

Giulio Dalla Grana

# “Dangerous and Pernicious Doctrines for the Health of the Souls”. Andrzej Towiański and the Reaction of the Roman Catholic Church

**Abstract:** Im 19. Jahrhundert vertrat Andrzej Towiański eine heterodoxe katholische Lehre, die von philosophischen und politischen Konzepten der Spätaufklärung und Romantik durchdrungen war. Der Towianismus verbreitete sich vor allem in Frankreich, Italien, der Schweiz und Polen. Towiański fand Sympathisanten unter denjenigen, die eine soziale und religiöse Erneuerung anstrebten, sowie unter zahlreichen Personen, die für ihre nationale Unabhängigkeit eintraten. Towiańskis Lehren wurden jedoch von verschiedenen kirchlichen Autoritäten bekämpft und vom Heiligen Offizium untersucht. Durch das Studium kirchlicher Archivquellen werden in dieser Studie die Gründe untersucht, die zur Verurteilung einer Ausprägung der katholischen Esoterik führten.

The aim of this contribution is to analyse the reaction of the Roman Catholic Church to Towianism, the religious current named after the Polish thinker Andrzej Towiański. Amid the nineteenth century, Towiański and his disciples attracted the suspicions of the Holy Office and of the dioceses and clergy in Paris and Piedmont.

Due to the several ecclesiastical institutions involved and the different territorial areas touched by the phenomenon, the case-study of Towiański's doctrine demonstrates different approaches in dealing with the existence of Catholic esotericism by the Roman Catholic Church. This study investigates the reasons that triggered the suspicions of the ecclesiastical institutions, their reactions, and the motivations that led to such reactions.

The article is divided into three parts: an introduction to Andrzej Towiański and his doctrine; a descriptive part that examines the reaction to Towianism by ecclesiastical institutions; a conclusive part that analyses the relations between the Towianist phenomenon and the Church. To illustrate the reaction of the Church to Towianism, this study was conducted on unpublished documentation retrieved in the archives of ecclesiastical institutions in Vatican City and Piedmont, and in the Archivio Begey, the Towianist archive preserved in Turin.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ACRR: Archive of the Congregation of the Resurrection in Rome, I. Fundatores, Semenenko Piotr. AAV: Vatican Apostolic Archive. ACDF: Archive of Congregation for the Doctrine of the

# 1 Preamble: A Question of Terminology

In 1907, Józef Pelczar (1842–1924), proclaimed saint in 2003 by Pope John Paul II (1920–2005), described Andrzej Towiański (1799–1878)<sup>2</sup> as the only Polish “heretic.”<sup>3</sup>

Alongside “heresiarch”, the term “heretic” can still be commonly found among scholarly and popular science publications on the history of the Church and of Christianity. These terms imply the identification of a dichotomy between doctrines and teachings that are “orthodox”, thus approved by the ecclesiastical authority as conforming to the doctrine of the Church, and others that are “heterodox”, thus a possible object of condemnation by the ecclesiastical authority due to their non-conforming nature.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, terms such as “esoteric” and “occult”, despite their different semantical roots (“internal”, the first; “hidden”, the latter), were used, from the middle of the eighteenth century, as synonymous and, nowadays, are often used to label heterodox ideas, especially in the field of the history of religions.<sup>5</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church, according to the archival documentation retrieved, complied with the original philological meaning of those terms. Therefore, Towiański was identified as a “heretic” because he taught a heterodox doctrine with the aggravating circumstance that it was kept hidden. Nonetheless, despite the heterodoxy of his doctrine, Towiański’s esotericism conformed to an ancient custom within the Church. Following the example of Clement of Alexandria (150–250) and other early Christian writers,<sup>6</sup> Towiański’s teachings demonstrated the distinction between “esoteric” and “exoteric”. The first, secret, devoted

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Faith. AAT: Archive of the Archbishopric of Turin, Frasoni 11. ASDC: Historical Archive of the Diocese of Coni, Curia vescovile, Rapporti con enti, Santa Sede, Dottrina eretica di padre Giacinto da Gaiola. BRAB: Royal Library of Turin, Archivio Begey, F22 Carte Towianski, Archivio Cracovia II, Zbiór Aktów i Dokumentów.

<sup>2</sup> Lami, Marlis: Andrzej Towiański (1799–1878). Ein religiöser Reformator im europäischen Kontext seiner Zeit, Göttingen: V&R Unipress/Vienna University Press 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Pelczar, Józef Sebastian: Pius IX i jego pontyfikat na tle dziejów kościoła w XIX wieku, Vol. 1, Przemyśl: Drukarnia „Udziałowej” Jan Łazor 1907, 215.

<sup>4</sup> Bauer, Walter: Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 1934.

<sup>5</sup> Baroni, Francesco: Storia dell’esoterismo e storia delle religioni. Mappatura di un campo di ricerca e prospettive teoriche, in: *Egeria* 16/2022, 59–79. Zander, Helmut: 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 / Helmut Zander, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2021, 14–43.

<sup>6</sup> Itter, Andrew: Esoteric Teaching in the *Stromateis* of Clement of Alexandria. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2009. Stroumsa, Guy G.: *Hidden Wisdom. Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism*, Leiden/Boston: Brill 2005.

to the initiates, those inside the Towianist community; the latter, public, for those outside the Towianist community.

Therefore, from the Church's perspective, esotericism can be perceived as both orthodox and heterodox. Especially in ancient Christianity, esotericism was a customary orthodox practice. Nevertheless, due to the secrecy permeating the transmitted teachings, their heterodox nature could not always be proved. Towiański's teachings, on the contrary, were disclosed and, consequently, judged.

## **2 Introduction: Andrzej Towiański's Revelation amidst the Nineteenth Century**

Andrzej Towiański was born in 1799 in the village of Antoszwinięcie, near Vilnius. Although he suffered from ophthalmia in his youth, he was able to complete his studies and begin a career at the courthouse of the city. On the 11th of May 1828, Towiański claimed to have experienced a Marian apparition in the Bernardine Church of Vilnius. After that event, he felt he was appointed to realise a divine mission. He abandoned his comfortable social position and travelled across Central and Eastern Europe to preach what he called the "Cause of God": the continuation of the action of redemption started by Jesus Christ. In 1840, he quit Lithuania and relocated to Paris, the centre of the Polish Emigration following the failure of the November Uprising of 1831. Towiański gained a certain fame among his compatriots due to the rumours concerning his travels and the "miraculous" healing of Celina Szymanowska (1812–1855): wife of the poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), identified at the time as the main cultural representative of Polish nationalism. On the 27th of September 1841, at Notre Dame, Towiański publicly announced the imminent coming of the "Higher Christian Epoch", a new age that would have anticipated the Kingdom of God.

Towiański promoted a message of renewal and rebirth. The received revelation appointed him to preach the accomplishment of the law of Jesus Christ on earth: a complete Christianisation of social relations and, therefore, of international relations. The Poles had suffered from the defeat of the past insurrections that aimed at the re-establishment of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Towiański looked towards his compatriots scattered around Europe to diffuse his message and preached the upcoming rebirth of the Polish nation through the accomplishment of God's Word on the earthly level. But Towiański's message also fascinated

promoters of national movements of other countries. Thanks to the support of Mickiewicz,<sup>7</sup> Towiański's charisma attracted numerous people.

Towianism can be identified as an elitist phenomenon that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, involved a few dozen people. Towianist groups operated in France, Piedmont, Switzerland, and Poland. They were organised in three non-institutionalised Circles in Paris, Zurich (where Towiański resided), and Turin. The Towianists focused their efforts on specific charismatic persons or whoever they perceived as moved by Christian sentiment. Usually, Towiański's disciples were attracted by his messianic message. They approached the Towianists and, if they demonstrated the willingness to improve their life through the pursuit of Christian principles, they were introduced to Towiański's doctrine. But, the initiation to Towiański's teachings, and even the meetings with the "Master", were a privilege conceded to a few selected people. Nonetheless, the Towianist endeavours of "converting" key public figures partially failed. The paramount example can be seen in Jan Skrzynecki (1787–1860), captain in chief of the November Uprising. Towiański initiated Skrzynecki and gave him a small notebook denominated *Biesiada* (The Banquet), containing the loose notes of his teachings. But, when Skrzynecki understood that the Christian teachings promoted by Towiański were dissimilar from orthodox Catholicism, he interrupted his relations with him.

## 2.1 The Acroamatic Teachings

Towiański's religious ideas are disclosed in the publications edited by his disciples after his death<sup>8</sup> and manuscripts preserved in the Archivio Begey, the Towianist archive in Turin. Nonetheless, the Towianists publications displayed Towiański's teachings through an exoteric narrative,<sup>9</sup> while their esoteric aspects can be noticed in writings such as *Biesiada*<sup>10</sup> or *Wielki Period* (The Great Period).<sup>11</sup>

While *Wielki Period* was discovered posthumously, *Biesiada* circulated in Paris and was the primary source used by the ecclesiastical authorities against

7 Koropeczyj, Roman: Adam Mickiewicz. The Life of a Romantic, Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press 2008, 281–355.

8 Towiański, Andrzej: Pisma, 3 vols., ed. Stanisław Falkowski / Karol Baykowski, Turyn: Nakładem Wydawców 1882.

9 Lami: Andrzej Towiański, 23–100.

10 [Towiański, André:] Banquet du 17 janvier 1841, Paris: Libraire de N. Béchét fils [1844]. Towiański: Pisma, Vol. 1, 1–21.

11 Towiański, Andrzej: Wybór pism i nauk, ed. Stanisław Pigoń, Wrocław/Warszawa: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich / De Agostini Polska 2004, 84–114.

Towiański. Recognisable as a divinely inspired text, *Biesiada* presented the Towianist cosmology, eschatology, and soteriological message. In the writing, Towiański described the world as surrounded by “inferior spirits”, who formed a column of darkness, under the command of the evil “Spirit of the Earth”; when Jesus Christ started the Cause of God, he dissipated the inferior spirits and opened a spiritual gate for the “superior spirits”, who formed a column of light. Towiański prophesied a great battle between inferior and the superior spirits in the middle of the nineteenth century. According to him, Napoleon’s spirit will lead the army of superior spirits until the “Seventh Envoy” will descend on earth, annihilating the inferior spirits through an immense column of light.

The columns of light and darkness were the basis of the Towianist metempsychosis. For Towiański, the soul was able to attract or be influenced by these columns. After death, the columns oriented the soul towards a new bodily existence that, according to the actions of the preceding life, could be easier or more difficult to fulfil. Therefore, for Towiański, the purpose of every existence was an individual spiritual improvement according to the Gospel’s teachings that, transferred into the social life of the collective-national level, would lead to a state which will finally introduce the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>12</sup> This concept of national metempsychosis was able to attract numerous people among Poles, Frenchmen, Jews, and Italians.

Towiański’s palingenetic idea can be understood through other two fundamental concepts, which are vaguely described across his collective works: the “Christian tone” and the “Triple Sacrifice.”<sup>13</sup>

Towiański promoted a gnoseological primacy identified as the Christian tone<sup>14</sup>, conceiving Roman Catholicism as based on feelings, on their “tone”. He rejected constructed devotional forms and doctrinal knowledge institutionalised by the Roman Catholic Church. On the other hand, he claimed that enlightenment could only blossom from insight or divine revelation. For Towiański, Christianity must be felt within the soul and, thus, transposed in the community since the law of Jesus Christ could not be theorised or formalised. The possibility to seek the tone, and to live according to it, avoiding the impediment caused by doctrinal interpretations, was denominated “Christian freedom.”<sup>15</sup> Only through exercising

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12 Sikora, Adam: Towiański i rozterki romantyzmu, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Wiedza Powszechna 1969.

13 An attempt to systematise and explain Towiański’s teachings was made by his disciples. See: Horoszkiewiczówna, Walentyna: Etyka Towiańskiego. Jej źródła i promieniowanie, Wilno: Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk 1938. Bersano Begey, Maria: Vita e pensiero di Andrea Towiański (1799–1878), preface by Giovanni Amendola, Milano: Editrice Milanese 1918.

14 Towiański: Pisma, Vol. 1, 91–94.

15 Ibid., 265–275.

the Christian freedom for reaching the tone, humanity could have marched on the path of “Christian progress”, which could be defined as the continuative and complete exercise of the law of Jesus Christ on earth over successive lives.

For Towiański, the implementation of Christian progress must be achieved through the Triple Sacrifice.<sup>16</sup> The Triple Sacrifice was composed of three steps: the sacrifice of spirit, the sacrifice of body, and the sacrifice of action. The sacrifice of spirit consisted in rising the spirit through meditation on the love of God. Then, the sacrifice of body entailed living according to the spirit shaped by the previous sacrifice. Finally, the sacrifice of action comported the application to the political and social life of the spiritual state attained, engaging in the spiritual elevation of the neighbour.

Towiański, like most of the authors who claimed to be divinely inspired or promoted forgotten or “secret” teachings, did not reveal the sources that inspired him, nor his readings, except for the Bible and *De imitatione Christi*. His religious ideas, however, presented similarities to those of Jacob Böhme (1575–1624), Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin (1743–1803), Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), and Barbara von Krüdener (1764–1824), alongside religious currents such as Lurianic Kabbalah, Frankism, and Russian chialism, or religious movements such as *devotio moderna* and evangelical Great Awakenings.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Towiański possessed features proper of authors identified as part of the esoteric milieux between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century<sup>18</sup>: the recovery from a deadly illness as a form of initiation to supernatural powers, a divine apparition disclosing a mission to pursue, the travels to acquire further gnoseological insights, the aristocratic initiatory nature of the transmission of acroamatic teachings, the ability to interact with the world of the spirits, and the accomplishment of healings.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 49–79.

<sup>17</sup> Dalla Grana, Giulio: Esoteric Resonances in Andrzej Towiański's Thought, in: The Polish Review 4/2021, 3–22. On the diffusion of late eighteenth-century religious ideas in Baltic Europe see: Szpotański, Stanisław: Andrzej Towiański. Jego życie i nauka, Warszawa: Kasa im. Mianowskiego 1938, 19–95. Weintraub, Wiktor: Poeta i prorok. Rzecz o profetyzmie Mickiewicza, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1982, 5–46. Towiański: Wybór pism i nauk, VII–XXI. On the Frankist and Kabbalistic influence on Towianism, see: Pigoń, Stanisław: Chrystologia A. Towiańskiego, in: Kwartalnik Teologiczny Wileński 2/1924, 400–423. Duker, Abraham G.: Polish Frankism's Duration: From Cabbalistic Judaism to Roman Catholicism and from Jewishness to Polishness. A Preliminary Investigation, in: Jewish Social Studies 4/1963, 287–333. Duker, Abraham G.: The Mystery of The Jews in Mickiewicz's Towianist Lectures on Slav Literature, in: The Polish Review 3/1962, 40–66.

<sup>18</sup> On these milieux, see: Laurant, Jean-Pierre: L'ésotérisme chrétien en France au XIXe siècle, Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme 1992, 49–116. Faivre, Antoine: L'ésotérisme, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1992, 71–108. Strube, Julian: Sozialismus, Katholizismus und Okkultismus im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts. Die Genealogie der Schriften von Eliphas Lévi, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2016.

Towiański's religious ideas were opposed by many. The ecclesiastical authorities and the orthodox Catholics saw him as a promotor of false teachings, political personalities identified his preaching as a misdirection from the problems of Poland, and some intellectuals perceived in Towiański's words a manifestation of folkloristic prophetism. Furthermore, the suspicions against him led to concrete results: expulsions, limited permits of stay, calumnies, and imprisonment were usual occurrences for Towiański.

## 2.2 The Political and Religious Scenario

To understand the reaction of the Church to Towianism in Paris and Piedmont, certain aspects of the French and Italian political and religious scenarios must be contextualised.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, both Italy and France were undergoing political turmoil that usually embodied anti-clerical stances. Paris experienced an intensification of republican and socialist instances aiming at social justice and renewal. The French capital was the cradle of ideologies such as Saint-Simonianism and Fourierism, which identified themselves as the bearers of a new religion.<sup>19</sup> In Italy, patriotic secret societies were trying to overthrow the monarchies appointed by the Congress of Vienna, and their actions were mostly inspired by Giuseppe Mazzini's (1805–1872) civil religion.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, both areas faced the conflict between reactionary Catholicism and liberal Catholicism. The Church was opposing liberal instances advocating the reformation of the Roman Curia and national independences through condemnations in the Index of Forbidden Books, bulls, and encyclicals, making the nineteenth century one of the most productive centuries for the Roman Congregations of the Inquisition and of the Index.<sup>21</sup>

Paris was the city that hosted most of the Poles defeated in the November Uprising. The Polish Emigration was politically divided and lacked the support of the Holy See, which was aligned with the interests of the Holy Alliance in suppressing the national-liberal insurrections. Gregorius XVI's (1765–1846) encyclical *Cum primum* condemned the November Uprising, creating a fracture in the Polish clergy who supported the insurrectionary activity, leading to a partial mistrust of

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<sup>19</sup> de Lubac, Henri: *La postérité intellectuelle de Joachim de Flore*, Vol. 2, Paris Namur: Éditions Lethielleux 1981, 7–50.

<sup>20</sup> Alunni, Sofia: *Secolarizzazione gioachimita e teologia politica*, Roma: Studium 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Palazzolo, Maria Iolanda: *La congregazione dell'Indice nell'Ottocento*, in: *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* 1/2012, 59–81.

the Church by the Polish Emigration.<sup>22</sup> Although Towiański did not fight in the November Uprising, his messianic message could be interpreted as an alternative to the Roman institutions that denied the existence of the Polish nation and of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

In the Italian peninsula, after the Congress of Vienna, the Kingdom of Sardinia resulted in the only State able to pursue a foreign policy of territorial expansion. If, after the failure of the republican uprisings of 1820, 1830, and 1848, many Italians identified the Kingdom of Sardinia as the only political actor capable of creating the Italian Nation-State, the Church perceived it, and the whole national movement, as a menace since it aimed at the suppressing its temporal power.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, to understand the concerns and the hostility of the Italian clergy towards Towiański and his disciples, two issues must be mentioned. Between 1848 and 1855, a series of laws by the Sardinian government recognised the freedom of confession, the abolition of ecclesiastical privileges, and the dissolution of religious orders. The State of the Church and the Piedmontese clergy felt directly attacked, and, on the 26th of July 1855, Pius IX (1792–1878) excommunicated the King of Sardinia and those politicians who voted in favour of such laws.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, Towiański called his mission *Sprawy Bożej* (Cause of God, *Sache Gottes*). In French, the term was translated as *Œuvre de Dieu*. In Italian, it was called *Opera di Dio*.<sup>25</sup> In Italy, the term *opera* (work, *Werke*) identifies the predominantly religious institutions established for social assistance and moral improvement. Therefore, the term was misleading since it usually indicated civil and religious societies. The appearance of what was identified as a religious society that aimed at competing against the social monopoly of the Church, in a State that was trying to dissolve the socio-political power of the clergy, was perceived as a threat by the clergy.

Finally, the Church was facing another struggle. In 1838, the Holy Office began to gather material on Mesmerism. According to the documentation preserved in its archive, the Holy Office confounded various manifestations of practices involving the spirits such as Mesmerism, Spiritism, and clairvoyancy.<sup>26</sup> While

22 Kalemka, Sławomir: *Wielka Emigracja. Polskie wychodźstwo polityczne w latach 1831–1862*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Wiedza Powszechna 1971, 273–326.

23 Martina, Giacomo: *Pio IX (1846–1850)*, Roma: Università Gregoriana Editrice 1974, 49–80.

24 The priest Tomaso Chiuso devoted several sections of a volume on the history of the Piedmontese Church to the various “enemies” and laws against the Roman Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Sardinia. Chiuso, Tomaso: *La Chiesa in Piemonte*, Vol. 4, Torino: Giulio Speirani e Figli 1892.

25 Towiański’s mission 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).

26 Armando, David: *Magnetismo animale*, in: *Dizionario storico dell’Inquisizione*, Vol. 2, ed. Adriano Prosperi / Vincenzo Lavenia / John Tedeschi, Pisa: Edizioni della Normale 2010, 960–961.



in France, Mesmerism was a widespread phenomenon,<sup>27</sup> in Italy, starting from the middle of the nineteenth century, Turin became the centre which laid the foundation for the diffusion of Spiritism across the Italian peninsula.<sup>28</sup> Notably, at the end of the nineteenth century, the priest Tomaso Chiuso even identified in Towianism the original manifestation of this phenomenon in Italy.<sup>29</sup>

Several Towianists were involved in these milieux. Usually, Towiański's disciples advocated liberal Catholic stances, and among them numerous Poles were members of the Polish Democratic Society, the almost totality of the Frenchmen were former followers of the "prophet" Pierre-Michel-Eugène Vintras (1807–1875), and many Italians were members of the Giovine Italia and the Italian Spiritic Society.

### 3 The Diffusion in Paris and the Congregation of the Resurrection

The day after Towiański's speech at Notre Dame, a group of Polish orthodox Catholics gathered, worried about the words heard. Towiański resided in the French capital for a few months, and the information about him mostly concerned rumours of his supernatural powers, especially in relation to the exercise of Mesmerism and his ability to communicate with the dead.<sup>30</sup> Worried by the growing number of Towiański's disciples, which, in a few months, would form a Circle of around forty members, the priest Aleksander Jełowicki (1804–1877) collected material against Towiański and, in June 1842, obtained a copy of *Biesiada* through Skrzynecki.

In the same period, the Congregation of the Resurrection was established in Rome.<sup>31</sup> Four priests founded it: Piotr Semenenko (1814–1886), who, at the time, was travelling across Italy, Germany, and Poland; Józef Hube (1804–1891), who resided in Rome; Hieronim Kajsiewicz (1812–1873) and Edward Duński (1810–1857), who established the headquarters of the Congregation in Paris. Semenenko read *Biesiada* in August 1842. His judgement was unequivocal:

27 Viatte, Auguste: *Victor Hugo et les illuminés de son temps*, Montréal: Éditions de l'Arbre 1942, 13–32.

28 Gallini, Clara: *La sonnambula meravigliosa. Magnetismo ed ipnotismo nell'Ottocento italiano*, Milano: Feltrinelli 1983.

29 Chiuso: *La Chiesa in Piemonte*, Vol. 4, 124.

30 Smolikowski, Paweł: *Historia Zgromadzenia Zmartwychwstania Pańskiego*, Vol. 4, Kraków: Spółka Wydawnicza Polska 1896, 3–17.

31 Iwicki, John / Wahl, James: *Resurrectionist Charism. A History of the Congregation of the Resurrection*, 3 vols., Rome: Zgromadzenie Zmartwychwstania Pańskiego 1986–1991.

There is not even a moment of doubt that Towiański's opinions and views are basically contrary to the Catholic dogmas and destructive to Catholicism. Indeed, they destroy Christianity in the complete meaning of that word.<sup>32</sup>

Semenenko was in Munich visiting Joseph Görres (1776–1848) when he read *Biesiada*. Görres' conclusion was categorical: "It is Jewish."<sup>33</sup> Semenenko was convinced of the Jewish nature of Towiański's doctrine, and identified elements of Gnosticism, Docetism, and other ancient heterodox doctrines too.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, the priest was not persuaded to confute Towiański. In the Autumn of 1842, Jełowicki commissioned the printing of *Biesiada*. When Duński and Semenenko heard about Jełowicki's deeds, they compelled him to stop the printing because they were not completely convinced about the righteousness of such action. Nevertheless, *Biesiada*, without stating its author, started to circulate in Paris as a result of the copies being stored in the typography and consequently distributed by its employees.<sup>35</sup>

On the 11th of October 1842, Kajsiewicz made the first formal action against Towiański. He submitted a report to the Archbishop of Paris, Denys-Auguste Affre (1793–1848). The priest wrote: "[Towiański is an] honest man [. . .] that has not been well-educated in religious matters [. . .]. He constantly practices Mesmerism, and he promotes Saint-Simonianism."<sup>36</sup> To prove that Towiański was a true menace, the priest revealed the existence of *Biesiada*, summarising the religious ideas contained in the pamphlet and mentioning the Jewish influence of Towiański's teachings. Although Kajsiewicz complained that the Resurrectionists felt provoked because the Towianists participated in the mass, the Archbishop did not undertake any action.

Two months later, Kajsiewicz wrote to his brethren in Rome:

"As you know, despite our written and oral testimonies, the Archbishop does not want to deal with this matter. On the 29th of November, forty of them [the Towianists] received the Eucharist. They could not be rejected because there was no public act against them."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> ACRR, 1286. Munich, 09/08/1842.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> ACRR, 412. Poznań, 10/09/1842.

<sup>35</sup> Pigoń, Stanisław: *Z epoki Mickiewicza. Studja i szkice*, Lwów: Wydawnictwo zakładu narodowego imienia Ossolińskich 1922, 253–256.

<sup>36</sup> ACRR, 405. Paris, 11/10/1842.

<sup>37</sup> Smolikowski: *Historia*, Vol. 4, 96.

In addition, he referred that Affre granted Semenenko the permission to interrogate Towiański. Around the Christmas of 1842, Semenenko reached Brussels, where Towiański resided after being expelled from Paris.<sup>38</sup> During the meeting, Towiański unsuccessfully tried to persuade Semenenko to join the Cause of God. The priest, on the other hand, obtained Towiański's admission of having written *Biesiada* and promoting the teachings contained in it. Nevertheless, the priest privately admitted the spiritual improvement gained by the Polish Emigration thanks to Towiański's influence, emphasising, however, that the Towianists avoided theological debates. He wrote to Hube:

They speak with fire, and they transmit great feelings. They speak with great faith, which leads to great conviction. They set aside all suspicious dogmas or leave them to the decision of the Church. [ . . . ] It is a pity, a true pity, about these people. Indeed, they have all improved their lives, they want to live with God, they work so hard in spirit. [ . . . ] Nevertheless, we told them the truth.<sup>39</sup>

In April 1843, *Biesiada* was published, without the Resurrectionist approval, on the first page of the newspaper *Dziennik Narodowy* (The National Daily News).<sup>40</sup> The Towianists never accepted the published versions of *Biesiada*. To all the critiques raised against Towiański, the Towianists always replied that they were based on an unapproved and incorrect exposition of Towiański's teachings.

### 3.1 The Resurrectionist Victory

On the 1st of October 1843, Towiański arrived in Rome and asked for an audience with Gregorius XVI. On the 21st of October, the Pontifical Secretary of State, Cardinal Luigi Lambruschini (1776–1854), issued an order of eviction from Rome in twenty-four hours against Towiański. The episode was later narrated by the Barnabite Father, Orazio Premoli (1864–1928):

[Józef Hube] contacted cardinal Lambruschini about the state of the thing: 'I know everything', the cardinal replied: 'do not be concerned: just leave it to me, I will arrange it well'. Rapidly, the order of expulsion from Rome arrived. The Congregation of the Resurrection

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**38** Semenenko, Pierre: Towiański et sa doctrine, jugés par l'Église, Paris: Sag-nier et Bray 1850, VIII–XIX.

**39** ACRR, 1333. Paris, 07/02/1843.

**40** Biesiada: Pismo Andrzeja Towiańskiego, in: *Dziennik Narodowy* 107, 15/04/1843. Biesiada: Pismo Andrzeja Towiańskiego, in: *Dziennik Narodowy* 109, 29/04/1843.

truly wanted to prevent any propagation of Towiański's false teachings, at least hoping to obtain from the Parisian ecclesiastical authority a decisive measure.<sup>41</sup>

After the Resurrectionist success in Rome, the occasion to act again against the Towianists in Paris was triggered by Mickiewicz in 1844. The poet, who was appointed professor of Slavic literature at the Collège de France, was devoting his lectures to Towiański's doctrine.<sup>42</sup> Although Semenenko wanted to oppose Mickiewicz, the priest was still hesitant of the steps to follow. In September 1844, he wrote to Kajsiewicz:

Concerning the Towianists, I still do not have any definite judgment yet. I am fearful of giving them too much weight, and it would be the same as considering them to be a true sect. They are not a sect, because they do not have priests, ecclesiastical dignity, etc. [ . . . ] Writing about them would be to dignify them.<sup>43</sup>

After this letter, Towiański disappeared from the Resurrectionist correspondence for five years. This occurrence could be explained by two events. In 1844, Mickiewicz lost his chair at the Collège de France due to his Towianist lectures, and, in February 1849, Duński left the Resurrectionists to join the Towianists.

In Summer 1849, after having received approval from the new Archbishop of Paris, Marie-Dominique-Auguste Sibour (1792–1857), Semenenko began to write the publication that would cause the Towianist downfall. Semenenko wanted to have a definite reaction from the Archbishopric of Paris. He affirmed: "I wrote it in French in order that the local bishopric authority can understand the material, learn, and judge the [Towianist] teachings."<sup>44</sup> In 1850, *Towiański et sa doctrine, jugés par l'enseignement de l'Église* was published. In the book, Semenenko meticulously analysed every passage of *Biesiada* and compared it to the Catholic dogma. At the end of the volume, Semenenko published *Biesiada* and its translation in French and Latin, adding a comparative table overviewing the "errors" promoted by Towiański.

41 Premoli, Orazio: Andrea Towianski (1799–1878), Roma: Francesco Ferrari 1914, 38–39.

42 Mickiewicz's Towianist lectures were published in two volumes one year later. Mickiewicz, Adam: *L'Église officielle et le Messianisme*, in: *Les Slaves*, Vol. 4, Paris: Imprimeurs unis 1849. Mickiewicz, Adam: *L'Église et le Messie*, in: *Les Slaves*, Vol. 5, Paris: Imprimeurs unis 1849. The two tomes were condemned by the Congregation of the Index in 1848. Schwedt, Herman H. / Schepers, Judith / Burkard, Dominik: *Römische Bücherverbote. Edition der Bandi von Inquisition und Indexkongregation. 1814–1917*, in: *Römische Inquisition und Indexkongregation. Grundlagenforschung. 1814–1917*, ed. Hubert Wolf, Paderborn: Schöningh 2005, 173–174.

43 ACRR, 438. Rome, 13/09/1844.

44 ACRR, 3616. Paris, 06/08/1849.

Although Semenenko tried to demonstrate the incompatibility between Towiański and Catholicism, Sibour did not undertake any action. The Towianist presence in Paris was consolidated and, although Towiański did not reside anymore in Paris and Mickiewicz died in 1855, continued to develop and operate in the French capital in the following decades.

## 4 The Diffusion in Piedmont and the Ecclesiastical Inquests

In 1848, the adoption of a constitution by the Kingdom of Sardinia granted amnesty to those previously condemned for political crimes. Giovanni Battista Scovazzi (1808–1893), a member of the Giovine Italia who had fled to Switzerland in 1833, was able to return to Turin. In 1844, Scovazzi met Towiański in Lausanne and was appointed by him to become the “apostle” of the Cause of God in Italy. Between 1848 and 1854, thanks to Scovazzi’s endeavours, a Towianist Circle, formed by a dozen of personalities, took shape in Turin.<sup>45</sup> Alongside Scovazzi, the main members of the Turin Circle were Giacinto Forni (1811–1884), a physician who published one of the first Italian books on Spiritism,<sup>46</sup> and Tancredi Canonico (1828–1908), a professor of law at the University of Turin. In the Turinese countryside, and in the adjoining province of Coni, Towianism found disciples in the Fino, Bernardi, and Unia families.<sup>47</sup>

Among the Piedmontese Towianists figured the theologian and professor of ecclesiastical history at the University of Turin, Francesco Barone (1813–1882). Initially, Barone was suspicious of Towiański’s teachings. In Autumn 1852, the priest visited Towiański in Zurich to clarify his religious ideas. The experience among the Towianist Circle in Switzerland convinced Barone of the Christian purity of those individuals and started to attend the meetings of the Turin Circle.

Although Barone never identified himself as a Towianist, he was the protagonist of the first ecclesiastical inquest, issued by the Archbishopric of Turin, against the Towianist movement. The Towianist biographies and the studies on

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<sup>45</sup> Canonico, Tancredi: *Testimonianze di italiani su Andrea Towiański*, Roma: Forzani e C. 1903, 11–48.

<sup>46</sup> Forni, Giacinto: *Del mondo degli spiriti e della sua efficacia nell’universo sensibile*, Torino: Speirani e Ferrero 1851.

<sup>47</sup> Zussini, Alessandro: *Andrzej Towiański. Un riformatore polacco in Italia*, Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna 1970, 59–80.

Towianism did not devote any attention to the Archbishopric of Turin's inquest.<sup>48</sup> All the Towianist publications reported, in a very few lines, that the Towianists presented their depositions at the Archbishopric, that Barone was heard by an Archbishopric Committee, and that no action was undertaken by the Holy Office. Nonetheless, the inquest was the starting point that led, a couple of years later, to the condemnation in the Index of Forbidden Books of the Towianist writings.

## 4.1 The Beginning of the Investigations

The first act that demonstrated Rome's interest in the diffusion of Towianism in Italy is dated 22nd of September 1855.<sup>49</sup> The Pontifical Secretary of State, Giacomo Antonelli (1806–1876), questioned the *chargé d'affaires* of the Holy See in Turin, Benedetto Roberti (?–1856), about the diffusion of a new “sect”. The *chargé d'affaires* reported that Duński often visited Turin and that the Towianist meetings were publicly known. Nonetheless, he was not able to give proper elucidations on Towiański's doctrine. The *chargé d'affaires* had only heard that the Towianists professed evangelical principles and that their political idea concerning the temporal power of the Church was unclear. Moreover, Roberti stressed that the diffusion of Towianism could bear major implications:

The penetration of this new doctrine could be motivated by the willingness to settle Protestantism in this part of Italy by the enemies of Catholic Religion. Since they cannot openly and boldly preach the Protestant principles to the eminent religious and Catholic population, they use other means that apparently seem good and religious.<sup>50</sup>

A few weeks later, the Vicar General of Turin, Filippo Ravina (1783–1858), summoned Barone. Between November 1855 and January 1856, the members of the Turin Circle presented to the Archbishopric numerous written testimonies on Towiański. This choice could be understood as a genuine willingness to explain to the ecclesiastical authority Towiański's message, to convince the Turinese Curia of the conformity of Towiański's doctrine to Catholicism, and to persuade it to embrace Towiański's mission.

In the meantime, on the 19th of November 1855, the council of the Holy Office received an “extrajudicial information [. . .] on a sect introduced in Turin by a

<sup>48</sup> Zussini, Alessandro: Il towianesimo in Piemonte. Inchiesta della Curia Arcivescovile di Torino nel 1856 (II), in: Archivio Teologico Torinese 1/2001, 121–152.

<sup>49</sup> AAV, Segr. Stato, Protocolli 230 (1855), 69641. [Rome,] 22/09/1855.

<sup>50</sup> AAV, Segr. Stato, Rubriche, Anno 1857, Rubr. 257, Fasc. 2, 79. Turin, 04/10/1855.

certain Andrzej Towiański, Pole.”<sup>51</sup> At the end of December, the Secretary of the Roman Inquisition, Cardinal Vincenzo Macchi (1770–1860), requested to investigate the diffusion of a “political-religious sect” to the Vicar General of Turin, to the *chargé d'affaires* in Switzerland, and to the *chargé d'affaires* in the Kingdom of Sardinia.<sup>52</sup>

From Turin, Roberti’s report identified religious and political implications related to the diffusion of Towianism in the Kingdom of Sardinia. Although the *chargé d'affaires* stated that Towiański’s disciples were praised as pious and religious people, he wrote:

The doctrine of this sect is immersed in such vague formulas, and in such obscure and elastic terms that, at first sight, it would seem to contain no evil but a germ of good. [ . . . ] Nevertheless, if all those formulas are carefully examined, those terms seem to contain the poison of mysticism, Jansenism, Protestantism, and even rationalism.<sup>53</sup>

According to Roberti, Scovazzi was the junction point between Polish messianism and Italian revolutionary means activity. He wrote: “This can lead to suspect that the aim of the new sect is political and religious”.<sup>54</sup>

From Lucerne, the *chargé d'affaires* Monsignor Giuseppe Bovieri (1800–1873) reported that he received divergent rumours from the priests and friars of the Canton of Zurich.<sup>55</sup> According to the information gathered, the Towianists were praised as highly devout Catholics. On the other hand, a friar from the Abbey of Einsiedeln described Towiański as a “sectarian” that did not perform any religious sacrament.

Although the *chargés d'affaires* acknowledged the zealous and pious characters of the Towianists, the suspicions of their involvement in revolutionary activities or religious propaganda were not ignored.

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51 ACDF, Doctrinalia 78 (1858), Fer. IV 21 Aprile 1858. Roma – Zurigo – Torino. Setta ed errori di Andrea Towiascki: Giacinto de Ferrari, Errori e Setta di Andrea Towianski. Relazione e voto con sommario, Roma, Marzo 1858, 2.

52 ACDF, Minutari 45 (1856), 2–4. The letter to the Archbishopric of Turin is dated: Rome, 30/12/1855. The letters to the Apostolic Nunciatures of Lucerne and Turin are dated: Rome, 02/01/1856.

53 ACDF, Doctrinalia 78 (1858), Fer. IV 21 Aprile 1858, 23. Turin, 17/02/1856.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., 26–27. Lucerne, 07/03/1856.

## 4.2 The Archbishopric of Turin's Inquest

Macchi's missive led Ravina to open an official inquest. The Archbishopric Committee of Turin prepared a list of twelve questions on Towiański and his teachings.<sup>56</sup> The questions concerned the role of the spirits in the Towianist doctrine, its doctrinal conformity to Catholicism, the political affiliation of the Towianists, and the diffusion of the movement in Turin. Besides Barone, the Committee summoned two other theologians: Giovanni Genta and Lorenzo Albera.

The inquest began on the 11th of February 1856 and finished on the 9th of April 1856. Barone affirmed that Towiański promoted an "eminently spiritualistic system,"<sup>57</sup> and that he often spoke with the spirits of the dead and saints. Barone initially manifested approval for the inquest. In the last hearings, however, the professor perceived that the Committee was placing accusations on him due to his Towianist affiliation, and, on different occasions, he rigorously stated: "I never perceived any proposition or word that made me suspicious that his doctrine was different from the one of the Catholic Church."<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, one sentence was sufficient to confirm the suspicions on Towiański and his disciples. When Barone was questioned if he suspected something unconventional in Towiański's teachings, he replied affirmatively, stating:

1° The infernal punishment. For the sinners, punishment is not eternal of true metaphysical eternity. After several centuries, they can be redeemed by God's mercy. 2° The existence of a plurality of lives for the soul or for the spirit of man.<sup>59</sup>

The Committee supposed that Barone was mesmerised by Towiański. The acknowledgement of doctrines perceived as against the Catholic faith seemed to persuade the Committee of the validity of its own assumptions. On the contrary, the Turin Circle believed that the acceptance of Towiański's message by the Church was soon to come. Forni wrote to Zurich Circle a very enthusiastic letter:

[The Committee] started to understand the importance and the greatness of the Cause. [ . . . ] Finally, he [Barone] spoke about what he understood concerning the great idea of the lives of the spirit [ . . . ] He did everything with such great sentiments, such vitality, and such blessing of Grace, that no one within the Committee raised any objection. [ . . . ] And now, confident in the grace and in the mercy of God, we await a signal from Rome!<sup>60</sup>

<sup>56</sup> AAT, 3, 0.

<sup>57</sup> AAT, 5, 30: *Esami sull'Opera di Andrea Towianski*, §7–9.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, §62.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, §35.

<sup>60</sup> BRAB, III, 355. Turin, 04/03/1856.



Although Forni's enthusiasm could be interpreted as detached from reality, it must be said that two members of the Committee, besides Ravina, appreciated the Christian zeal of the Towianists.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, the Turin Circle believed that Towiański's mission was supported by the Archbishopric.

Among the other two theologians summoned by the Committee, the most relevant examination was the hearing of Lorenzo Albera.<sup>62</sup> The theologian revealed the existence of a "Towiański's Society". According to him, the Society had numerous committees all over the Italian peninsula with adherents who used false identities. He affirmed that the Towianists were close to several personalities connected to the Royal family, members of the Sardinian Parliament who advocated the abolition of ecclesiastical privileges, and Luigi Desantis (1808–1869): Protestant minister and founder of the Italian Evangelical Christian Church. In addition, Albera handed to the Committee the manuscript *Memorie*, in which he exposed the alleged secret statute of Towiański's Society.<sup>63</sup>

The report sent to Rome by the Archbishopric Committee described the impossibility of understanding the nature of the Towianist community. For the Committee, the only relevant doctrinal issues were the two suspicious points disclosed by Barone and Towiański's relations with the spirits. Macchi did not write back to Ravina.

### 4.3 The Bishopric of Coni's Inquest

The main protagonists of the Bishopric of Coni's inquest were the Franciscan friars Giacinto of Gajola and Luigi of Carmagnola who resided in the convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli, in the countryside of Coni.

In Spring 1857, rumours of meetings held at the Bernardi family mansion and of friars discussing heterodox religious ideas were spreading in the province of Coni. On the 2nd of July 1857, the priest Giuseppe Bernardi (?–1892), the most fervent promoter of Towianism in the diocese of Coni, visited the Bishop of Coni, Clemente Manzini (1803–1865).<sup>64</sup> Bernardi wanted to introduce Manzini to Towiański's teachings, but the Bishop refused. Two weeks later, on the 16th of July 1857, Manzini published a *decretum* establishing an inquest on Father Giacinto of Gajola. The friar was accused of teaching "evil and erroneous doctrines against the orthodoxy and the purity of the Catholic faith, of trying to proselytise for the

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<sup>61</sup> BRAB, III, 351.

<sup>62</sup> AAT, 5, 30, Esame del Sig. Teol. Albera.

<sup>63</sup> AAT, 4, 21.

<sup>64</sup> BRAB, IV, 357. [Coni,] 07/07/1857.

so-called Sect of the Pole, Andrzej Towiański”.<sup>65</sup> Manzini did not know about the Turinese inquest, nor did Ravina know what was happening in Coni.

The inquest lasted from the 17th of July 1857 to the 22nd of March 1858. After three days of hearings, the notions of Christian progress, temporality of Hell’s punishment, metempsychosis, and Higher Christian Epoch were already recognised, defended, and explained by Father Giacinto to the Bishopric Committee.<sup>66</sup>

On the 10th of October, the Committee entered the convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli to examine Father Giacinto’s brethren. The friars confirmed that Father Giacinto usually talked of the temporality of Hell’s punishment, transmigration of souls, and renewal of Christianity. Moreover, they revealed that Father Giacinto discussed the same topics with peasants and clergymen outside the convent.<sup>67</sup> Worried about the acquired information, Manzini issued a circular letter to the parishes of the diocese, warning about the reality of the diffusion of Towianism, and asking to report any signal that could indicate Towianist presence in their parishes. A few parishes replied affirmatively, transmitting vague information on the Bernardi family and travellers headed to Switzerland. After vigorous debates between Father Giacinto and the Committee, on the 28th of October, the Committee decided to abandon every attempt to obtain Father Giacinto’s abjuration of Towiański’s doctrine.<sup>68</sup> The inquest created a situation of fear and suspicion inside the convent. Four months later, on the 27th of February 1858, the Custos of Santa Maria degli Angeli denounced Father Luigi to the Bishop.<sup>69</sup> In the following days, the Committee heard again the friars of the convent. After the hearings, the Committee identified Father Luigi as “corrupted” by Father Giacinto.

On the 24th of April 1858, Manzini condemned Father Giacinto and Towiański’s doctrine.<sup>70</sup> The sentence condemned several positions: the identification of the Church’s practices as an obstruction to Christian progress; the possibility that the Holy Spirit could disclose new revelations to laymen; the Origenist conceptions concerning the eternity of Hell’s punishment, the transmigration of souls, and the succession of lives; the messianic promises of the Higher Christian Epoch; the Towianist asceticism. Father Giacinto was requested to declare public abjuration, but he never did.

<sup>65</sup> ASDC, 2. 16/07/1857.

<sup>66</sup> ASDC, 1. Volume di processo del P. Giacinto Min. Rif., §11–51.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, §137–174.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, §236–253.

<sup>69</sup> ASDC, 20. Coni, 27/02/1858.

<sup>70</sup> La condanna del towianschismo, Torino: Sebastiano Franco 1866.

## 4.4 The Holy Office's Inquest

Although Macchi demonstrated interest in the diffusion of Towianism in 1855, the Roman Inquisition started to become formally involved in 1857. The Holy Office was not aware of what was happening in Coni and the only reference to Towiański was the Archbishopric of Turin's inquest of 1856.

The formal denunciation of Towiański happened on the 12th of May 1857. A certain Stefan Aleksander Dewonkowski entered the Palace of the Holy Office and declared:

I came here by order of my confessor to denounce a certain Andrzej Towiański. He is married, he resides in Zurich, he is a fifty-year-old Pole. He formed a heretical sect seventeen years ago. Though, he pretends to be Catholic. His main errors are: that he announced himself as a Messiah, claiming the biblical texts to himself; he admits the metempsychosis of the souls, that they carry the ancient sins with them; he denies the eternity of hell; he denies the end of the world; he wants from all his disciples to be called masters. He made many proselytes among the Polish Emigration, in Switzerland, and Turin too, and these things are of public notoriety.<sup>71</sup>

Nonetheless, no investigations were pursued. Dewonkowski disappeared and his confessor was unknown. Dewonkowski is mentioned in the Holy Office's report only. In the Resurrectionist correspondence, his name does not appear so far. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that Dewonkowski was sent at the Palace of the Holy Office with the intention to trigger a formal action against Towiański since he precisely mentioned all the possible theological points of conflict.

On the 10th of September 1857, the *chargé d'affaires* in Turin wrote to the Holy See concerning the Towianists.<sup>72</sup> A few days earlier, the book *Dunski*,<sup>73</sup> containing the epistolary correspondence of Edward Duński (who died in the April of the same year), was printed in Turin. Having received the letter from Turin, Pius IX became personally interested in counteracting the doctrine contained in the book, and ordered the examination of *Dunski* to the Holy Office.<sup>74</sup> The examination of the book and of the Turinese inquest was undertaken by the consultor Giacinto de Ferrari (1804–1874). Three months later, on the 10th of December, the council of the

<sup>71</sup> ACDF, Doctrinalia 77 (1857), Fer. V loco IV. 10 Dicembre 1857. Torino. Sul libro *Dunski* sacerdote zelante, e zelante servitore dell'opera di Dio: Giacinto de Ferrari, *Dunski* Sacerdote zelante, e zelante Servitore dell'Opera di Dio. Torino 1857. Voto, Roma, Novembre 1857, 19.

<sup>72</sup> AAV, Segr. Stato, Rubriche, Anno 1857, Rubr. 257, Fasc. 2, 73. Turin, 16/09/1857.

<sup>73</sup> Różycki, Karol: *Dunski, prêtre zèle et zèle serviteur de l'Œuvre de Dieu*, Paris: Henri Plon 1857.

<sup>74</sup> AAV, Segr. Stato, Rubriche, Anno 1857, Rubr. 257, Fasc. 2, 73. The letter was received on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 1857.

Holy Office gathered to hear de Ferrari. The consultor quoted long passages of Albera's *Memorie* and Semenenko's *Towiański et sa doctrine*. Although *Dunski* was the reason why the council gathered, the attention shifted to *Biesiada*. Since de Ferrari identified *Biesiada* as the source of the religious ideas promoted in *Dunski*, the consultor proposed to postpone his sentence for a complementary condemnation of the two Towianist writings.<sup>75</sup>

Four months later, on the 21st of April 1858, the council of the Holy Office gathered to deliberate on the matter. De Ferrari summarised the investigations pursued in 1856 in Lucerne and Turin. He highlighted several suspicious points: the deliberate secrecy of Towiański's teachings; Towiański's declarations of pursuing a divine mission; his disciples' claims of not being involved in politics; the spiritualistic aspect that permeated Towiański's gnoseology. For the consultor, the only possible tool able to disclose Towiański's doctrine was Semenenko's book. De Ferrari's opinion on *Biesiada* was rigorous: "it is properly a nebulous work scattered with such darkness, which manifests a sectarian jargon."<sup>76</sup>

In conclusion, the consultor identified two fundamental issues raised during the Turinese inquest. The first issue was theological and concerned Barone's words: de Ferrari emphasised that Barone recognised two suspicious points: the rejection of the eternity of Hell's punishment, and the transmigration of souls. The second issue concerned both the political and religious domains, and it was related to Albera's deposition. The manuscript submitted by Albera was entirely transcribed and enclosed in de Ferrari's report, affirming: "It can give complete knowledge on the sect."<sup>77</sup> Finally, the consultor concluded the examination with these words: "Towiański's book is essentially sectarian and extremely dangerous. It paves the way for errors and to corruption. Therefore, it deserves to be condemned."<sup>78</sup>

The council of the Holy Office approved the *decretum* of condemnation, its publication in the Index, and its dispatchment to Turin and Lucerne.<sup>79</sup> On the 6th of May 1858, after the Papal promulgation, the *decretum* was printed.<sup>80</sup> Bovieri personally tried to persuade Towiański to submit to the *decretum*<sup>81</sup> but the Holy See never obtained his abjuration.

<sup>75</sup> ACDF, Decreta 281 (1857), Fer. V loco IV. die 10 Xbris 1857.

<sup>76</sup> ACDF, Doctrinalia 78 (1858), Fer. IV 21 Aprile 1858, 13.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>79</sup> ACDF, Decreta 282 (1858), Feria IV die 21. Aprilis 1858.

<sup>80</sup> Schwedt / Schepers / Burkard: Römische Bücherverbote, 258–259.

<sup>81</sup> Towiański: Pisma, Vol. 3, 316–321.

## 5 Religious Issues and Political Concerns

As it can be noticed in the descriptive sections, Towianism presented different issues related to the dealing of the Roman Church with Catholic esotericism. These issues concerned the identification of an unknown set of religious principles by the ecclesiastical authority; the motivations that led to opposing the religious phenomenon; and the relations of the Church with Catholic esotericism.

### 5.1 Divergent Perceptions

Central points in the relations between Towianism and the Roman Catholic Church concerned the identification of the Towianists by the ecclesiastical authority and the Towianist obedience to it.

For the Towianists, the acceptance of the Cause of God by the Church was the necessary preliminary step towards the Higher Christian Epoch. Since this new age was based on the accomplishment of the law of Jesus Christ on the earth, they identified as fundamental the support of the ecclesiastical authorities. The Towianists aimed at being accepted by the Church because they perceived it as the depositary of the ancient teachings of Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, according to Towiański, the salvific mission of the Church was corrupted over the centuries by the Spirit of the Earth. Indeed, in the Towianist correspondence, Towiański's disciples addressed themselves as "soldiers" fighting to re-establish the "Church of Jesus Christ" over the Roman Church, which was often referred to as "the Beast". But, according to the Towianists, in the Church, there were people still pure and capable of attracting the column of light, though they did not know that. These points can be understood as the reasons why the Towianists continued in the attempt of diffusing Towiański's message to the Church. Indeed, Towiański and his disciples never stopped in their mission to persuade the clergy despite the aversion and the *decreta* issued against Towianism. Part of the second volume of Towiański's collected works presented Towiański's writings about the Church and transcriptions of conversations with clergymen.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, in 1869, Canonico was even received in a private audience by Pius IX.<sup>83</sup> And, in 1878, at the Papal conclave for electing Pius IX's successor, Canonico distributed to the Cardinals two

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<sup>82</sup> Towiański: *Pisma*, Vol. 2, 7–185.

<sup>83</sup> Canonico: *Testimonianze*, 136–174.

pamphlets illustrating his idea of State-Church relations and Towiański's exoteric teachings.<sup>84</sup>

The ecclesiastical authorities, however, perceived Towiański and his followers in different ways.

In Paris, the Polish orthodox Catholics identified the Towianists as enemies of Catholicism. When *Biesiada* was published in *Dziennik Narodowy*, the preface stated: "The readers can easily understand that the supposed Master is the master of falsehood, and he wanders in the darkness outside Christianity."<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, unlike the Italian ecclesiastical authorities, the Resurrectionists never recognised the Towianists as a "sect". The Resurrectionist doubts concerning the identification of the Towianists as a true menace can be noted by the halted publication of *Biesiada* and Semenenko's decision to publish *Towiański et sa doctrine* eight years after the discovery of the Towianist notebook. Despite the Resurrectionist alignment with the religious and political orthodoxy of the Roman Catholic Church, they always tolerated, unpleasantly, the Towianist presence in Paris.

In Turin, both the *chargés d'affaires* and the Vicar General acknowledged the Christian virtues of the Towianists. Thanks to the depositions handed to the Turinese Curia, part of the Committee even sympathised with them. Nonetheless, the suspicions were real and Barone's words about Towiański's religious ideas were too heterodox to be accepted.

In Paris and in Turin, the ecclesiastical authorities lived in the same city and directly interacted with the Towianists. On the other hand, Coni and Rome presented a dichotomous scenario. Although the Bishop of Coni met the Towianists on a few occasions, both Manzini and de Ferrari based their judgement on secondary sources. Through sole doctrinal reasoning, the Bishopric of Coni and the Holy Office firmly condemned Towianism.

## 5.2 Dissimilar Reactions

Towianism presented divergent reactions from ecclesiastical authorities. In the cities that hosted a Towianist Circle, an asymmetry between the acknowledgement of the existence of the Towianist phenomenon and the consequent reaction by the ecclesiastical institutions developed.

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<sup>84</sup> Canonico, Tancredi: Scritto di Andrea Towianski a Pio IX, Roma: Tip. Artero and Comp. 1878. Canonico, Tancredi: La questione religiosa e l'Italia, Roma: Forzani e Comp. Tipografi del Senato 1879.

<sup>85</sup> *Biesiada*: Pismo Andrzeja Towiańskiego, in: *Dziennik Narodowy* 107, 15/04/1843.

The Archbishopric of Paris did not undertake any measure against the Towianists, nor did it demonstrate interest in it. When, in Autumn 1842, Kajsiewicz visited Affre to feign Mickiewicz's abjuration, he reported to Semenenko: "The Archbishop dislikes his [Mickiewicz's] exaltation. Nonetheless, he believes in his good faith. Therefore, he would not like to force him because he assures that he is, and he wants to be, a Catholic."<sup>86</sup>

In the Kingdom of Sardinia, already in 1854, a Catholic newspaper denounced the Towianist presence in the capital.<sup>87</sup> But, only in the first months of 1856, the Archbishopric of Turin established an inquest under orders of the Holy Office. On the other hand, the Bishop of Coni demonstrated resolution in swiftly acting against Towianism. Just two weeks after Bernardi's visit to Manzini, the inquest against Father Giacinto began. Manzini did not ask for any approval from the Holy Office, nor did he submit his sentence to it.

Notably, the reaction of Rome presented a disinterested approach. According to the provided documentation, it can be noticed that, over the years, Rome received several reports from the *chargés d'affaires*, the dossier of the Turinese inquest, and even a formal denouncement. Nonetheless, only the intervention of Pius IX compelled the Holy Office to undertake the formal examination of the Towianist writings.

Another dissimilar point related to the inquests concerned their procedure. In Turin, three theologians were summoned and the report was based on their hearings and on the Towianist depositions. In Coni, the Committee heard Father Giacinto, Father Luigi, and the friars of Santa Maria degli Angeli. The judgement was based on the hearings and meticulously supported by references to numerous ancient conciliar *decreta*, especially the Constantinople Council II that condemned Origenism. In Rome, de Ferrari based his condemnation on textual analysis and theological interpretation. The Holy Office did not request any deposition or hearing. Contrastingly, during the examination, de Ferrari complained that the information obtained by the Archbishopric of Turin's inquest were received *de relatu*, but the consultor founded his judgement on the available written testimonies on Towiański.

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<sup>86</sup> Smolikowski: *Historia*, Vol. 4, 99.

<sup>87</sup> Andrea Towianski, nuovo inviato di Dio, in: *L'Armonia* 140, 21/11/1854.

### 5.3 Doctrinal Perils

Many of the principles expressed by Towiański were attacked by ecclesiastical institutions because of their theological contents. The rumours on Towiański, however, contributed further to the judgement.

Certain points raised suspicions and anxiety among the theologians. In *Towiański et sa doctrine*, Semenenko emphasised that Towiański was denying almost every Catholic dogma and biblical narrative. The main sections of the book concerned the creation of the world, the mysteries of the Church, and the sacraments. The priest's work was so punctilious that he also commented and criticised what Towiański omitted to write in *Biesiada*. In addition, Towiański was not simply presented as a "heretic" in Semenenko's book. He was portrayed as a liar, a crook, and a mesmeriser able to subjugate his adepts' minds. Semenenko's work persuaded the ecclesiastical authorities of the theological dangers presented by Towiański and identified him as a *magus*. Indeed, the Archbishopric of Turin was worried about the promotion of Spiritist *séances* in Turin by the Towianists. Barone, however, specified that, although Towiański was in contact with the spirits, he firmly condemned Spiritist activities.<sup>88</sup>

Presumably, it was the very accusation of Mesmerism that led to the involvement of de Ferrari in the examination of the Towianist writings. The documentation preserved in the archive of the Holy Office does not give any explanation of his appointment. Nonetheless, one year before, de Ferrari was involved in the creation of a *decretum* which condemned Mesmerism.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, due to the rumours concerning Towiański's powers, it could be argued that de Ferrari was identified as the most competent consultor on the matter. During the examination, he emphasised

In a spiritualistic world, the excited mind of the Polish emigrant produces his turbid, nebulous ideas as he pleases. [ . . . ] Soon, the souls of his disciples are captured, persuading them of his higher mission. Such prestige is the work of Mesmerism and of the influence of spirits, and it can be seen exercised on his disciples. Although they are men of knowledge, piety, and letters, they become demented after they get acquainted with him.<sup>90</sup>

According to de Ferrari's words, it can be noticed that Mesmerism was perceived as a true danger since the practice was used to "capture" the soul and the mind of people, to turn them towards heterodox doctrines, and therefore, against the Church.

<sup>88</sup> AAT, 5, 30, §15. Towiański: Pisma, Vol. 2, 303–313, 503–507.

<sup>89</sup> ACDF, St.St. Q.6.a: "De magnetismo animale", Giacinto de Ferrari, Sul Magnetismo con minuta di enciclica per reprimere gli abusi. Relazione con sommario, Roma, Aprile 1856. Macchi transcribed and delivered the *decretum* to Semenenko. ACRR, 5063. Rome, 04/08/1856.

<sup>90</sup> ACDF, Doctrinalia 78 (1858), Fer. IV 21 Aprile 1858, 17.



Metempsychosis was surely the most controversial point promoted by Towiański. The Holy Office's inquest predominantly scrutinised this point, alongside the supposed self-proclamation of Towiański as a new Messiah. De Ferrari wrote:

[*Biesiada*] talks only about reliquaries: columns of spirits. Man is represented as the last reliquary, and the last point through which the spirits operate. [ . . . ] A transmigration of spirits seems to be indicated. [ . . . ] The inferior spirits alone dominate the earth. Nevertheless, the mission of Jesus Christ dissipated earthly evil somewhere. [ . . . ] Nevertheless, when the seventh envoy arrives, evil will perish. [ . . . ] It seems that he [Towiański] alludes to himself.<sup>91</sup>

On the other hand, Manzini treated metempsychosis and the temporality of Hell's punishment as a single entity, as the rediscovery of the "errors" promoted by the Origenists.<sup>92</sup> Notably, only the Bishopric of Coni's judgement focused on the issue of the revelation. Manzini condemned the possibility of a "revelation made by the Holy Spirit directly to the worshippers, and from the worshippers to the Church."<sup>93</sup> The Bishop based his statement on the condemnations presented in the Lateran Council V and Pontifical bulls against Peter Waldo (1140–1206), John Wyclif (1330–1384), and Jan Hus (1371–1415), stressing that laymen could not teach anything to the Church, and identifying Towianism as an attempt of Protestant or reformist propaganda.

## 5.4 Political Concerns

Although the reactions of the ecclesiastical authorities were based on religious reasons, they denoted relevant political concerns.

In Paris, the Resurrectionists were moved by the fear of the spreading of heterodox doctrines. Nevertheless, their efforts could be identified as the reaction to a competitor in the spiritual leadership of the Polish Emigration deluded by the Roman Church. The Resurrectionists were persistent in counteracting the Towianists although the indifference of the Archbishop, and Towiański's eviction from Rome can be seen as the coronation of their political recognition by the Holy See. Moreover, the real success of the Resurrectionists consisted in the promotion and diffusion of a narrative that condemned unilaterally and unequivocally Towiański. Notably, almost every French and Swiss clergyman enquired on Towiański suggested the consultation of *Towiański et sa doctrine*, and de Ferrari also identi-

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–14.

<sup>92</sup> La condanna del towianschismo, 5–9.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

fied Semenenko's publication as the only tool available to understand Towiański's doctrine.

Both in the Kingdom of Sardinia and in the State of the Church, the investigations against the Towianists were provoked by religious issues. The Towianist meetings raised the suspicions of the Piedmontese Curia, and the *chargé d'affaires* and the Pope were concerned about the diffusion of doctrines opposing Catholicism in Piedmont. But, alongside the doctrinal menace, the Italian clergy identified Towianism as the bearer of a political aspect. Indeed, Roberti was the first who was alarmed concerning the presence of members of the Giovine Italia in the Turin Circle. Moreover, in every communication of the Roman congregations, the Towianists were identified as a "political-religious sect". The recognition of the Towianists as a "sect" meant that they were perceived as one of the numerous freemasonic and revolutionary groups scattered across the peninsula, which, at the time, conspired against the Italian monarchies and ecclesiastical privileges.

The theologian Lorenzo Gastaldi (1815–1883), future Archbishop of Turin, identified the Towianists as a part of "the common enemy [that] is destroying every Catholic truth."<sup>94</sup> From the Church's perspective, Gastaldi's words denote a total congruence between every kind of secret, liberal, and revolutionary association and the Towianists. The major evidence of this congruence between anticlerical politics and heterodox doctrines was given by Albera. His deposition showed all the elements to recognise the Towianist community as an enemy to counter: a secret society established in different parts of Europe; ancient doctrines rejected by the Church; relationships with anticlerical politicians and Protestants. Indeed, Albera seemed to have confirmed Roberti's assumption about the introduction of "anti-Catholic" doctrines in Piedmont. When Ravina sent the inquest's report to Rome, he stressed: "The deposition of the priest Albera deserves special attention."<sup>95</sup> The various remarks given by the Piedmontese clergymen can be interpreted as the manifestation of a persecution complex that permeated the Church in the nineteenth century. Protestants, Freemasons, anticlerical politicians, revolutionaries, and promoters of heterodox doctrines were confounded and identified as the same entity that was menacing the Roman Catholic Church.

Although it was opposed and condemned, Towianism was a phenomenon not hostile to Catholicism. Due to the Towianist claims to be devout Catholics, de Ferrari reported that Towiański, "if he really lives as a Catholic,"<sup>96</sup> would benefit from the condemnation. As it can be seen by the reactions to other personalities

<sup>94</sup> Lettere sulla setta di Towianschi, in: L'Apologista 7, 17/02/1858.

<sup>95</sup> AAT, 4, 20. Turin, 05/05/1856.

<sup>96</sup> ACDF, Doctrinalia 78 (1858), Fer. IV 21 Aprile 1858, 21–22.

related to liberal Catholicism, such as Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–1852), Antonio Rosmini (1797–1855), Gioacchino Ventura (1792–1861), Charles de Montalembert (1810–1870), Henri Lacordaire (1802–1861), and Félicité de Lamennais (1782–1854),<sup>97</sup> the Holy Office conceived Towiański as another liberal Catholic reformer. Bovieri's attempt to obtain Towiański's abjuration demonstrates, indeed, that a submission to the Pontifical authority was perceived as more useful than an inexorable condemnation.

## 6 Conclusion: The Perimeter of Catholic Esotericism

The diffusion of Towianism in the Kingdom of Sardinia provoked three ecclesiastical inquests that involved the ecclesiastical authorities of four States and produced two *decreta* of condemnation and the insertion into the Index of Forbidden Books. Moreover, based on the Holy Office's *decretum*, two other Towianist books were condemned by the Congregation of the Index in 1863 and 1913.<sup>98</sup> Nonetheless, over the decades, Towianism never ceased to attract new disciples or sympathisers among clergymen and Catholic intellectuals. In the first years of the twentieth century, Towianism was identified as one of the precursors of Catholic Modernism by the reactionary faction of Pontifical politics<sup>99</sup> and, besides Vintras' doctrine, it was of one of the main inspirations of the Old Catholic Mariavite Church.<sup>100</sup>

Towianism was identified by the Roman Catholic Church as the synthesis of its antagonists. The Towianist preaching conveyed the reformist theology of liberal Catholicism and the paligenetic spirit of the national uprisings. The Church perceived Towiański's doctrine as another aspect of the jurisdictionalist policies of the modern State, of the anticlerical stances promoted by the revolutionaries, of the rising revindication of rights by confessions different from Catholicism, of

97 Malusa, Luciano: I processi a Rosmini e Gioberti tra Indice e Sant'Uffizio. Problemi e sospetti (1848–1854), in: *Verbotene Bücher. Zur Geschichte des Index im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hubert Wolf, Paderborn: Schöningh, 317–343. *Les Catholiques libéraux au XIXe siècle. Actes du Colloque international d'histoire religieuse de Grenoble des 30 septembre – 3 octobre 1971*, preface by Jacques Gadille, Grenoble: Presse Universitaire de Grenoble 1974.

98 Schwedt / Schepers / Burkard: *Römische Bücherverbote*, 299–300, 561–562.

99 Alcuni precursori del modernismo, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 2/1912. Intorno ai precursori del modernismo, in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 4/1912. Erba, Achille: Aspetti e problemi del cattolicesimo italiano nei primi decenni del '900, in: *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura religiosa*, 1/1969, 13–121.

100 Peterkiewicz, Jerzy: *The Third Adam*, London: Oxford University Press 1975.

the subversion of the throne and altar alliance. Moreover, the halo of mystery that surrounded the Towianist Circles favoured the suspicions against Towianism. The Turinese inquest's report stated: "Although they [the Towianists] claim the desire of explaining Towiański's doctrine and the Cause of God; instead, they jealously keep a veil on it [. . .] There is the willingness to absolutely disclose the Cause of Towiański by the exteriority of its works."<sup>101</sup> De Ferrari noticed too: "The error hides under the veil of apparent piety and virtue: this proves that the sect needs to stay in the darkness."<sup>102</sup> The inquisitorial documentation proved the impossibility of clearly identifying the Towianist phenomenon. Therefore, it contributed to the formulation of an array of speculations.

Towianism could not be received, nor understood, by the Church. The alleged supernatural activity of Towiański was not seen as a demonstration of his divine mandate, but as a nebulous occult and dangerous practice that could have encouraged a myriad "anti-Catholic" phenomena such as Protestantism, Jansenism, or revolution against the authority. Therefore, the ideas promoted by Towiański were perceived as a valid cause to proclaim anathema. The secrecy and the initiatory nature of Towiański's teachings were sufficient to indicate the existence of a theological controversy and, consequently, condemn it. For the Church, Towianism represented something unintelligible as it could have been the dissolution of the State of the Church and the limitation of the Pontifical authority.

Nonetheless, if the anxieties of the Roman Church can be framed within the political field, the formal reasons for the condemnation had a religious nature. Towiański's ideas of metempsychosis, temporality of Hell's punishment, besides the assertions of having relations with the spirits, the claimed reception of a revelation, and the coming of a new messianic epoch were identified as heterodox by the ecclesiastical institutions and, therefore, contrary to Catholicism. According to the Bishop of Coni, the very religious ideas of Towiański's could have paved the way to higher dangers. Manzini asserted:

Concerning their [Towiański's teachings] fruits; they produce a latent rebellion first, then a more or less explicit one against the authority, the faith, and the Church. Concerning the society; they are teachings of a stranger society, excluded from the true Catholic Church. It has leaders and masters without a mission, and it wants to impose itself on the Church.<sup>103</sup>

The Bishop of Coni stated a fundamental issue that concerned not only Towianism, but every instance that could be perceived as "esoteric" or "occult" within

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<sup>101</sup> AAT, 4, 19. Turin, 26/04/1856.

<sup>102</sup> ACDF, *Doctrinalia* 78 (1858), Fer. IV 21 Aprile 1858, 11.

<sup>103</sup> La condanna del towianschismo, 14.

the Roman Catholic Church. For Manzini, ideas not conforming to Papal and conciliar decrees resided outside the Church. Since they were not part of the Church, they were hostile to it and to society; therefore, they must be opposed and condemned.

Apart from its heterodox religious ideas, Towianism presented some features that could contribute to identify some traits of Catholic esotericism. The Towianists perceived themselves as a branch of the Church, they recognised the Roman Catholic Church as the only possible social and religious body, and they sought to perfection it. The most noteworthy feature was the belief that the Towianists identified their religious ideas as conforming to the Church. Indeed, to defend the idea of metempsychosis, Towiański usually recalled Jesus Christ's speech after the transfiguration at Mount Tabor or his words at Caesarea Philippi. During the Bishopric inquest, Father Giacinto asserted:

Concerning the two points of the eternity of Hell's punishment and the succession of lives, he [Towiański] does not destroy, nor attack, any law of the Church. [. . .] They are substantially different, and they do not have anything in common with Origen or the Origenists. No one is able to explain them except who received them by revelation, and not by doctrine. What is felt cannot be described.<sup>104</sup>

According to Father Giacinto's words, the Towianist doctrine itself was not just contrary to the Catholic confession, but its authenticity was confirmed by the fact that it was received by revelation. During the Archbishopric of Turin's inquest, Barone similarly expressed the primacy of feelings on theological reasoning:

It is not a question of doctrine, but to feel and to judge a genuinely Christian action bearing the power of pure Christian life [. . .]. It is totally necessary that someone gets involved in it at least for a while, to inspect it closer, and then, to feel it. Only through this process, someone can understand it.<sup>105</sup>

Nevertheless, the point of conflict was caused by the imposition of the Roman Church's authority. The Towianists always treated the *decreta* against them as issued by the Spirit of the Earth. Therefore, they were unacceptable. The relations between the Church and Towianism, or other instances of Catholic esotericism, could be summarised by Gastaldi's comment on the Bishopric of Coni's *decretum*: "No one can accept revelations if the Church does not approve them or avails their veneration."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> ASDC, 23. Coni, 14/03/1858.

<sup>105</sup> AAT, 5, 30, §20.

<sup>106</sup> Lettere sulla setta di Towianschi, in: L'Apologista 7, 17/02/1858.

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AAV: Vatican Apostolic Archive

ACDF: Archive of Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

ACRR: Archive of the Congregation of the Resurrection in Rome, I. Fundatores, Semenenko Piotr

ASDC: Historical Archive of the Diocese of Coni, Curia vescovile, Rapporti con enti, Santa Sede, Dottrina eretica di padre Giacinto da Gaiola

BRAB: Royal Library of Turin, Archivio Begey, F22 Carte Towianski, Archivio Cracovia II, Zbiór Aktów i Dokumentów

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