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**BODY AND SPIRIT IN THE WRITINGS
OF ANDRZEJ TOWIAŃSKI¹**

The figure of Andrzej Towiański usually raises extreme emotions: from admiration to condemnation. The high temperature of the dispute about the founder of Koło Sprawy Bożej (Circle of God's Cause) is certainly testimony to the special dimension of Towiański, as well as to the complex and mysterious phenomenon of his influence on his contemporaries. It is not surprising, therefore, that in Polish culture Towiański is perceived as a prominent and distinguished man—either a genius or a charlatan.

This interpretation has had many influential supporters up to now, both on the side of his admirers and that of his enemies. Among the latter was the philosopher Bronisław Trentowski,² who in a book entitled *Demonomania, czyli nauka nadziemskiej mądrości w najnowszej postaci (Demonomania, or the Science of Supernatural Wisdom in the Most Contemporary Shape)* (Poznań 1844), devoted to the intellectual and social dangers of irrationality and magical thinking, declared: “This treatise, although it does not at all ask questions about Towiański's personal teaching, as they are irrelevant, shows its hidden sources and reveals the depths of the soul

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² See Stefan Kawyn, *Antymickiewiczowska kampania „ojca Bronisława”*, in Idem, *Mickiewicz w oczach swoich współczesnych. Studia i szkice*, Warszawa 2001, 325-339.

of the prophet”³. Let us concentrate on the goal that the philosopher set himself: to reveal the hidden motives of Towiański’s views and their equally hidden consequences. And what about the rest? Nothing, after all it is “irrelevant”...

Trentowski made his points; it is difficult to deny it. Demonic figures responsible for social unrest (not to say mass hysteria) should be taken seriously enough. Trentowski’s diagnoses were confirmed by many facts in Towiański’s biography and by the behaviour of his supporters, by the programme and practices of the sect he founded, its customs, rituals, peculiarities and pathologies.⁴ Trentowski’s views are also supported by many striking and evocative interpretations of contemporary ‘Towianism’ researchers.

The image of Towiański as an unusual figure, charismatic or demonic, but always outstanding, seems to be the closest to our contemporary sensitivity. Let us note, however, that by assigning him extraordinary power, we not only forget a little how ordinary he was (and he was, undoubtedly, very ordinary), yet we also worship what is not rationalizable, but what confirms the strength of “magical” power. However, this image of Towiański is just one side of his personality. He was, after all, not only a charismatic “Master” of the Circle of God’s Cause, pretending to be a new messiah, not only an extraordinary religious leader, often seen as a man of a “fearsome sight” from the vision of the Bernardin Brother Piotr,⁵ who drew the attention of almost all the ‘Great Emigration’ in the 1840s. In the later, about a thirty-year-long phase of his activity he put on

³ Bronisław Trentowski, *Demonomania, czyli nauka nadziemskiej mądrości w najnowszej postaci*, Poznań 1844, 258.

⁴ These issues are fully covered by Alina Witkowska, *Towiańczycy*, (particularly the chapter “Sekta” [“The Sect”], 84-119). See also Dorota Siwicka, *Ton i bicz. Mickiewicz wśród towiańczyków*, Wrocław 1990; Krzysztof Rutkowski, *Zabijanie Mickiewicza w Kole Sprawy Bożej*, Gdańsk 1999.

⁵ Adam Mickiewicz, *Forefathers’ Eve*, translated by Charles S. Kraszewski, Glagoslav Publications, London 2016, 219.

a different image—that of a meek wise man and a benign old man, moved by the fate of his co-religionists.⁶

This profound change is very well shown in his *Pisma* (*Writings*), published posthumously in three substantial volumes in 1882. Apart from very few exceptions, they did not contain new, fiery political or religious manifestos. These three volumes included mostly moral instructions which he gave in private conversations or during religious meetings. Towiański's *Writings* from Turin (written down and prepared by his supporters) were designed in such a way that the teaching included there "would provide answers to all situations in the life of any man".⁷ Even at first sight, the collection does not seem to be anything special in its design and message. It looks more like a practical, orthodox guidebook of a Christian spiritual life, so popular in the nineteenth century (and not only then). This observation, however, raises a series of new questions—not only about Towiański's real identity, but also about the kind of context in which his ideas should be placed.

It is not my goal to return to the debate about the truth behind Towiański's images. I am interested in other questions: Can we see ideas included in Towiański's *Writings* as a representation of the views of "one of the most influential members of the Polish intelligentsia in nineteenth-century"? Would this interpretation explain a specific symbiosis of Towiański as a genius and ordinary man? Would it show the relationship between Towiański and nineteenth century thinking about man and the world? Perhaps this interpretation would explain to some extent the influence he had on people around him. Perhaps this influence would be better understood.

In this study, I will attempt to look at Towiański's views from this perspective. I will be most interested in the understanding of the both spiritual and bodily nature of man as presented in his Turin *Writings*. The choice of this particular topic is not accidental—the problem

⁶ Alina Witkowska writes about various 'faces' of Towiański in op. cit., 120-150.

⁷ Stanisław Szpotański, *Andrzej Towiański. Jego życie i nauka*, Warszawa 1938, 261.

of the relationship between the body and the spirit, “the way of picturing what connects the body and the spirit”⁸ seem to be the key issues of nineteenth-century anthropology.⁹ Andrzej Towiański’s views have a lot in common with this thinking—many of the themes are in line with nineteenth-century anthropology, but at the same time many of them are unique and original. We should also remember that Towiański’s thinking about man was shaped by the Christian tradition, and therefore, it may become testimony to another important tendency—what I mean is the fact “of the strong influence of the body on the imagery of the devout Christians of this period”¹⁰ (obviously, it should be also remembered that in the case of Towiański, it is a figure of a “new” Christian, freed from the rigours of orthodox doctrines and institutional conditioning).

“Man is the spirit, which through the will of God was imprisoned in the body, in the matter that is in earth, so that he would overcome adversities which limit him and live free on earth, so that the spirit, which is higher, lived in the lower [form] in its freedom, according to its higher law” (Tow, I 53).¹¹ The passage from Towiański is a very good summary of his views on the spiritual and material nature of man and on the relationship between the spirit and the body in human life.¹² Just

⁸ *Historia ciała*, vol. 2: *Od Rewolucji do I wojny światowej*, ed. by Alain Corbin, trans. by Krystyna Belaïd and Tomasz Stróżyński, Gdańsk 2013, 56.

⁹ The themes of the body and corporeality have become very popular in the contemporary humanities. On the relation between the spiritual and bodily nature of man, see, for example Mariusz Chołody, *Ciało – dusza – duch. Dyskurs cielesny w romantyzmie polskim (fragmenty)*, Poznań 2011; *Historia ciała*, vol. 2: *Od Rewolucji do I wojny światowej*, op. cit., many entries on these issues will be included on this website: *Sensualność w kulturze polskiej* (<http://sensualnosc.ibl.waw.pl>).

¹⁰ *Historia ciała*, vol. 2, 70.

¹¹ Unless there is a different reference, all quotations from: Andrzej Towiański, *Pisma*, vol. I-III.

¹² The anthropology of Andrzej Towiański is an issue which has been researched a few times before. Practically all the key publications about Towiański have dealt with this issue to some extent. In this paper, I am referring to the following works: Stanisław Szpotański, op. cit.; Stanisław Pigoń, *Wstęp*, in Andrzej Towiański, *Wybór pism i nauk*, ed. by Stanisław Pigoń, Wrocław 2004; Adam Sikora, *Towiański*

as many other contemporary writers and thinkers, Towiański looked at human nature in dualistic categories¹³ as a creation both spiritual and bodily. He was also convinced about the absolute subordination of the material world to spiritual reality, which means the primacy of the soul over the body. At the same time, he stressed the key role which the body should play in the human achievement of Christian perfection, or (in his view) the fullness of personality:

Man's soul works hard to move out, to free itself from the lowness in which it is placed, because it feels that such being is not natural, that this world is not its homeland, and this hard work of the spirit to free itself from the body, to triumph over the body, and over other obstacles withholding the spirit, this work uplifts the spirit, and at the same time it uplifts the body and as a result, the body comes closer to the spirit, which is the main goal of a Christian. In this way, the spirit and the body help each other, and such help is common in the operation of God's grandeur, where, according to the way ordained at the top, each creature moves itself upwards only as far as it moves upward another creature connected with it. (Tow I, 53)

The model of the relationship between material and spiritual elements, the body and the spirit, was the result of Towiański's theological and cosmological convictions.¹⁴ They were based, to a certain extent, on the medieval conceptions of a hierarchical and continuous structure of the cosmos, although they also contained elements which cannot be found in the Christian tradition (such as reincarnation, which was, however, marginalized in Towiański's *Writings*). According to these convictions, the spiritual element was the fundamental form of the world's being, a specific "foundation

i rozterki romantyzmu, Warszawa 1984; Alina Witkowska, op. cit., 19-57; Dorota Siwicka, op. cit.; Stanisław Pieróg, *Towianizm*, w: *Słownik literatury polskiej XIX wieku*, ed. by Józef Bachórz i Alina Kowalczykowa, Wrocław 2009, 947; Mariusz Chołody, op. cit. (particularly the chapter "Ciało i «Sprawa Boża»", 186-212).

¹³ See *Historia ciała*, v .2, 38.

¹⁴ "Towiański had ambitions of a holistic explanation of being". Alina Witkowska, op. cit., 58.

of being”¹⁵ and it had an impact on the material sphere of reality (including man). According to Towiański, God, as the most perfect spiritual Being, is at the top of the cosmic architecture of the Universe, in the sphere beyond the material and it is from this place that He wields power over all creatures. Below there exists a sphere inhabited by other beings without bodies, which—depending on the type and degree of perfection—are divided into light and dark columns. Columns of light spirits are lighter and hover higher. Because of their purity, they are closer to God. On the other hand, columns of dark spirits are heavier and hovered lower above the earth, moving away from God as a result of their immersion in sins. The earth, understood as a material space and the place of man’s actions, is at the feet of this rich and varied universe of spirits. The earth is subjected to them, and remained a specific battleground of the eternal war between good and evil, fought by light and dark spirits. According to Towiański, these spaces are not hermetically separated; on the contrary, they form one whole, and influence one another in a constant and significant way. Of particular importance for human life is the influence of the columns of spirits on the moral nature of individual people: light spirits are to enable contact with God and help man on his way to perfection; dark spirits are to obstruct the way to salvation and move man away from God. It is important because, according to Towiański, moving towards perfection could be achieved only within bodies, and that is why all spirits crave to enter human bodies and “attack men to make them their tools”.¹⁶

However, the cosmological visions of Towiański and his theological doctrine were not fully coherent, and they did not form the key constituent of his teaching. The founder of the Circle of God’s Cause focused on prescriptions for the spiritual change of the world and of its moral amendment. He saw the path of spiritual perfection as the basic ethical duty, which each man must fulfil consistently in his everyday life, regardless of whether he has been destined for small

¹⁵ Stanisław Pieróg, *op. cit.*, 947.

¹⁶ Stanisław Pigoń, *op. cit.*, xviii.

or great things (he, by the way, believed that "there are no small things"; Tow I, 373). "The first duty of man is to work hard, offer oneself to God, to become free and move upwards" (Tow I, 53). The goal of this spiritual effort was to achieve a harmonious personality, and the full integration of spiritual and bodily dimensions,¹⁷ and eventually salvation. That is why Towiański's doctrine is referred to a "perfectionist moral doctrine".¹⁸

At the top of this ethics there is, therefore, man: absolute, perfect in body and soul, managing himself so well as a fencer does with his skewer, always active, with a ceaseless effort transforming himself onto a higher shape of moral perfection, connected with other people through ties of love and a sense of apostolic responsibility, while through his earnest spirit connected with supernatural, irrational element of being, with God, and from thence receiving help and guidance.¹⁹

Towiański's moral teaching (rooted in the Christian tradition, but adopting ideas from elsewhere, as in the case of reincarnation) very clearly showed his attitude on the role of the body and the spirit in human life. The main principle was the total subjection of the body to the spirit, freeing the spirit from the influence of dark spirits and opening it to light spirits and to the will of God. Towiański's ideas were "radically anti-rationalist".²⁰ The goal of man is not to "increase knowledge" but to "fulfil God's vocation" (Tow II, 224). Man's intellect did not have much to say (Towiański called it an "earthly organ" and identified it with the head), unlike feelings, and the will to behave according to moral laws, guided by the heart and the spirit (which he, in turn, called "Christian organs" and considered to be "a source of love, sensation and internal life"; Tow II, 222). The most important thing, however, was Grace, coming from above, the source of which

¹⁷ Dorota Siwicka, *op. cit.*, 5-41.

¹⁸ Stanisław Pieróg, *op. cit.*, 948

¹⁹ Stanisław Pigoń, *op. cit.*, xxx.

²⁰ Stanisław Pieróg, *op. cit.*, 947.

was God himself. Man, defined by Towiański as the “spirit buried in the body” (Tow I, 55) or “the spirit dressed in the body” (Tow II, 247), should strive for perfection of his physical part, and break his sinful habits through inner effort, which he called “the movement of the spirit”, “the pressure of the spirit on the body”.²¹ This was the only way to truly free man:

To free the spirit means to move the spirit away from the body and uplift it over the body; it depends on intentions, mode and force if this freeing is real and true, shown to man by God’s word and supported by God’s Grace, or false, against the law of Christ, supported by the evil, by desires, which attempt to take man off the Christian path, and when he is strayed, take power over him. (Tow I, 54)

Such a freeing, however, happened under the constant pressure from the light and dark columns of spirits, and therefore, it was being forged during the constant struggle between good and evil (which testifies to the “specific Manicheism” of Towiański’s teaching²²), in the constant effort to transform consciousness, and attempt to rule over the body and change the surrounding world. In this context, Towiański had the following piece of advice: one should be very careful if this spiritual effort is happening in the surrounding of light spirits and with their help; in other words, it should be happening in the Christian ‘tone’—otherwise it would be false and lead man astray.

So the key thing is in what circumstances the spirit is being freed and in which direction it is freed: towards heaven, towards earth, towards Mammon or towards hell, and I am using the word “hell” because the extent of evil which can be done then is enormous. (Tow I, 55).

Towiański’s doctrine—at first sight one-sidedly spiritualist—in reality had a more complex character. After all, God’s love, which was the source of creation, obliged man, to be reciprocal: it should ignite love towards all creatures: “A natural consequence of God’s

²¹ Stanisław Pigoń, *op. cit.*, XXXII.

²² Stanisław Pieróg, *op. cit.*, 947.

love is the love of anything that is God's part, all the higher things, all the values of Christianity which are revealed here on earth" (Tow I, 67). The fact that the process of perfecting the human spirit can be achieved only in the body meant that the body was given great dignity: "Earth can only receive the Christian, the spiritual with the earth, with the appropriate embodiment" (Tow II, 208).²³ Therefore, we cannot forget "how great a gift of God's is the organization, that is the body, which is given only to fulfil God's Will, God's Word, for the Christian progress of man" and also "how sad are, not only in this life, but also in man's eternal future, the consequences of wasting a God's gift by destroying the body in any possible way, how painful it is for the spirit to do without the body what he was told to do in the body" (Tow I, 73). In this way, Towiański's thinking is a "vindication of the body".²⁴

The body, however, if it is to be of good service to man, not only has to be defeated and submitted to the will of the spirit. It should also be appreciated; it must be seen as a means to perfect the personality, and the gateway to a higher reality. Towiański believed that each man should perfect himself according to these principles—principles not always coherent and perhaps even contradictory. The duality of his moral rules, which has been shown earlier, has caused an unusual tension within his ethical concepts.

The power over the body can be achieved through proper organization of spiritual matters. Moreover, the weakness of the body does not disable great spiritual deeds. Perfection of the spirit, the "pressure" of the spirit on the body, means the necessity to accept "the triple Christian sacrifice", which results in the unity of the spirit, the body and the action:

Christ, showing the fullness of God's thoughts to man, taught with His words and with His example how to free and uplift the spirit

²³ "The spirit without the body or the shape wastes, in a way, its time, with no merit in God's eyes. Man can help himself only on the earth, in real shape, even lower than the human body, even if he were a protozoan, a stone, or an animal". Alina Witkowska, *op. cit.*, 19.

²⁴ Adam Sikora, *op. cit.*, 70-81.

by the force of sacrifice, how to triumph and uplift the body by connecting the uplifted spirit with the body, and how, finally, in this joint uplifting of the spirit and the body, live spiritually in the body, towards the Christian goal, so that the spirit, the soul and life, all man's actions, all his being, were uplifted to height, defined by God's Word, and which Christ, the Embodied Word, showed to man. This naturally leads to the following: the Christian sacrifice is of a triple nature, that is this work, this awakening, this effort should be made first in the spirit, then in the body, and finally in the whole life, in all matters of man. (Tow I, 56)

The first type of "Christian sacrifice" was, therefore, to take place in the spirit: it involved contemplation of the truths of the faith, ardent prayer, mental considerations of oneself, and the strong resolution to change one's life. The second type of "Christian sacrifice" involved taking control over the body, curbing its lawless habits, subjecting it to the will of the spirit:

[...] enter your spirit into the body, permeate, enliven the body with this tone, these feelings, this life, which you have awakened in your spirit, and then in this union, in this concord of the spirit and the body, and while concentrating on the spirit, go to your life, to your work, to your duties, press with your spirit on your body, because this is what life is about. (Tow I, 58)

Towiański was not satisfied, however, with the demands for spiritual contemplation (the domain of the "sacrifice of the spirit"), nor demands for physical discipline (the domain of the "sacrifice of the body"). He demanded the sacrifice for others, the involvement in the spiritual and material transformation of the world, the public confirmation of the rules of the Christian life in everyday life. That was the idea of the third form of "Christian sacrifice"—the "sacrifice of actions".

The founder of the Circle of God's Cause was against undertaking action for action's sake. He argued that each "action" must be submitted to the individual predilections of each man, his talents and his calling, but first of all, it must be in concord with God's will. The person,

shaped in this way, fulfilling the "triple Christian sacrifice" in life, was compared by Towiański to a Napoleonic grenadier, whose "body is active, soaked in the spirit, so that each muscle is tense, and there is action in this, because there is power and readiness for action" (Tow II, 232-233). Just as this Napoleonic soldier who "burnt in the spirit, perspired in the body and held all the action within himself" (Tow II, 232-233), a true Christian should be ready to support his convictions with action and thus fulfil his vocation.

The sense of suffering was an important part of Towiański's ethical system. According to Towiański, suffering was an incentive for man to embark on the path to moral perfection, because it was a form of God's reaction to the "animalisation" of the human spirit. It was God's answer to man's abandonment of the duty of spiritual work. Therefore, Towiański consistently saw suffering as an experience in concord with God's plan, and referred to it as "God's pressure":

When the body lowers itself, and becomes like an animal to the degree that the spirit cannot possibly succeed and control its body, God, who does not stop making sure that His Will, His Word is being fulfilled by man, allows for such a man to be touched by force, and is forced as in slavery, hard labour, illnesses etc. to have the body tested, and then it can be submitted to the spirit, and to the Lord. How much misery, suffering and pain man must experience because of this! Man blames it all on the earthly causes which he sees, and is not able to recognize the true cause. How many other effects not following God's Word can have!—it can also take the form of splitting sacrifices; fulfilling one part and disregarding the rest. (Tow I, 60)

According to Towiański, suffering almost always had a supernatural source. It was not exclusively the case of an unfortunate accident or coincidence. It was more like a warning, the mobilisation to start with the spiritual work. It was tangible proof of man's disability and sinfulness—because "it is a man who wants to be a value in himself;

a sick man who turns out to be disabled, also morally, and therefore, in a way, stigmatized”.²⁵ Towiański taught his son in the following way:

If you, rejecting the sacrifice explained today to you, started having fun, and therefore lowered yourself, made your body animal-like, maybe God would throw pain upon you to move your body, for example through illness, some trouble. The evil would hide away from you its true nature, would suggest to you that your illness is only the result of catching a cold or something else, that your problem comes from a visible, earthly cause, from some meagre undoing, your lack of caution, or, finally, from people’s injustice. (Tow I, 61)

Towiański perceived suffering not only as a dramatic life experience and a painful test for the body. He saw in it the chance for enlivening spiritual life and restoring authentic contact with God. He was convinced that God sends a man only suffering which is adequate to his abilities and not greater than he can bear. “Each man, according to his records—he argued—has in store an appropriate burden of reversals coming from the body, the world and Satan”. “A strong body” means “a greater burden put on the spirit”, while “a light body, subtle and even unhealthy” is capable of carrying “a lighter burden” (Tow I, 137). It is according to this rule that God distributes “pressures” to his people.

By means of these assumptions Towiański explained the role of suffering in the world. For example, in this way he spoke to one of his “brothers” about the loss of his sight. According to him, blindness can be

[...] happiness for the spirit, because in this adversity some of the obstacles which make it more difficult to find salvation are removed from man. The loss of sight separates man from the earth and from Mammon, restricts and limits his earthly life and forces him to turn his spirit towards heaven, forces him to inner and Christian life. (Tow II, 501)

²⁵ Alina Witkowska, op. cit., 49.

In a similar way Towiański consoled parents in mourning after the loss of their child. He advised them to see "God's special care" in this traumatic experience, To see God's concern for the parents to "stand in the full Christian character". While preaching to grief-stricken parents, he raised peculiar speculations: "Maybe this child—which can only be seen by God himself—was an obstacle for you to achieve this [...]" (Tow II, 297). In another part of his *Pisma*, he argued:

In this way, God takes away from man all the land in which he drowns his spirit: he takes away health, wealth, family, earthly homeland, so that man's spirit, stripped from the earth, starts missing heaven and his Christian homeland here on earth; God takes away things which stopped man from progress, to wake him up to further, constant progress (Tow II, 171).

Towiański strongly warned against indifference towards suffering and argued for mercy to war prisoners as well as to the wounded. Moreover, he was not indifferent to animals' suffering. He ordered one of his disciples to drop his key duties, arouse in himself an act of compassion and an act of "spirit's movement" if he meets on his way "a lean, gaunt horse which in his misery turns to him his eyes full of grief" (Tow II, 297). Towiański treated rejection of suffering as a misuse of the Christian calling:

As a bird, which once it stops working with its wings, falls down from height onto the earth, a Christian, who rejects the cross, sacrifice, inner work, falls down from Christ's Church, from this height onto the opposite church, he breaks his communion with Christ and joins the evil which reigns in this opposite church. (Tow II, 191)

His conviction about the superiority of the spirit over the body was also applied to his medical advice. Although he did not reject medicine completely, he felt "the highest contempt" for doctors.²⁶ This was caused by his belief that illnesses have their roots mostly in

²⁶ Ibid., 49. She calls Towiański's views "spiritual medicine" (op. cit., 45-47).

the spirit, and, therefore, it is there that the remedy is to be looked for. The spiritual values of Christianity should become a “more and more central medicine for the spirit” (Tow II, 497). In this matter he preached even to doctors.

According to Towiański, performing the “triple sacrifice” and bearing “God’s pressures” had to coincide with deep respect for the physical organization of man and man’s needs. The key message of his teaching was not the rejection, mortification or destruction of the body, but its transformation, the goal of which was freeing it from the habits of the world, strengthening it in the struggle with evil desires. Therefore, in his teaching we have so many reflections about the value of rest and orders to provide adequately for the body and its needs. “The true order of Christ the Lord—he argued—does not reject life, liveliness, mirth” (Tow I, 120). Therefore, it is “necessary to take a rest from time to time; take a break from the efforts of the spirit; to give yourself some rest. In order to achieve this, he advised being on your own, particularly close to nature (away from busy cities and towns, from crowds of people, and particularly away from parlours, which were to him a model example of moral corruption). He emphasised the value of a “Christian conversation”, in which important issues of faith and morality were discussed for the spiritual development of man—for him this was an antidote to the shallowness of conversations in parlours. He also advised long walks and joyful fun, he suggested frequent baths, and was not against strengthening the body with a shot of vodka. He was an enthusiast of theatrical performances and concerts (he even claimed that theatre is “often a temple of truth and feelings” Tow I, 120).

Some of Towiański’s opponents were outraged by his advice. One of them, Stefan Witwicki, “noted with indignation that after meetings at which spiritual issues were discussed Towiański was quite often in a hurry ‘to get to an opera or a ballet, as a refresher—as he would say—after the hard work of the spirit’”.²⁷ Witwicki’s indignation was not well founded, though, because Towiański declared on many

²⁷ Stanisław Pigoń, *op. cit.*, xxx.

occasion that even during rest "you have to keep a constant watch over yourself" and permanently arouse in yourself "emotions, love, sacrifice" in order to "put yourself on the Christian path" (Tow I, 114). Towiański's support of decent entertainment was the result of the fact that he saw in it a form of a sublime mystery, one more chance to come into contact with God. Zygmunt Krasiński, who participated in one of such meetings with Towiański, reported: "he invited us to dance a *polonaise*, and he himself danced in the first pair, and he did it all not in an ordinary human fashion, but in each of his steps and movements there was something heavenly, something superhuman, such solemnity, such dignity, such decency, such living Christianity".²⁸

In his teaching, Towiański often dealt with the ethics of love and married life. He emphasised here that the key motive of the emotional relationship between man and woman should be the "affection of spirits", not physical drives. Love should happen "in purity, freed from the body". Evil is the relationship which lives only on the "affection of the body", "similarity of magnetisms"—because it imprisons people in the "magnetic-nervous net", "often connects with each other with this lowly bond people whose spirits are contradictory in nature" (Tow II, 314, 387) and destroys the true union of the spirit, and even leads to idolatry (that is how Towiański perceived the idealization of women, so frequent in the Romantic period). Towiański condemned, therefore, all "excess"; the vain wish to be liked, wearing stunning clothes, showing off "in society". Instead of this he advised lovers to form a "Christian friendship" and create "the communion of spirits", "the communion of Christian brotherhood" (Tow II, 323, 332), and it was the only type of relationship, based on spiritual grounds and preserving people's autonomy, that he regarded as decent. It was not by accident that he used the word "brotherhood" in this context (he

²⁸ Quoted in Stanisław Pigoń, *Adoracja Towiańskiego*, in Idem, *Wśród twórców. Studia i szkice z dziejów literatury i oświaty*, Kraków 1947, 122-123.

also referred to women as “brothers”!)—he simply “regarded sex as an issue much below the spirit”:²⁹

Because the communion of spirits is the key thing and the basis for the sacrament of marriage, and two spirits can only be united so much in the law of spirits if each of them lives his or her own life, free, autonomous—it is to grasp how perverse, or even against God’s thinking, is the deathly marriage union, the servile union of two spirits attracted by the magnetic power alone, by the drive of one body towards another body, which weakens, puts to sleep, and finally kills life in both spirits [...]. (Tow II, 362).

In another passage, he said:

The Christian communion of souls, without any external interference, is an ideal of man’s relationship with woman; this is the basis for the Christian brotherhood and the foundation of the sacrament of marriage, and apart from it, anything else in this field is a sin, venial or mortal, lesser or deadly, depending on if it comes from the body or from the soul, but also depending on the damage done to a fellow man and also to the sinner himself. (Tow II, 398).

Towiański’s moral regulations contain many condemnations of all physical intercourses which are not supported by the spiritual union—both in marriage and outside of it. He was against flirting (which he called “magnetizing with women”) and all forms of bodily lust. He argued that even in marriage fulfilling the physical needs of the body is rarely performed in a decent way, because usually it is connected with “doing it with your spirit”—while it should be “done in the decent way, not thinking of it either before or after, and not involving your spirit in it” (Tow II, 399). He radically condemned any intimate outside marriage relationship between man and woman—he regarded them as one of the most cardinal sins, which ruins the spiritual life of man and is “the prostitution of the spirit itself”, as it takes two people off the road of virtue. According to Towiański, such voluntary outside

²⁹ Stanisław Szpotański, *op. cit.*, 170.

relationships were even worse than men's use of prostitutes – which (in his opinion) was performed “without the participation of the spirit”, “under the pressure of bodily drives” (Tow II, 398, 400). It should be clearly stated that Towiański considered all such deeds serious violation of God's commandments and referred to them “as the most abhorrent for a true Christian” (Tow II, 398).

Towiański always regarded sins of the spirit as more dangerous than sins of the body. He considered “the magnetic drive coming from the body and being a natural need of man” (Tow II, 389-390) as belonging to the physical side of man. He, therefore, warned that we should consider “sins coming from man himself, from the body, the blood, the bile as less important” (Tow II, 210). At the same time, he claimed that the “prostitution of the spirit”, in the form of “communing and tying thoughtlessly with any spirit flying through our insides”—in other words in the form of irresponsible surrender to different spiritual temptations—brings a life of misery to the soul and is much more treacherous for man than “prostitution of the body” (Tow I, 116).

Towiański also spoke and wrote a lot about child's upbringing. He supported pedagogical concepts (for example, Frederick Froeb's novel system of kindergarten care) which emphasised the importance of the child's physical development. He even argued that there are children for whom “bodily labours” and all physical work were not only beneficial for their personal development, but also “may become a condition for salvation” (Tow II, 441). He also highlighted, however, that children should always be given an incentive to climb onto a higher level of spiritual development, and, therefore, their upbringing should never be restricted to “earthly” causes only.

What in the civilized world is commonly referred to as ‘good education’, in reality is bad education, because in it there is no place for God and for the spirit of a child, but the main goal there is the earth itself and the earthly future of a child; and as a result, it is only earthly powers and abilities, the body, the mind, talents which are developed in a child, while the spirit is neglected—this type of education often develops and arouses, particularly in girls,

evil inclinations and drives such as inner hardness, coldness, pride, flirtation, etc., and what matters only is that sins should not be too explicit, but covered artificially in Christian forms and attractive aspects of civilization. All things which really matter for the soul are disregarded: simplicity, humility, frankness, compassion, inner life [...] (Tow II, 439-440).

Although Towiański's teachings were mostly moral in nature and put forward general rules of behaviour, they contained quite a few sensual metaphors, picturesque similes and juicy phrases. Towiański frequently and willingly illustrated his thoughts in such a way. He referred to meetings and conversations of religious nature as a "spiritual banquet" (Tow II, 203). He compared a good Christian, skilfully drawing on different spiritual sources, to a bee "which can draw sweetness out of all flowers" (Tow II, 201). He approved of the reaction of one of his co-brothers (Antoni Gorecki), who in the company of other emigrants protested against discussing God "with a glass" in hand, and ordered them "first to kneel and pray [...] and only then to speak about God's matters" (Tow II, 170). In order to underline the great capabilities of man, he would ask his interlocutor if he could write with his foot, and then answered: "[...] no, because you have never tried it, because you haven't trained your foot. Try training it for at least an hour a day and you will see that in a year you will be able to write with your foot" (Tow I, 77). He illustrated the obligation of mutual support on the path to perfection and salvation as the order to give each other a hand, but he also added that "in God's Cause there is no support of man, otherwise it would not be God's Cause". Here "no one will lead anyone by the hand", "everyone is free and stands on his own two feet" (Tow II, 228). To emphasise the necessity of rest, he used a colourful argument: "A bow cannot stay drawn all the time, or it will break" (Tow, II, 252). He compared following bad examples to drinking water "muddled by thunderstorms and poisoned with sewage" (Tow II, 200), and the moral degradation of man to mud: "In order to help a fellow human, we should from time to time lower ourselves and get down in the mud in which he lives, so that later, having found a clean part

in him, get him, little by little, out of the mud" (Tow II, 247). He frequently used biblical stylistics: he demanded offering one's cheek (Tow II, 183), compared Christ to a sower (Tow II, 211), warned against scattering the seeds of God's words onto the barren, "heavy and weedy soils of human souls" (Tow, II, 211), and compared worldly temptations to Mammon (Tow II, 449).

It can be assumed that many of these maxims, lessons and warnings would have remained totally ineffective if it had not been for particular qualities of the "Master". According to witnesses to his life, "goodness was the inborn foundation of his character, which can be testified by people's sturdy attachment to him, particularly of those people who lived and worked with him for many years".³⁰ Many of his contemporaries had a similar opinion about his moral stance. His supporters were particularly convinced about it:

They saw in him a man transformed, formed in a strong, persistent and harmonious way onto some new, higher moral order, which was totally subordinate to the spirit. In the eyes of his brothers, the Master was an integral Christian, a man who consistently and fully brought into effect the truth of God and the teaching of Christ, who did not allow for discord between the spirit and the body. He kept all his life, his every move, in a constant, steady religious tone, and he coped with temptations, if he had had any, silently and triumphantly. There was no split in him, no scrabbling of a slave, cries of powerlessness in the shackles of sin, but a granite block of a spiritual man, God's servant.³¹

Many of his enthusiasts (including Adam Mickiewicz) believed that he had a supernatural power to heal and work miracles.³² Towiański himself (as Aleksander Chodźko recalled) claimed that he had "moments of a spiritual high so tremendous that he could stop a steam-boat sailing on a sea with one look".³³

³⁰ Stanisław Szpotański, *op. cit.*, 288.

³¹ Stanisław Pigoń, *Adoracja Towiańskiego*, 120-121.

³² *Ibid.*, 90-91.

³³ *Ibid.*, 118.

It should be remembered that from his early years (which he spent in Lithuania), Towiański paid attention not only to his spiritual development. He also worked on his physical strength. He trained himself to get used to “long walks regardless of the weather, to limiting his needs, and to a military sort of life: alert, mobile”.³⁴ However, his life was not ascetic. He was committed to “the concept of the world as a place of human activity and moral obligation”³⁵ and continued with long walks for the whole of his life. He was fascinated by theatre, opera and ballet. He enjoyed fun: “We saw and knew him eating, drinking, even dancing”—reminisced Zygmunt Krasiński.³⁶ Adam Mickiewicz called him a “perfect man”. While the Reverend Edward Duński called him “the strictest of monks [...] living with a family and in the world”.³⁷

Towiański was deeply convinced that “[...] man has to use the earth and Mammon, as if that was not the case, that is not resting in it with his spirit, not giving his heart to it” (Tow II, 449). His ideal of life could be summarized in this commandment: “Abandon the earth and rest in heaven” (Tow II, 327). In this way, Towiański seemed to be a representative of 19th-century anthropology, based on the dualist concept of man. It seems, however, that his concepts can also be interpreted as attempts at moving beyond this dualism and showing man’s nature in holistic categories, harmoniously unifying the body and the soul in one being.

³⁴ Stanisław Szpotański, *op. cit.*, 115.

³⁵ Adam Sikora, *op. cit.*, 75.

³⁶ Quoted in S. Pigoń, *op. cit.*, 122.

³⁷ Quoted in Alina Witkowska, *op. cit.*, 29.