



Andrzej Towiański

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Introduction

In his CDAMM article on '[Polish Messianism](#),' Damian Cyrocki looks at various influential figures. Here is an excerpt on one figure: Andrzej Towiański (1799–1878).

Andrzej Towiański

Andrzej 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, Antoszwilce, 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 Fiszman 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) and other church officials to undertake a Christian revolution that would introduce evangelical principles into the world of international relations (Weber 2000, 128).

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