prayer are fulfilled. In particular, he meant that God would reign in heaven and on earth. The philosopher lamented that the Church devotes too much attention to the afterlife and marginalises the fulfilment of God's will on earth. Only when the latter is fulfilled will the kingdom of God come (Walicki 1971, 34). For Cieszkowski, the Lord's Prayer had a prophetic character. Speaking of bread, Jesus assumed the coming of a system in which everyone would have a job, a degree of what we would now call social security, and the problem of hunger would disappear.

Cieszkowski had no place for national messianism. For him, there was only one Messiah, and that was Jesus. There was only one sacrifice, and that was the one on Calvary. However, Jesus's mission was divided into two parts. First, he was to bring order to the kingdom of heaven and let the souls of the dead into it, and only then establish the kingdom of God on earth. Ultimately, humanity was to unite, and the philosopher postulated the creation of international organisations that would implement certain ethical postulates and guard peace. The Polish nation was a tool to help accomplish this mission, but it was not the Messiah.

Cieszkowski distinguished three stages in the history of mankind. The first took place before the coming of Jesus and was centred around nature and the body. The second, which began with the coming of Jesus, brought the soul to the foreground but also put it in opposition to the body. It was only in the third stage that this opposition was to cease to exist. The third stage was to be known as the age of the Holy Spirit and was the period of the abolition of all contradictions. It was in this kingdom, which was to come in the nineteenth century, that the union of the people with God was to take place (Cieszkowski 1922, 20).

## Final Division among Polish Messianists

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Clearly, Polish Messianists differed significantly from each other, but nothing divided them more than the Spring of Nations, a series of popular national uprisings that took place in Europe in 1848-1849. For Krasieński, who had a negative opinion of the revolutions, it was a catastrophe and a manifestation of evil forces. Słowacki, who died in 1849, believed in improving humanity until his last moments, so he welcomed the Spring of Nations as a positive phenomenon. The whole event was the most tragic for Mickiewicz. He organised the Polish Legions fighting for the unification of Italy and liberation from Austrian rule. The Polish bard expected that the Pope would give his blessing to his legions. Pope Pius IX (p. 1846-1878), however, preferred to defend the interests of the Papal States and strongly opposed the revolution.

## The End of Polish Messianism

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The events related to the Spring of Nations clearly showed that states are not necessarily guided by ideals but owe much to cold calculation and their own interests. Roman Dmowski (1864-1939), a Polish politician and co-founder and chief ideologue of the National Democracy, considered Polish Messianists to be a brake on the emergence of modern nationalism in Poland. According to him, Polish Messianists deceived themselves and cultivated a political romanticism, while in reality it is not ideals that count but the material strength of individual countries. He was of the opinion that countries should primarily reckon with the actual distribution of power. He saw the biggest failure of Messianists in the fact that they could not understand that international affairs depend first of all on material forces (Walicki 1978, 12). However, as noted by Walicki, the nationalists of Dmowski's camp, despite their criticism towards 'political romanticism,' took over certain concepts, such as nation, mission, and spirit, and gave them new meanings. Such words became weaponised against minorities and helped to propagate antisemitism.

Dmowski and his political camp perceived Jews as an economic and cultural threat that prevented the creation of a strong integrated and ethnically based Polish nation (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006, 174-75).

Those nationalists were not the only ones who looked at Polish Messianists with suspicion.

After the January Uprising (1863–1864), the ideas of Romanticism were also rejected by Polish representatives of Positivism. Conservatives, supporting the ideas of Romanticism, accused the Positivists of a lack of patriotism and of weakening the national spirit by rejecting armed struggle. Famous authors such as Bolesław Prus (1847–1912) or Eliza Orzeszkowa (1841–1910) were in favour of organic work, spreading education (especially among peasants), the emancipation of women, and the assimilation of Jews and other minorities with Polish society. They could not accept Messianism with its mysticism and exaggerated religiosity. Such language and concepts were deemed to be a shameful aberration (Walicki 1978, 12).

In other words, Polish messianism turned out to be unsuccessful and its ideas were taken up by others but in entirely new forms. However, it is without doubt an important element of the history of Polish spirituality. It still had the power to inspire the successive generations, which was most evident in [Mariavitism](#).

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