

MARCIN IWANICKI

JOHANN CRELL ON RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND SALVATION*

The Reformation contributed to the development of religious tolerance in both its political and moral-religious aspects. First, by breaking up the unity of Western Christianity, it gave tolerance a political dimension. In a situation of religious discord, tolerance helped maintain peace between countries with different religions or denominations, as well as within individual states, which were increasingly diversified in terms of denominations and religions. As regards religion, initially tolerance so understood was seen as a necessary evil and a temporary compromise rather than a permanent component of the legal and political order. Over time, however, we observe the development of a more positive understanding of tolerance as a particular good. Its practice begins to be seen as a virtue or even a religious duty.

Second, the Reformation led to changes in religious consciousness that fostered a positive understanding of tolerance. Because of the profusion of denominations—often coexisting within a single state—each of which laid claim to be unique and to possess absolute truth, reflective some open-minded people began to question the status of their own religious views. There was a growing sense that human reason was prone to error and that the final decision in religious matters should be left to the individual conscience and not issued by external authorities, who often resorted to secular coercive measures. Under such circumstances the idea that access to truth in religion

MARCIN IWANICKI, PhD, Assistant Professor at the Department of the History of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin; correspondence address: Al. Raławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Poland; e-mail: marcin.iwanicki@kul.pl; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3904-0291>.

* This work was supported by a grant from the Ministry of Education and Science programme “Science for Society”, project no. NdS/536461/2021.

is gradual and that the claim to absolute truth may be premature could at last emerge.¹

The legacy of the Reformation includes two further threads of thought that will play a role in our considerations: (a) doctrinal minimalism, that is a considerable limitation of the set of truths necessary to salvation, and (b) practicalism, that is, the recognition of the primacy of practice over theory, and of good over truth. According to practicalism, these are not rites or sacraments, or pious adherence to any relevant dogmas that constitute the core of religion but a way of life consistent with natural ethics.²

Against the background of the above outlined changes, in the heterodox circles of the seventeenth-century Europe the idea of universal tolerance—tolerance applying to all faiths and religions—began to take shape. The Polish Socinians were the leading defenders of universal tolerance, doctrinal minimalism, and practicalism. The Socinian position on the issue of tolerance was exceptional in those times—Catholics, Calvinists, and Lutherans treated tolerance mostly as a necessary evil, enforced under certain circumstances by the balance of political forces. Only with time would the ideas of the Socinians begin to influence the mindset of the main Christian denominations. Johann Crell's short work, *Vindication of Liberty of Religion*, would contribute to this shift in no small way.

The systematic and comprehensive defense of religious tolerance to be found on the pages of Crell's treatise is ahead of its time, and precedes the classic works written by John Locke and Pierre Bayle. Crell's work contains in outline most of the arguments that Locke and Bayle later developed in defense of tolerance. The treatise is a voice in the contemporary dispute over religious freedom in Poland, but it can also be read independently of its historical context as a universal defense of tolerance.³ The originality of Crell's

¹ Zbigniew Ogonowski defines this set of claims as “historicism combined with elements of skepticism” (see OGONOWSKI 1957, xxvi). The view of the susceptibility of reason to error concerns, above all, speculative theological truths such as the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus or the trinity of God and is combined with epistemological optimism as regards provability of the fundamental truths of Christianity (*fundamentalia fidei*). Crell's writings exemplify this approach, as I will try to demonstrate.

² See, e.g., OGONOWSKI 1960, 59–63. The outlined shifts are part of a larger phenomenon which Paul Hazard calls “the crisis of the European mind”. See HAZARD 1993.

³ Crell's treatise was probably written around 1632. The author died a year later, and his literary legacy began to be published abroad a few years afterwards. The reasons why his treatise was not immediately put in print in Poland remain unknown. Many of Crell's ideas were presented in a less systematic way in the works of earlier writers, such as Sebastian Castellio. See, e.g., CURLEY 2004.

defense lies primarily in the non-denominational, humanistic character of his arguments and in the coherent and elegant form in which he manages to put together various claims, most of which were already in circulation. Primarily, the author appeals to reason, not to external authorities. His words show his anthropological optimism and belief in the dignity of a human person, who is a free being naturally endowed with the capacity to discover the truth and do what is right. It is further worth noting that the tolerance that Crell defends is a non-instrumental tolerance; that is, it is not motivated solely by political considerations. The tolerance he postulates covers a wide range of freedoms, including the freedom to present one's religious beliefs in public. As he emphasizes, the representatives of different confessions and religions should have a legally guaranteed freedom "to engage in their religion, to follow its laws, to profess it, to defend it, and to seek to spread it without resorting to violence" (CRELL 1637, 16).⁴

In this essay, I will discuss the philosophical content of the treatise, while omitting its purely religious themes. I will also point out various difficulties and limitations of its argument. The structure of the essay is as follows: after presenting and analyzing the main contents of the treatise (parts I–V), I identify a more general problem with Crell's views concerning their internal consistency. I discuss two possible solutions, which go beyond Crell's own views, but seem faithful to the spirit of his religious rationalism (part VI).

I

In the preface to his treatise, Crell writes:

Since those who leave the Church of Rome demand that a safe and sound peace be granted to them in secular life, it must be shown that they are not heretics or that, even if they were, peace should nevertheless be maintained with them. The first point of contention cannot be resolved until one side, defeated by the arguments offered by the other, somehow passes into its camp. It would take too long a time to wait for this solution. The second issue can be easily examined and must be resolved irrespective of the first (2).

⁴ All subsequent page references are to Crell's Latin edition of (1637). The translations of the passages cited are mine. For the first English translation see CRELL (1646).

Crell distinguishes here two general strategies for defending tolerance: one rejects the thesis that dissidents are heretics, the other concedes it. He himself advocates the latter, arguing that the question of religious tolerance can and should be resolved regardless of who is in the right.⁵ This is not because the theoretical question of truth is less important than the practical question of peace—in any case, that is not the reason Crell provides—but that truth in religious matters is far from obvious and takes time to discover. Meanwhile, maintaining peace in the situation of the co-existence of various confessions and religions, often hostile to each other, requires immediate decisions. Crell makes it clear that although for the sake of argument he will assume that dissidents are heretics, this is not his own view.

Crell's strategy has at least two advantages. First, it separates the practical issue from intricate theoretical questions, which makes it more likely that the issue will be resolved. Second, it makes his argument acceptable to Catholics, who do consider dissidents to be heretics. The latter advantage is not insignificant, given that Catholics are the primary addressees of the treatise. Although the meaning of Crell's text is in many respects universal, the text concerns directly the contemporary relationship between the various Christian denominations or, more specifically, the relationship between the Catholics and the Protestant dissidents, of whom Crell is a representative.

The author composes his work under outstanding historical circumstances, probably during the interregnum following the death of King Sigismund III, in the climate of growing religious fanaticism.⁶ These were the times when

⁵ Samuel Przymkowski develops the former strategy in his essay *On Peace and Harmony in the Church*. Next to Crell's treatise, this is the second most important Socinian work on religious tolerance. In his work, Przymkowski understands the heretic not as a person who unconsciously commits a theoretical error in religious matters, but as someone who disobeys the practical precepts of the Gospel and in his conduct is guided by mundane motives, such as material gain or ambition. On this understanding of heresy, no people of good will, including dissidents, can be considered heretics. Crell himself does not offer either a definition or a more precise account of heresy. This issue, which for understandable reasons has been the subject of lively debates in modern times, will not be further discussed here.

⁶ During the second half of the seventeenth century, the Socinians were expelled from Poland, and a law prohibiting apostasy from the Catholic faith came into force. The Warsaw Confederation was still formally in force in the eighteenth century, but it would gradually become a dead letter. According to Zbigniew Ogonowski: "Even in the sixteenth century, or, more precisely—in the second half of it, Poland was still a shelter and a safe haven for all kinds of heretical refugees, both from the countries where the Roman Inquisition exercised its power [under the dominion of the Inquisition] and from those which persecuted apostasies and deviations from the Protestant orthodoxy. The Poland of that time, next to Hungary and Transylvania, was praised in the writings of many European humanists as the most tolerant country in Europe, 'haereticorum asylum et refugium.' At the turn of the sixteenth century, the situation began to change funda-

religious freedoms, which had been granted “for eternity” to non-Catholic Christians more than half a century earlier by the resolutions of the Warsaw Confederation, came under threat. Since Catholics were a much stronger party, they could easily break the agreement if breaking it would suit them. It is in this context that Crell raises the question of the moral permissibility of breaking contracts.

Catholic thinkers would invoke the greater good of the Church to justify the permissibility of both entering into such agreements and breaking them. They would argue that signing the contract is permissible when not doing so would lead to an even greater evil (e.g., to a bloody and devastating religious war in which Catholics would suffer significant losses). Similarly, breaking a contract is permissible if it could benefit the Church (e.g., if it guaranteed Catholics governance in the state). When one enters into such an agreement for the greater good of the Church, one only utters certain words without genuine intention. The contract is therefore from the outset “null and meaningless” (10).

The above argument is clearly consequentialist in nature. It was further supplemented with the analogy between heretics (“soul killers”) and unrighteous people such as pirates (“body killers”). Just as it is morally permissible not to honor a contract with pirates, when, for instance, the agreement would oblige the prisoner to provide pirates with weapons in exchange for freedom, so it is permissible not to keep an agreement with heretics.

Crell points out that “reasonable” Catholics reject the above view on agreements, thus making it clear that he himself considers it unreasonable. However, he centers his criticism on a different moral aspect of the issue. First, as he notes, the essence of the contract is an obligation, and failure to fulfill an obligation is a morally impermissible lie—there are few exceptions to this rule, and they do not apply to the case in question. Second,

if heretics wanted to feel safe, they would be forced to strive for the destruction of Catholics. They would need to put this effort into practice at every opportunity, even if they were still at peace with Catholics. For they would realize that when a convenient opportunity appeared to destroy or expel them, Catholics would not only be able to avail themselves of such an opportunity with a clear conscience, but they would also be unable not to take advantage of it with a clear conscience. (5–6)

mentally. The spirit of intolerance increased as the Catholic reaction grew in strength. By the eighteenth century, the religious fanaticism of the nobility would become the subject of harsh criticism by progressive Western thinkers” (OGONOWSKI 1966, 80).

In other words, entering into contracts for the greater good of the Church thus understood would bring about effects opposite to the ones intended—instead of securing the stability of the state, such action would undermine it. This would mean that the dissidents, aware of the impermanent nature of the guarantees they had been given, would not keep their agreements after coming to power, and, worse still, the temporality of the agreements would push them to start preventive wars at every opportunity.

The conception of the greater good of the Church also implies that Catholics have no right to oppose the unfavorable breaking of contracts in the countries where they constitute a minority. Suppose they try to defend religious tolerance in those countries. In that case, they will be accused of applying a double standard—one standard in those countries where being the majority, they are in control, and a different one in those where being a minority, they are subject to a foreign power. Besides, reason tells us that the roles can be reversed in one and the same country, and we know from experience that this is often the case.⁷ The argument from role reversal refers to the principle “don’t do unto others what you don’t want others to do unto you.” In Crell’s work, the argument appears in two versions, referring either to a possible change in the political and religious situation in a Catholic country (Catholics may find themselves in the position of a religious minority) or to the actual situation of Catholics in non-Catholic countries, where Catholics constitute such a minority. The argument from role reversal is further reinforced by the uncertainty and volatility of human fate emphasized by Crell (64).

When defending tolerance, Crell returns several times and in different contexts to such—possible or actual—role reversals. He speaks of a possible role reversal, for example, when discussing the tolerance that the early Christians showed to Jews and heathens

Moreover, if you say that the Christians of that time could not have acted differently because they were weaker than the infidels and that they would have acted

⁷ Such double standards were used quite widely at that time. As Zbigniew Ogonowski writes: “Without fear of deviating from the truth, we can say the following: in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, wherever a faction of Christianity was in minority, and thus exposed to persecution, it would become an ardent and convinced supporter of freedom of conscience. It would build appropriate theories, for which it would always find a sufficient number of biblical quotations. However, when the faction happened to gain the upper hand, most often, the former victim of persecution would turn into the persecutor, sometimes no less ruthless and cruel than its former oppressor. A reconstruction of the doctrine would, of course, also take place: both sides, the oppressed and the oppressor, would adapt it to the new situation” (OGONOWSKI 1966, 114).

differently if they had been stronger, then, in your opinion, these early Christians appear like vipers in the bosom of the infidels: they [early Christians] abstained from hurting them [Jews and heathens] as long as they were unable to hurt them, but they waited until a convenient opportunity arose to harm and destroy them. Thus, in your opinion, their love for the infidels, their desire for peace, and their patience were false, for they would turn into severe hatred and war as soon as the Christians gained confidence in their own strength. The infidels, therefore, would have very good reason to plan to slaughter Christians, since they would have to expect inevitable destruction at their hands, notwithstanding any gentleness and patience that Christians showed them previously. (17)

Later in his treatise, while discussing the allegation that dissidents pose a threat to the stability of the state, Crell formulates the role reversal argument as follows:

For if diversity of religions disturbs peace in the state, the Catholic religion will disturb peace in a heretical state as much as a heretical religion does in the Catholic state, especially when it approves of the extermination of heretics. Indeed, a heretical religion that rejects all extermination and persecution of heretics will disturb peace much less than the Catholic one. In addition, everyone thinks that their religious convictions and beliefs are the best. A Catholic is as much a heretic to a heretic as a heretic to a Catholic. Therefore, if the argument we are trying to refute were sound, the heretical authority would have to decree to banish all Catholics in order to preserve peace. If Catholics do not like this idea, they should not like to have heretics who are weaker than them expelled from their country either. (42)

As we have said, the argument from the greater good of the Church used to be supplemented by the analogy between “body killers” and “soul killers.” In response to this analogy, Crell points to two characteristics that distinguish wrongdoers from heretics—the former, unlike the latter, do evil intentionally; moreover, by their actions, they pose a threat to peace and security. Heretics, on the other hand, “do not know that they are heretics, ... they would not be heretics if they knew it, but they are most strongly convinced that they hold true ... beliefs on matters of religion” (11–12).

Crell also notes that if heretics are taken to pose a spiritual threat (“they infuse others with their poisons”) and, for this reason, any contracts with them are not binding, the same should apply to followers of other religions, such as Jews and Muslims, and to unrighteous people, such as prostitutes. However, binding agreements are concluded with representatives of these

groups, and they are tolerated in society. We are thus dealing here with an apparent injustice—cases that are similar in important respects are treated differently.

Crell claims further that, paradoxically, the situation of heretics is less favorable than that of the followers of other religions, even though their error is lesser. Heretics are Christians, after all, and, therefore, closer to truth than non-Christians.

In short, the analogy between heretics and unrighteous people cited by Crell's adversaries is doubly misguided: it does not justify the desired thesis because there are significant differences between wrongdoers and heretics; moreover, even if the analogy were adequate, it would justify too much, in particular it would justify breaking contracts with representatives of other religions and such groups of unrighteous people as prostitutes.

Crell believes that even if we agree that heretics have pernicious influence on others (since they spread "poison, not potion that grants salvation"), they must be conquered with spiritual weapons, not physical ones. In other words, the most effective antidote to the poison of heresy is strong arguments that will enthrall heretics with the "splendor of truth." As Crell cautions the supporters of intolerance, "even if you finally succeeded in totally eradicating them this way [i.e., using physical violence], you will not defend your religion, but defile and dishonor it" (30).

Although Crell aptly and ingeniously questions the adequacy of the analogy between heretics and pirates, it should be noted that he does not thereby refute the thesis that heretics can constitute a mortal threat. From the fact that heretics, unlike pirates, pose a spiritual threat unconsciously and from the fact that they do not threaten the peace and safety of the state, it does not follow that the threat they pose is not real. In his argument, Crell underestimates the possibility that heretics might pose a threat to the salvation of those with whom they come into contact and among whom they propagate their views. At this point, the critic could cite the analogy between heretics and people afflicted with plague. Just as a plague-stricken person may unintentionally or unconsciously pose a threat to the rest of the community and, for this reason, be subject to coercion (e.g., to forced quarantine or exile), so a heretic may unintentionally or unknowingly pose a threat to the rest of the community and therefore be subject to religious coercion. In other words, the two differences between heretics and pirates that Crell mentions—that the heretics are ignorant of their error and do not endanger the peace and security of the state—do not suffice to justify tolerance of heretics, especially

given that the proponents of intolerance have at their disposal a better analogy with a plague-stricken person.

What emerges here, I think, is a more general weakness of Crell's argument, which is to downplay the danger that—in the eyes of the Catholics of the time, who happen to be Crell's opponents—heretics constitute not so much for their own salvation or the security of the state, but for the salvation of others. The weakness probably results from Crell's epistemic optimism and his declared belief in the effectiveness of the "splendor of truth." Since we can also detect traces of skepticism in Crell's position, let me elaborate on the nature of his optimism. In explaining the origin of religious discord, Crell refers to the hiddenness of God, who is accessible only through Revelation, and to the ambiguity of Revelation, interpreted differently by different denominations. The two factors yield cognitive uncertainty. To cite Crell:

[In Biblical times], the people of Israel almost continuously witnessed prophecies which provided clear evidence about God and his will so that everyone knew well what to think of God and the worship due to God unless they closed their eyes and refused to see things as bright as the sun. Today, however, there are no more prophecies, so it is easier to fall into erroneous views regarding the right way of worshipping God. (24)

Elsewhere he writes:

Nevertheless, religion has acquired a very different meaning since God commanded humans to seek him not on earth but in heaven and ceased to give them such clear evidence of his presence among men; he no longer looks after and protects the religion he has established in such a visible way; he does not call prophets, does not send prophecies any more, but he governs *and directs everything in a more hidden way*, in order to inspire stronger faith in people. It is easier therefore now to fall into error, and it would violate their conscience if one wanted to dissuade them from error through punishment or force them to accept the truth that was no longer supported by such clear evidence. (49; my emphasis)

On the other hand, Crell emphasizes human dignity, expresses faith in reason, and recognizes the strength of the premises that support the truth of Christianity; this places him in the ranks of epistemic optimists. According to Crell, human reason can: (a) prove the existence of God, establish the authenticity of Revelation, interpret it, and distinguish the truths necessary for

salvation from other truths contained in Revelation; and (b) settle at least some disputes between different denominations by a free and patient exchange of opinions and arguments. Crell assumes that there exist intersubjective criteria for settling religious disputes, at least as regards key issues. As he writes:

For such is the nature of truth—especially the divine and redemptive truth—that if it is appropriately presented and supported by strong evidence, it penetrates a soul inclined toward virtue more easily than lies and error. Truth has its own light and some wonderful radiance with which it enlightens those who do not intentionally close their eyes. It wins both subtle and simple minds as long as they are not devoid of common sense. (33–34)

Referring to Catholics, Crell argues that

tolerance would bring glory to their nobility, justice, meekness, and moderation. It would also allow them to win the hearts of heretics, and, having won them in this way, they could easily also persuade them to accept the truth supported by strong arguments.... And ... when the truth somehow clashes with a lie, it breaks the lie to pieces with its power, and its brilliance shines forth even more clearly as a result. (55–56)

Strictly speaking, there is no inconsistency between Crell's beliefs on this matter—between, on the one hand, his belief about the hiddenness of God and, on the other, his belief about the possibility of knowing the truth in religion. His belief about the hiddenness of God and the consequent epistemic uncertainty is not synonymous with religious skepticism. It is in fact merely an expression of the conviction that discovering religious truth is a difficult and gradual process. In any case, religious uncertainty is clearly delimited, according to Crell: the fundamental Christian truths necessary for salvation are accessible to reason and can be known with certainty. Cognitive uncertainty concerns only the remaining truths that are merely useful for salvation—and it is these other truths that are the main object of contention between various Christian denominations.

In Crell's view, cognitive optimism provides an important reason in defense of tolerance. The compelling power of truth is so strong that it does not require the help of coercion. It is not only the case that the various confessions and religions could live in peace with each other, but also that they could reach an agreement on the most important theoretical questions.

Therefore, a full Crellian defense of tolerance would require a convincing justification for such epistemic optimism.

II

Crell emphasizes that tolerance does not entail recognizing dissidents' views as true or praising them. This is what he writes:

Granting religious freedom to heretics entails only the obligation that they will never be restrained by force from engaging in their religion, observing its precepts, professing it, defending it, and spreading it without resorting to violence, and that no harm will be done to them because of it, but that the whole matter may be entrusted to God, so that he may himself punish them when he wills. It will be up to the Catholic Church to combat them with all the force of its spiritual weaponry. (16)

Tolerance, therefore, does not mean approval of erroneous views. On the contrary, it allows for criticism of the tolerated views by means of "spiritual weaponry," that is, argument and persuasion. To understand the difference between tolerance and approval, it is helpful, again, to refer to the analogy between other religions and unrighteous people: from the fact that Catholics tolerate such people, it does not follow that they accept their views or conduct.

However, there still remains the doubt that Crell wants to dispel: isn't it the case that tolerance contributes to the spread of erroneous views and threatens to change the balance of power in the state? Crell believes, strange as this may sound, that the available data prove this to be wrong. Given the importance of the argument, it is worth quoting in its entirety:

Many also argue that if freedom is granted to heretics, heresies will increase in strength. On the contrary, heresies will increase when heretics are destroyed by force, especially if people have come to understand religion, righteousness, and virtue differently. This is evidenced by the experience of recent centuries. The Protestant denomination most grew in strength in France, Belgium, and England when its persecution began. Reason teaches us the same thing. That those who want to suppress a religion by force undermine in this way their own position and the trustworthiness of their own religion, while the religion they intend to destroy gains in popularity. By resorting to violence, they seem to show that they

believe neither in their cause nor in its victory should they be forced to engage in a battle of arguments. Therefore, having no evidence to support their position, they resort to force, and because they lack spiritual weaponry that could subdue the hearts of men, they reach for physical weaponry. Moreover, the news of their cruelty spreads widely, stirring up hatred against them, while those who because of their religion suffer persecution—easily win human love and kindness And these are usually followed by faith. (26–27)

In other words, in times when religion is seen as involving an inner and voluntary conviction on the part of the believer, the use of coercion in matters of religion has at least three undesirable consequences: (a) it reveals the powerlessness of arguments supporting the claim that a given religion is true; (b) in observers, it arouses resentment towards the persecutors and admiration and respect for the persecuted whose integrity is the best proof of their virtue and piety; and (c) it strengthens the faith of tenacious dissidents who do not falter under persecution, and it breeds hypocrisy and conformism in the others. With reference to that last consequence, Crell goes even further and offers an additional warning to the effect that kindness towards tenacious dissidents can eventually lead to the acceptance of their faith. Conversely, hypocrisy and conformism of some dissidents can lead the others to indifference and atheism. Crell remarks somewhat ironically, “If you say that the Spanish Inquisition is active in some area, and yet heresies are not spreading there, then perhaps what is spreading there is atheism, not heresy?” (53). Thus, using coercion in order to prevent the propagation of allegedly erroneous views may have consequences opposite to those intended.

To put it another way: if conversion were a matter of external behavior, then persecution could indeed achieve it. Conversion so understood, however, is devoid of any moral and religious value, because salvation requires an inner conviction that cannot be achieved by coercion. If, on the other hand, we understand conversion as a matter of inner conviction, it becomes morally and religiously valuable, but can no longer be obtained by force. As Crell explains,

This violence cannot make anyone think differently. Beliefs cannot be imposed on humans or snatched from them by force. All that can be achieved this way is to make them speak things they do not mean and to acknowledge in words only the religion that they reject in their souls. (44)

Thus, the transformation of people subjected to coercion would only ever be apparent; they would be acting against their conscience—would inwardly remain enemies of the Church, condemned to eternal damnation. At the same time, they would deteriorate morally (hypocrisy is a defect), and their religious situation would not improve (they would not avoid eternal damnation because God disapproves of hypocrisy).

Therefore, the actions of the persecutors are ineffective—even worse, they are counterproductive because they only aggravate the situation stirring up fervor and hostility in some dissidents and driving others to hypocrisy and possibly atheism. Persecutors use means inappropriate for the end they wish to achieve and thus act irrationally.

Let us note, though, a complication entailed in this line of argument. Crell seems to make tacitly some contentious assumptions about the nature of beliefs and the relationship between beliefs and actions. First, he assumes that the morally reprehensible persecution (“a blemish on the persecutors’ customs”) and the intransigence of dissidents indicate that the beliefs of Catholics must be false and those of the dissidents true. He does not have in mind the falsity merely of the belief about moral permissibility of persecution, but of the whole set of religious beliefs that distinguishes Catholics from dissidents. This assumption would be acceptable if the belief about the admissibility of persecution were an inevitable consequence of this larger set of beliefs, but, arguably, this is not the case.

Second, Crell accepts the claim that coercion in the field of belief is ineffective, but he does not sufficiently justify it. In particular, he does not make a distinction, which would be essential for assessing the claim, between direct coercion, such as imprisonment or torture, and indirect coercion, in the form of such practices as confiscation of heretical books or closure of dissident schools. Consequently, Crell fails to consider the possibility that this latter type of coercion, if used for extended periods of time, could prove effective in the fight against heresy. Of course, one may wonder whether indirect coercion would be effective when applied to those beliefs that are of particular importance in human life and also whether the beliefs accepted as a result of such coercion would be free and valuable. In any event, the fact that Crell’s analysis does not acknowledge the distinction between direct and indirect coercion, and the difference between what can be effective with respect to a person subjected to coercion and to those who may find themselves in the orbit of the person’s erroneous views, constitutes a defect in his

arguments, which a successful Crellian defense of tolerance would have to correct.

III

Crell believes that the use of coercion is ineffective, but his argument does not end there. He also believes that coercion is morally wrong because it is morally wrong to act in a way that leads others to commit moral evil. Because hypocrisy is morally evil, leading someone to behave hypocritically has the same moral status.

Crell's formulation of this thesis needs clarification. Using religious language, he puts his thesis in the following way: "He who forces others to commit grave sins also gravely sins himself" (45). If we do not qualify the actions described in the above principle as 'intentional,' the principle is false. But once we add the qualification, the principle no longer applies to the conduct of those persecutors who are convinced of the redemptive effectiveness of their actions. Even so, adding the qualification would dispel only some of the doubts we may have about the principle. Crell does not consider the answer that his opponent could give to the objection against coercion formulated on the basis of the principle. The supporter of coercion might for example argue that dissidents are eternally damned either way, so it is unclear whether we should hold the persecutors responsible for their fate. Instead, their actions should be seen as a risky and unsuccessful rescue mission that unintentionally accelerates the inevitable death of the person being rescued. It might be the case that the persecutors will answer for the greater burden of punishment that will befall the submissive and insincere dissidents who add the sin of hypocrisy to their sin of heresy. But in a game of such high stakes, such a risk is worth taking, and it is not clear that the responsibility for a failure would actually burden the persecutors' conscience. In this way, the proponent of coercion may try to challenge the principle in question.

Is this attempt to defend coercion successful? It all depends on whether coercion in matters of religion is ineffective. If it is ineffective, then this rescue mission would not only be risky but also irrational: from the start it would be doomed to failure. Thus, we see that the soundness of Crell's moral argument depends on the soundness of his psychological argument. Such a relationship between the psychological and moral argument is not insignificant. It indicates that if, hypothetically, persecution was effective, it should

be applied. In other words, the moral argument is ancillary and only applies when it is the case that coercion is ineffective in the domain of conscience.

According to Crell, coercion is morally wrong not only because it leads submissive heretics to hypocrisy, but also because it results in a situation in which insincere heretics are treated better than tenacious heretics, even though the former are morally inferior to the latter. In other words, the persecutors treat the two groups of dissidents unfairly. This is how Crell formulates this idea:

[In] this way, they tolerate the worse heretics and exterminate the better ones. For those who have not been proven wrong and who do not want to renounce their beliefs so as not to violate the peace of their conscience or offend God are better and more honest than those who, against their conscience, in words condemn the view which, even if it were erroneous, they consider to be true and consistent with the word of God. (51)

Here we can see a more general pattern of argumentation that Crell uses in his work, which consists in pointing out inconsistencies in the way his adversaries treat different social and religious groups. Similarly, Crell points out that wicked people and followers of other religions commit greater errors and are further away from the truth than Christian heretics—so if the latter deserve persecution, then *a fortiori* this is what the former deserve. It is unfair to treat these two groups differently. Crell's implicit suggestion is, of course, that both groups deserve tolerance, but it is worth noting that the inconsistency he notices can also be removed in another way, namely through equal intolerance towards both groups.⁸

IV

Even if tolerance did not contribute to the spread of erroneous views, would it not threaten the stability of the state? Crell considers the objection according to which the co-presence of several religious parties in one state could give rise to conflicts and the concomitant claim that, for political

⁸ With a great dose of realism Crell points out that allowing religious coercion can easily become a pretext ("a beautiful disguise") for actions guided by less noble motives, such as the desire to take over someone's property or position. He also notes that since there are more errors in the world than authentic virtue and piety, allowing persecution will make it the case that it is not the truth, but errors that will spread even further (CRELL 1637, 63).

reasons the single binding Catholic religion should be established in the state (30–31, 35). He admits that in an ideal state, there would only exist one true religion, but this does not imply that religious discord in the real world must prevent the peaceful coexistence of citizens. Such a claim, he notes, is contradicted by numerous examples from history: on the one hand, attempts to establish religious unity by coercion often result in long-lasting conflicts that destroy the state; on the other hand, there have been countries in which different religions peacefully coexist. Crell then asks rhetorically,

But why is it believed that it is impossible for this to happen what we know to have happened so many times, and what, as we can see, is even today happening under the rule of the Turks, who allow Christians to perform their religious ceremonies? (37)

Instead of trying to establish a single religion by coercion, it is, in his opinion, better to provide adequate state control over religious minorities and behave kindly towards religious minorities, which will win their gratitude. Here Crell offers two types of argument that he has already presented elsewhere. Using the argument from analogy, he observes, first of all, that a similar objection could be made with regard to disagreement on political issues. Since we allow a divergence of opinion concerning political views, we should also allow it with respect to religion. Second, using the argument from role reversal, he points out that if preserving peace in the state by force was permissible (we can ignore its ineffectiveness for a moment), then it could be used against Catholics in other countries, because “to a heretic, a Catholic is as much a heretic as a heretic to a Catholic” (42).

V

At the end of this overview, let us briefly consider another reason against intolerance which Crell does not develop, probably because it would be unconvincing for his adversaries, but which seems interesting for the contemporary reader. The reason is related to the doctrinal minimalism adopted by the Socinians and the division of Christian truths into the (fundamental) truths that are necessary for salvation and other truths that are merely useful for this purpose. If we agree with the Socinians that all that is needed for salvation is the acceptance of the essential truths of Christianity, which are common to all Christian denominations, we will have to conclude that the

religious disputes that inflamed Europe at that time concerned issues irrelevant for salvation. Even if these issues turned out to be undecidable, the divergence of opinion regarding them would not matter much, and the dialogue between different denominations could continue in a peaceful fashion. When Crell recommends entrusting God with the matter of solving the disputes between Christians (e.g., 62–64), he is not merely suggesting that these disputes do not have obvious solutions. Rather, he is putting forward a stronger thesis to the effect that those issues are unsolvable for us and that the diversity of conflicting views should encourage us to adopt the attitude of cognitive humility and leniency towards the mistakes of others. Undoubtedly Crell is not a skeptic with respect to the fundamental truths of Christianity, but his position regarding the other truths of religion can be treated as a kind of skepticism that fosters tolerance of the diversity of views. What justifies this tolerance is that salvation is not at stake. We should tolerate other people's errors because they do not lead to eternal damnation.

However, this argument in support of tolerance has a significant drawback. The adherents of other religions, such as Judaism and Islam, do not accept fundamental Christian beliefs. Thus, in light of the discussed position, the dissemination of their religious views, insofar as they are contradictory with the fundamental Christian truths, would be seen as fatal. The grounds for tolerance towards representatives of other religions would therefore have to differ from those towards rival Christian denominations, making such Crellian defense fragmented and heterogeneous.

VI

Let us go beyond the treatise *Vindication of Liberty of Religion* to consider a certain tension that can be found in the thought of Crell and of other Socinians, and then reflect on possible ways of removing it. The tension comes to light when we consider the relation between their views on tolerance and on salvation.

The Catholic defenders of religious intolerance, whom Crell opposes, embrace epistemic and soteriological exclusivism. In other words, they believe that Christianity consists in a codified and immutable system of dogmas, and that to belong to the Church and to be eligible for salvation one must accept this system in its entirety, as well as its official interpretation.

On this view, even an impeccable moral life would not suffice for salvation, if one rejected some of the truths of faith, as dissidents do.

Crell also embraces Christian exclusivism. In his view, although the Christian truth is known only imperfectly and should not be spread by coercion, it is nonetheless absolute and necessary for salvation. What distinguishes him from more traditional exclusivists is the view that tolerance should not be limited to Christian denominations; on the contrary, it should encompass all religious people of good will. However, there are specific threads in the thought of Crell and other Socinians, in particular, their practicalism and religious rationalism, which call this exclusivism into question. Let us now look at them more carefully.

As stated above, in addition to exclusivism, Crell's position also includes doctrinal minimalism and practicalism. According to doctrinal minimalism, there exists a small set of truths common to the various Christian denominations. These truths are beyond rational doubt and their acceptance is considered a necessary condition for salvation. Other religious truths are left to the judgment of the individual conscience, and mistakes in this domain do not preclude the possibility of salvation. According to practicalism, in turn, morally right conduct is more important than religious beliefs.

At first glance, it may seem challenging to reconcile doctrinal minimalism with practicalism. Consistent practicalism seems to imply that any set of beliefs that facilitates a morally right way of living is as good as any other. While minimalism requires us to accept a specific set of religious truths, practicalism, when taken to the extreme, overrides any such requirement.

However, there is no inconsistency between Crell's doctrinal minimalism and his practicalism, because his practicalism is moderate, that is it holds that a set of basic Christian beliefs, although less important than moral conduct, is nevertheless equally necessary for salvation. By combining minimalism in the matter of doctrine with moderate practicalism, we get the view that the acceptance of fundamental truths and living according to the precepts of the Gospel are both necessary and sufficient conditions for salvation. This is an intermediate position between the requirement that one should accept all doctrinal truths and the requirement that one should only follow the Gospel's ethical guidelines, regardless of any doctrinal truths one might adopt.

Yet another problem arises in this context. Different groups of beliefs and desires might underlie the same conduct. It is also clear that we can be motivated to live a morally good life not only by beliefs and desires inspired by

the Gospel precepts. As we have seen, Crell mentions some characteristics of dissidents that evoke admiration and respect, such as courage and intransigence in the face of persecution. Thus, he recognizes that a morally good life is possible within different Christian denominations. It seems difficult to deny that we can find similar examples among members of all the great religions and among those who are not affiliated with any religion. However, according to Crell and other Socinians, merely living a life guided by charity toward the other does not suffice for salvation, a necessary condition of which is, in addition, proper motivation, that is, being inspired by Christianity. To be saved, one must be guided by charity because the Christian God so commands. This position leads directly to exclusivism with respect to salvation, that is, to the thesis that being a Christian is necessary for salvation. This exclusivism is somewhat mitigated in the Socinian version, which rejects eternal damnation and asserts that death which ends all existence is itself a sufficient punishment or else that some finite punishment precedes ultimate death. Thus, although moral behavior is not sufficient for salvation, it helps avoid eternal damnation.⁹

The view we have just discussed is morally problematic. While it is not objectionable to include motivation in moral assessment, it seems arbitrary to privilege Christian motivation and adopt Christian doctrinal minimalism. The key Socinian claim according to which a good and just God does not act arbitrarily speaks against such an arbitrary restriction. Since God's perfection is non-negotiable, the only way to remove this tension is to modify the concept of salvation. When well thought through, the Socinian view seems to lead to inclusivism with respect to salvation. What modification in the Socinian position could provide theoretical justification for such inclusivism?

There are several ways to proceed here. One would be a further "thinning" of Christian doctrinal minimalism. It could, for example, be replaced with theistic minimalism, according to which unique epistemic status can be ascribed only to a small number of claims shared by all theistic religions. Needless to say, such a set of claims would be slightly different from the one shared by Christian denominations. (Following this solution, we could perhaps still maintain the thesis about the distinguished role of Christianity. We could claim, for instance, that the Christian religion contains more spiritual

⁹ Ernst Soner, a Dutch thinker and a teacher of many Socinians, worked more extensively on the problem of the injustice of the punishment of eternal hell. He claimed that after the resurrection, unrepentant sinners suffer a finite punishment proportional to their faults, and are then annihilated. Since death is man's natural destiny, annihilation as such does not count as punishment. See SONER 1957 and OGONOWSKI 2021, 253–57.

truths than other religions or that it most effectively leads believers to a morally good life.) However, this suggestion is not entirely satisfactory—although it blunts the edge of the arbitrariness objection, it does not completely overcome it, because it excludes the possibility of salvation for non-theists, both religious and secular, who lead a good life.

Another, more radical, solution would be to adopt extreme practicalism, according to which the necessary and sufficient condition for salvation is not belief, but living a life in accordance with the principles of charity. It would not differ in appearance from a life in accordance with the Gospel guidelines, but would not have to be motivated by the Gospel. In extreme practicalism, all that matters is proper conduct, and there does not exist any set of religious beliefs whose acceptance would condition salvation. All sets of beliefs leading to a life of charity are soteriologically on a par.

Following this line of reasoning, one could argue that different denominations and religions are not only epistemically, but also morally equivalent, in the sense that we find models of moral life in each and every one of them. Moreover, if true Christianity is identified with its moral teaching, and if the moral teaching of Christianity coincides with natural ethics, which is accessible to all rational persons, then every rational person could live a morally good life and be saved. Crell himself, perhaps unintentionally, seems to lean in this direction. His practicalism finds its fullest expression in the following passage:

Indeed, we recognize the Christian religion not so much by its pursuit of the truth but rather by how it inculcates its followers with charity, peace, meekness, humanity, kindness, and patience.... In defending the truth of divine matters, it does not want people to spread and protect it by breaking the bonds of human and civil coexistence but by making those bonds stronger, affirming the law of charity for all men and respecting the law of peace. (30–31)

Worth citing in this context is yet another passage that appears in Crell's treatise a little earlier:

It is difficult ... to believe that God, who is so much delighted with virtue and piety and considers them worthy of the greatest rewards, should deny the knowledge of the true religion to more virtuous people and grant it to those who are less virtuous.... We have good reason to believe that greater virtue accompanies more perfect faith. (28)

In this brief remark, Crell does not go as far as to claim that faith is synonymous with virtue. Instead, he formulates a more cautious thesis of their co-occurrence (“greater virtue accompanies more perfect faith”). However, even this weaker thesis distances him from Christian exclusivism. A modern follower of Crell could take an extra step and argue as follows: if virtue and faith always appear together, and if we find examples of virtue among non-Christians, then virtuous non-Christians must also have an authentic faith. In this way, the thesis of the co-occurrence of virtue and faith would lead to extreme practicalism and a rejection of Christian exclusivism.

But why, then, wouldn’t this thesis lead Crell himself in this direction? It is difficult to say. It seems that the reasons might have been historical rather than systemic. As Zbigniew Ogonowski explains, the Socinians

never dared to explicitly claim that the knowledge of Christianity is not necessary to attain salvation. It was John Locke who crossed this threshold in his treatise *Reasonableness of Christianity*. The premises that were Locke’s starting point were very similar to those of the Socinians. On their basis, Locke admitted that, as far as the question of salvation was concerned, the Christian revelation was not necessary.... Identifying the content of revealed religion with natural religion seriously undermined the very need for revelation. (OGONOWSKI 1966, 507–508, 513)

The Socinians themselves do not make such a radical claim, but it could be considered a natural extension of their position, which otherwise is, in my view, characterized by theoretical instability.¹⁰

VII

Let us now recap. First, Johann Crell in his treatise offers several complementary reasons in favor of religious tolerance. The reasons vary both in their character and rhetorical power. We find among them reasons that are theoretical and practical, empirical and speculative, as well as secular and religious. We can notice a certain symmetry between the reasons put forward by the supporters and the opponents of intolerance. For example, Crell con-

¹⁰ While discussing the precursory views of the Socinians, it is worth mentioning that they reject the absolute immutability of God, predestination, foreknowledge of free human actions, and the idea, already mentioned, that morally good non-Christians would be punished with eternal hell.

trasts the pirates analogy that was used as a premise supporting the permissibility of breaking contracts with the prostitutes analogy. Considering the premise that coercion is an expression of concern for the souls of heretics, he opposes it with the premise that coercion only worsens their moral situation. He juxtaposes the suggestion that tolerance leads to indifference and atheism, with the claim that it is actually intolerance that leads to such consequences. And, finally, when discussing the claim that persecution of heretics is necessary to ensure peace and security in the state, he sets it against the argument that persecution is the most certain source of conflict. Crell's overall strategy is, therefore, to show that all the reasons that we can present against tolerance will ricochet.

Regardless of how self-evident Crell's main thesis might be, in this essay I argued that none of his specific reasons for tolerance is conclusive. Still, they continue to merit close examination and could perhaps be defensible in a suitably modified version. The one major issue with Crell's position—that on account of his exclusivism about salvation, he faces an arbitrariness objection—might be dealt with by adopting theistic minimalism or, better yet, extreme practicalism.

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JOHANN CRELL ON RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND SALVATION

Summary

The essay discusses the defense of religious tolerance presented in Johann Crell's treatise *On Freedom of Conscience*, pointing to the tension between Christian exclusivism on the one hand and religious practicalism and rationalism on the other inherent in Crell's views. This tension can be resolved by adopting theistic minimalism or extreme practicalism.

Keywords: Johann Crell; Socinianism; religious tolerance; practicalism; doctrinal minimalism; religious rationalism.

JAN CRELL O TOLERANCJI RELIGIJNEJ I ZBAWIENIU

Streszczenie

Autor omawia obronę tolerancji religijnej podjętą w dziele Jana Crella *O wolności sumienia*, wskazując na pewne napięcie w poglądach Crella między jego ekskluzywizmem chrześcijańskim a religijnym praktycyzmem i racjonalizmem. Istnieje kilka różnych sposobów usunięcia wskazanej trudności, między innymi poprzez przyjęcie minimalizmu teistycznego lub skrajnego praktycyzmu.

Słowa kluczowe: Jan Crell; socynianizm; tolerancja religijna; praktycyzm; minimalizm doktrynalny; racjonalizm religijny.