In July of 1648, while peace talks were bringing the Thirty-Years War to a close, a handful of aging theology professors at the Lutheran University of Wittenberg sat down to draft a formal response to a letter they had received asking them whether or not it is right to tolerate Jews and their synagogues. The letter had been written by the Mayor and City Council of Minden, a member of the Hanseatic League and one of the first German cities to have adopted the Lutheran Reformation. The city had long-standing ties to Wittenberg and owed its church order to Johannes Bugenhagen, one of Luther’s colleagues and fellow reformers. Now, in a time of general exhaustion on the continent of Europe and financial hardship in Minden, the city fathers decided to reevaluate their dealings with Jews. They drafted a set of ordinances regulating Jewish participation in city life and sent the draft, along with an introductory letter, to the Wittenberg faculty of theology for approval—a common thing to do in those days; counsels of this kind were a regular service provided by prominent university faculties. Wittenberg’s theologians attached considerable importance to the practice and published a sizeable collection of their responses to various questions, including this one, in a nearly 2000-page folio volume in 1664, thereby lending weight and permanence to their decisions.¹ Their response to the city of Minden, therefore, reflects a position which, a decade and a half later, the faculty still held to be normative and applicable to similar cases elsewhere.²

Both parts of the Minden city fathers’ letter, the introductory description of their case and the 20-point list of ordinances designed to regulate interaction with the city’s Jews, deserve a closer look, as they reveal a number of attitudes and anxieties common to early-modern, specifically seventeenth-century, Lutherans in Germany. After a few formulas of greeting and respect, the authors point out that their city has “in certain ways” tolerated the presence of Jews longer than anyone could remember. They do not specify exactly how long Jews had lived in Minden, but it must have been...
a very long time. To this day historians do not know when Jews first arrived in Germany—some suggest that the first small groups came to trade centers like Worms along with Roman soldiers before the time of Christ. Significant Jewish settlements were certainly present in scattered German cities around the turn of the first millennium, and there is no reason not to suppose that at least some Jews had lived in a city like Minden since the early Middle Ages. In other words, the authors are probably referring to a coexistence dating back several centuries at least.

While they had lived in German territories for a very long time, Jews occupied a socially precarious and legally uncertain position in these Christian societies. Church and state not only were not separated, their codes of law were closely interconnected. Being a non-Christian placed one at a distinct disadvantage and could easily subject a person to legal prosecution. Heretics, we remember, were not treated lightly. Jews were not considered heretics, strictly speaking, but they were nonetheless thought to pose a threat to Christian society because of their "unbelief." Medieval views are exemplified by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), with evident consequences for canon law. The best-attended and likely the most significant of the medieval church councils, it called for considerable restrictions on Jewish participation in European public life, commanding Jews to distinguish themselves from Christians by dress, forbidding Jews from holding public office and even from appearing in public during Holy Week. Numerous papal decrees over the subsequent centuries continued that trend and called for further measures aimed at segregating Jews from the Christian community. Regarding the fundamental legal status of Jews, early-modern Imperial law remained ambiguous: following Roman precedent, Jews were generally thought to enjoy rights of residence (Wohnrecht), but only to the extent that their presence did not disadvantage Christians. This qualification made their situation difficult and frequently dependent upon special orders of protection and the favorable disposition of local rulers. There were no real guarantees, particularly since legal protection always competed with widespread hostility and resentment among the general population. The balance could easily tip in this direction, especially when times
were hard. Local persecution was not uncommon during the medi­
deval period, and culminated in large-scale expulsions from much
of Germany in the late fourteenth century, following the Black
Death. In some parts of early-modern Germany, Jews disappeared
permanently. For Minden, the record remains unclear, but a num­
ber of Jews apparently returned to the city around 1530 and re­
established their community. Similar patterns apply to other
German cities. But the overall tenuousness of Jews’ status remained
unchanged.

A well-documented pogrom in Frankfurt in 1614 illustrates the
case. General economic frustration, including high unemployment
and inflation, was blamed by many on local Jews. As resentment
mounted, a group of merchants and guild members led a mob and
stormed the city’s Jewish ghetto, driving out over 1300 Jews and
plundering their shops. Countless Jewish residents were killed.
When the Holy Roman Emperor Matthias (crowned in Frankfurt
two years earlier) learned of this, however, the situation changed
dramatically. The mob’s leaders were found, arrested and executed;
the Jews were brought back and their ghetto rebuilt. Consequently, Jews were able to remain in Frankfurt, but the story il­
ustrates how dangerously they lived. Just two years later, another
pogrom devastated the Jewish neighborhood in Worms, less than
fifty miles down the road.

The Minden Query

All of this serves as a backdrop to the Minden letter’s assertion
that the city had tolerated a Jewish presence “in certain ways” and
for a duration that no one is able to define precisely. The letter’s
vagueness is no accident and reflects the tenuous and impermanent
situation in which the city’s Jews found themselves.

Having said this, the authors immediately shift gears and begin
enumerating the grave disadvantages this non-specific tolerance has
brought them. Never, the city fathers assert, has Minden profited
financially from the Jews or the fees of protection it collected from
them. On the contrary, the Jews have brought misfortune and dam-
aged the community. Jews, the authors continue, traffic in stolen goods and profit from excessive—and Godless—usury, taking advantage of their Christian neighbors. Even worse, they mock and blaspheme against the Lord Jesus Christ, meeting clandestinely in their synagogues and reading forbidden books and scriptures. Unfortunately, the city fathers note, these same Jews have a way of ingratiating themselves to higher rulers and extracting promises of protection that make restricting them politically difficult. In order to forestall such a situation, the city fathers would like herewith to solicit an official judgement from the highly regarded professors of theology and law in Wittenberg, thereby lending greater authority and, they hope, unassailability to their proposed regulations. In doing so, they refer to Martin Luther's recommendations on how to deal with Jews, spelled out in a late work of the Reformer entitled The Jews and Their Lies. This is a clever move, because Luther's treatise is infamously anti-Jewish and drastic in its recommendations on how to deal with Jews, much harsher than anything the Minden fathers have in mind. Referring to Luther, however, puts the Wittenberg theologians in a difficult position, not only because of Luther's stature as Reformer, but also because they themselves are Luther's heirs and successors in Wittenberg's department of theology. The Minden fathers therefore get cover for their own, less draconian regulations—and we get the opportunity to see how early Lutheranism lived with Luther's uncomfortable legacy.

Before turning to the Wittenberg response, a quick summary of the twenty conditions and laws proposed by the Mindeners is in order. The first aims at curtailing the Jews' freedom of religion, prohibiting any religious gathering or synagogue, whether in private or in public, forbidding separate Jewish schools as well as any further forum for preaching, reading the Torah or cursing and blaspheming against Christians. Refusal to comply with this prohibition shall result in revocation of their legal protection—that is, expulsion from the city. Secondly, every Jew, including women and children, shall be required to attend Sunday services in the city's churches, as well as special monthly worship services organized by Christians specifically for them and to hear sermons aimed at their
conversion. Failure to comply shall result in a penalty of one Thaler per absent person. The remaining eighteen points regulate commerce and financial transactions between Jews and Christians, calling, on the whole, for greater transparency and government regulation. For example, Regulation 15 requires Jews to keep their financial records, especially those involving loans to Christians, in German rather than Hebrew. Regulation 5 prohibits Jews from slaughtering animals and working as butchers. Regulation 6 reiterates an Imperial decree that fixed interest rates on loans at 5–6%. All loans exceeding 10 Thalers, according to Regulation 16, are to be reported to and confirmed by the city government. Regulation 13 ordains that unpaid debts should also be reported to the city council for action. Finally, Regulation 20 calls for the Jews to behave modestly and inoffensively, and to swear an oath of allegiance to their city's government.

In general, these regulations are unremarkable in the early-modern context. Similar provisions were drafted in other cities and territories and drew on precedents dating back to the mid-sixteenth century. As early as 1538, the Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer wrote a recommendation to the Hessian Landgrave Philipp, who had also asked whether he should permit Jews to reside in his territory. Just two years previously, the elector of Saxony had expelled Jews from his own lands, so Philipp has good reason to ask. Bucer responds by affirming the view that Jews should be allowed to settle as long as they do not harm the Christian religion or disadvantage Christians. In order to ensure this, however, Bucer calls for a prohibition of the Talmud (following long-standing medieval tradition), restriction of Jewish employment to tasks involving menial labor, and a prescription of compulsory sermons for effecting conversion. The Hessian Landgrave adopted most of Bucer's recommendations, but softened the requirement to hear compulsory sermons by changing it to compulsory church attendance. This latter requirement became a fixture of early seventeenth-century Lutheran recommendations and was echoed by a number of prominent theologians such as Johann Gerhard of Jena, who is discussed below. In that sense, the Minden city authorities are not really breaking new ground with their regulations,
although their formulation of the first regulation, which required both regular church attendance and compulsory conversion sermons, appears a bit harsher than the average.

*Wittenberg Theologians Respond*

In responding to these suggestions, the Wittenberg theologians perform an exercise of thoroughgoing and critical historical theology and jurisprudence. Drawing on extensive quotations from numerous early Lutheran and Roman Catholic sources, their response takes up, in its printed form, eight folio pages—and was probably thirty to forty pages long in the hand-written original. The authors remain anonymous—that is, they write in the name of the faculty as a whole—but no doubt included the three full professors of theology teaching at the university at that time: Jacob Martini, a significant philosophical theologian; Wilhelm Leyser, a systematician with extensive exegetical and philological interests; and Paul Röber, who also served as superintendent (the early-modern Lutheran equivalent of bishop) for the Wittenberg region. All three would have been well-known and highly regarded figures outside their own institution; Martini, in particular, enjoyed an international reputation. All three, furthermore, were highly conversant with Jewish literature and with the study of Jewish culture.

Beginning with late-Renaissance humanism, the study of Hebrew had been championed by a growing number of reform-minded scholars and had become a part of the university curriculum in places like Wittenberg. Philological studies quickly expanded and grew to include both a variety of other so-called “oriental” languages like Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic and others, and an interest in ancient and medieval Near Eastern cultures—including, of course, Jewish culture. Christian scholars read medieval Jewish commentaries, masora, the writings of Moses Maimonides, and engaged in Hebrew philological studies that yielded, among other things, improved editions of the Hebrew Bible. The Reformed scholar Johannes Buxtorf wrote a work he called the “Juden Schul” (Basel, 1603), which is an early kind of ethnographic
study of Jewish culture. Buxtorf seeks, among other things, to depict Jews "as they would have seen themselves"—a significant methodological advance over previous approaches and one that, even if not carried out with ultimate effectiveness, nonetheless sought to overcome the constraints of a purely Christian perspective. Other Christian scholars, including a number of Wittenberg theologians and philosophers, followed suit. A Wittenberg orientalist and university librarian named Andreas Sennert took such ideals to heart and embarked upon an ambitious project of expanding the university's library collection in order to make as much source material as possible available to scholars.

Developments like these had theological counterparts, as well. As early as 1625, Wittenberg systematician Balthasar Meisner developed a theology of religion that made possible a comparative approach between Christianity and other faiths, including Judaism. It was the first general theory of religion in Lutheranism and one of the earliest such constructs in the history of Christian thought. The authors of the response to Minden were part of such developments and products of this kind of academic culture. But let us return to the text and to how they answer the Mindeners' query.

Surprisingly, they begin by confronting the Mindeners' reference to Luther head on. They do not avoid Luther's own words, but quote one of the most offensive passages of Luther's 1543 treatise on "The Jews and Their Lies" in full: You ask, they say, whether Jewish synagogues should be tolerated. Let us recall, then, the well-known words of Luther on this subject. Luther writes (I summarize):

First set the synagogues on fire, and then take whatever does not burn and bury it, so that no stone or trace remain visible for ever. . . . Do this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that all the world may see what kinds of Christians we are and what liars and blasphemers the Jews are. . . . Moses himself says (Deut. 13) that a city that practices idolatry should be destroyed with fire entirely, so that nothing remain; and if Moses were alive today, he would be the first to set the Jews' houses and schools ablaze. . . . Secondly, one should break open and destroy all of their homes, for the Jews do the same here as they do in their schools; they should be rounded up and herded into stalls, like gypsies, so that they know they are not lords and masters in our country, like they think they are, but instead a scourge and captive—as
they incessantly lament and complain to God on high. . . . Third, take all of their prayer books and Talmud, since these teach idolatry, lies, curses and blasphemy. Fourth, prohibit their rabbis from teaching. . . etc.\textsuperscript{13}

The Wittenberg theologians’ reaction to this statement begins defensively—which is not surprising, considering the situation they face as the Reformer’s heirs:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Lutherus ist nicht aus hiesigem Gemühte/ und Eyfer/ ohne Wissenschafft auff solche harte Wort gerahten/ denn er in vorigen Jahren noch in guter Hoffnung gelebet/ es würden viele Jüden gewonnen und bekehret werden/ wenn man freundlich mit ihnen umgienne/ wie zusehen im 2. Jenischen Theil/ daß Jesus ein gebornen Jude sey f.227.}\textsuperscript{14} [Transl.: “Luther did not arrive at such harsh words out of a this-sided sensibility and zeal, without science, for in previous years he had still lived with the hope that many Jews would be won over and converted if one treated them in a friendly manner, as we read in the second part of (the Jena Edition of) his works, fol. 227”].
\end{quote}

Qualifying Luther’s words as “harsh” and implicitly conceding that they could be viewed as expressions of irrational zeal, the authors seek to rescue the Reformer’s honor by describing his underlying motives as “not this-sided.” In other words, he was not subject to vicious sentiments but oriented toward higher goals. Those goals lay in leading the Jews to the Messiah, as Luther had made clear in his previous treatise, “That Jesus Christ was born a Jew,” published in 1523.\textsuperscript{15} This, too, is the agenda the Wittenberg theologians wish to continue and to recommend to the Minden fathers.

Nonetheless, they wish to see a “science” in Luther’s thoughts. In this context, \textit{Wissenschaft} is used very generally to signify coherent reasoning drawn from biblical principles and human experience. Such experience, they argue, had taught Luther that being “friendly” to the Jews not only did not lead to their mass conversion, but had in fact encouraged them to disparage and slander Christians. Luther articulates this revised assessment in a 1537 letter to Josel von Rosheim, a prominent Jewish leader from Alsace, and the Wittenberg authors quote extensively from that letter.\textsuperscript{16} In doing so, they wish to make the point that leading Jews to Christ may require measures to suppress false teaching. The primary measure they have in mind concerns prohibiting the Talmud.\textsuperscript{17}
How do Luther's "harsh words" of 1543 fit into that agenda? On balance, the Wittenberg authors view excessively repressive measures as impractical and as hindering the aim of Jewish evangelization. Such "sharp sentences of the theologians," they continue later, put the Jews off and make them suspect that all the Christians really want is to drive them away and take their property. Thus, they conclude, it is best not to speak that way at all, unless as a last resort to combat persistent slander and blasphemy—and then only as a threat.\(^\text{18}\) While they do not mention Luther's 1543 statements directly, such comments by the Reformer obviously number among the "sharp sentences of the theologians" whose value they question. Furthermore, none of the Wittenbergers' own recommendations include anything remotely resembling the severe measures Luther had spelled out, but focus primarily on prohibiting what they consider false preaching and especially the Talmud. In fact, their warnings to Christian readers emphasize the profound and even eschatological danger couched in more extreme actions: "For anything Christians do to hinder Jewish conversion, they will have to answer directly to God."\(^\text{19}\) To cite an example, they continue, some people have suggested expelling the Jews and sending them into a deserted land to live by their own devices. "But then no one would be there to lead them to a knowledge of Christ, and they would not be able to participate in the faith."\(^\text{20}\) Words like this contain a critique of reigning political practice toward the Jews, particularly in the authors' own Electoral Saxony, from which Jews had in fact been expelled. The response also shows a highly selective reading of Luther's controversial treatise. The Wittenbergers read it in a way that ignores Luther's repressive measures and instead draws out his earlier agenda of ministry. By juxtaposing the 1543 text with those of 1523 and 1537, the theologians perform a task of clever contextualization that, under the circumstances, goes perhaps as far as they could to relativize Luther's later statements without overtly disparaging the Reformer's overall authority. After this initial quotation, they never return to Luther's words of 1543 and the text has no impact on the content of their response. They bury it in silence.
This entrée into their argument deserves further comment because it sheds light on a long-standing question among historians. Luther's writings on the Jews are, of course, well known and are especially problematic against the backdrop of the Holocaust, where events eerily hearken back to his 400-year-old recommendations. Since the Nazis themselves were aware of Luther’s 1543 tract and regarded it as legitimating their behavior, one may reasonably ask whether there is a kind of continuity of anti-Semitism in Lutheranism, extending from the late Luther up to the twentieth century. The historical evidence, on balance, makes this seem unlikely. There certainly was a degree of anti-Jewish sentiment among sixteenth-century Lutherans, several of whom are known to have lobbied their political rulers to have Jews driven away. In most of these cases, the rulers were considerably more open-minded—or financially motivated, whatever the case may be—than the theologians. But even within this context, Luther's statements of 1543 stand out as extreme. Ironically, they found some limited application, for his own Saxon rulers responded by expelling Jews from their territories long-term. Nonetheless, reactions like those of the above-mentioned Wittenberg theologians make clear that Luther’s later views on the Jews did not exercise a durable influence on early-modern Lutheranism. In reviewing the reception of Luther's writings on the Jews from the Reformation through the end of the nineteenth century, church historian Johannes Wallmann observed that the writings in question virtually disappeared after the seventeenth century and were rarely read at all prior to their twentieth-century revival. The Wittenberg response, coming about a century after Luther’s treatise, and provoked directly by the Minden questioners, illustrates nicely how that process of burying the late Luther took place—and supports Wallmann’s thesis. This text demonstrates not a continuity, but a marked discontinuity with the later views of Luther.

If Luther’s views on Jews left any legacy at all, then it is, as the Wittenberg response makes evident, by virtue of his earlier treatise on Jesus as Jew, a work which calls for tolerance toward Jews, but raises hopes for their eventual conversion. It is those hopes which
are expressed again by Luther's early-modern heirs and which shape the remainder of this Wittenberg response. Drawing on scriptural accounts of an eschatological salvation of the Jews, such as in Romans 9–11, early-modern Lutheran theologians saw it as their duty to act as instruments of God's will and to make available to Jews the means of their eventual recognition of Christ as Savior. Lutheran strategies for doing this varied, but are exemplified by the response to Minden.

For one thing, early-modern Lutherans rejected all forms of coercion in spiritual things. Luther himself had made this a hallmark of Lutheran theology in his 1523 treatise, and criticizes what he considers a Roman Catholic approach. The Wittenberg response quotes Luther in this case, as well:

The Papists treated the Jews like dogs, and not like human beings, they did little more than scold them, taking away their possessions as soon as they were baptized, teaching them nothing about Christian doctrine or living, but merely subjecting them to papistry and monkishness. . . . I hope we can be friendly with the Jews, instructing them clearly from Holy Scripture so that they may become real Christians . . . If the Apostles, who were Jews, had dealt with us Gentiles in the manner that we Gentiles now treat the Jews, no Gentile would ever have become a Christian. But since they treated us as brothers, so we, too, should now treat the Jews as brothers, so that we might convert some of them—for not every one of us has made it up the mountain either, much less over the top.

No forced conversion, nor hollow, nominal conversion (the Wittenbergers tell a story in which the King of Portugal drove several thousand Jews into a church and sprinkled them with holy water) but patient, brotherly instruction, guided by a humble recognition that the Jews have a biblical birthright that precedes that of the Gentiles. At the same time, however, the Wittenberg theologians, like most early-modern Lutherans, entertained fairly reserved expectations about the potential success of such efforts. Luther himself soon grew weary of his stance, long before he fell victim to bitterness and frustration at the end of his career. Experience has shown, the Wittenberg response maintains, that the work of genuine conversion is slow-going. Consequently, it may be just as well to concentrate on managing the interim—reducing the offenses
and containing the potential damage while waiting for God to act in the long run.

This part of the response reveals a key characteristic of the Wittenberg strategy. Addressing the situation in Minden, the authors seek to manage the interim in such a way as to further the work of conversion. That means reducing fields of conflict between the two religious communities, but it also means both increasing opportunities for evangelization and decreasing Jewish opportunities for contrary or openly anti-Christian teaching. Importantly, the measures they outline have little to do with Luther, aside from echoing his commitment to Jewish conversion in a general way. They bear no resemblance at all to the violent steps the Reformer had described in 1543, and this text is clearly not one of the authorities to which they appeal. Instead, they draw on a much longer and more ecumenical tradition of civil and canon law that reaches back into the early Middle Ages. The authors take great pains to demonstrate a wide-ranging consensus, drawing as eagerly from Roman Catholic contemporaries as from their Lutheran confrères. The quotations are used to support both parts of the Wittenberg agenda: arguing for the appropriateness and feasibility of seeking Jewish conversion, and drawing attention to the need for restrictive measures in civil law. A distinctive feature of the Wittenberg response, however, is its emphasis on the integration of Jews into Christian communities. While the primary purpose of such integration lies in providing better occasions for evangelization, it also involves significant social consequences and marks a sharp departure from other early-modern strategies of confinement to ghettos and expulsion.

Their more integrative approach is evident by the way they handle many of the restrictive measures. One of these consists of forbidding the Jews the use of their Talmud. Unlike many of their predecessors and contemporaries, however, the Wittenberg theologians nest this prohibition in an approach that can best be described as “dialogical.” The first thing to do, they tell the Minden authorities, is to summon the Jewish leaders to a meeting and to engage them in a theological discussion on their own terms, pointing out that even Jewish teaching, above all the Mosaic scripture,
argues against the authority of the Talmud. They then need to be shown that the Talmud is full of slanderous statements against Christians and cannot, therefore, be countenanced in a Christian community. In an interesting case study of sexual anxieties projected onto a racial "other," the Wittenberg theologians go on to cite a number of examples in which the Talmud appears to devalue Christian women, telling Jews that sexual relations with Christian women outside of marriage do not count as adultery—thereby making Christian sisters "fair game" to philandering Jews. All the more reason to banish the Talmud, they conclude.

Quoting the advice of a Jewish convert to Christianity, the Wittenbergers affirm compulsory preaching, albeit preaching that is restricted to Old Testament texts in order to spare Jewish consciences. Citing another Jewish Christian, they then counsel against allowing the Jews to practice usury. Most of the remaining twenty points the Wittenberg theologians find to be consistent with Imperial, natural and Mosaic law, or with human reason. One of the few revisions they suggest concerns Jewish butchering and again underscores their call for integration. While the Mindeners had recommended prohibiting Jews from handling meat altogether, the Wittenbergers point out that doing so would prevent Jews from sharing workplaces with Christians—and they reduce the prohibition to one on slaughtering.

On balance, then, the Wittenberg response affirms the twenty regulations submitted to them by the Minden authorities. Their advice consists for the most part of reframing the agenda within a context of mission to the Jews. They thereby seek to defuse the conflict of interests and the clash of religious and financial cultures and to point the Minden parties toward a course of integration and reconciliation—even if, between the lines, one senses that they themselves expect that reconciliation to be long-term rather than imminent. Their advice to invite Jewish leaders to a discussion seems clearly aimed at softening the confrontational tone of the regulations and embedding the new initiative in a context of dialogue. Much of their advice, of course, is anachronistic by today's experience with Jewish-Christian relations, but some of it appears progressive by the measure of its own time.
Comparisons with Johann Gerhard

The relatively progressive tone of the document becomes more evident when one compares it to the openly confrontational and restrictive posture taken by another well-known Lutheran just three decades earlier: the Jena theologian Johann Gerhard, writing in Book VI of his *Loci theologici* on the question of whether Jews are to be tolerated in a republic.27 Unlike the Wittenberg theologians, Gerhard is not addressing a specific case but speaking in general prescriptive terms; his statements come in the context of reflections on the nature of an ideal political magistrate. Nonetheless, his words appear remarkably hostile next to the more dialogical stance favored by Wittenberg thirty years later. Gerhard’s approach recalls provisions of the Fourth Lateran Council and related legal traditions, demanding strict segregation, identifiable dress, prohibition from holding public office and relegation to menial jobs. Where the Minden city fathers are interested in regulating commercial relations between Christians and Jews (and are encouraged to do so by the Wittenberg response), Gerhard’s measures appear aimed at prohibiting and undercutting as many of those relations as possible. His recommendations are riddled with invective and examples of outright bigotry.28 One should not, he remarks, allow Jews to do business with food, and especially meat, because they contaminate it with their fetid breath—which comes from eating garlic every day.29 Gerhard bases many of his measures on notions that Jews are “slippery people,” untrustworthy, and possessed of hatred for Christianity. Tellingly, he calls for strategies to repress the “inborn haughtiness of this race.”30 Even Johann Gerhard, however, does not seem directly inspired by the late Luther. He mentions Luther’s anti-Jewish writings only in passing and instead dwells more firmly on a reading of Imperial and canon law. These traditions, of course, are much older—and in that sense Gerhard’s particular vision of “restricted tolerance,” as he calls it,31 seems backward-looking and medieval (in the worst sense of the word).32 Consequently, it would be hard to regard his views as part of a specifically Lutheran legacy.
The Wittenberg response quotes Gerhard. But it quotes from Book IX, and not Book VI, of the *Loci theologici*. In Book IX, which deals with the Last Things, Gerhard writes of Jewish conversion and affirms the view that a general conversion of all the Jews may be expected pre-eschatologically, prior to the Last Judgment. This, of course, is a basic presupposition of the Wittenberg recommendations. The social policies of Gerhard's Book VI are not part of the Wittenberg text, although several of the traditional ones, including the prohibition of Jewish butchering, also surface in the Minden/Wittenberg regulations. In that sense, the Wittenbergers' handling of Gerhard parallels that of Luther: the more troublesome words are buried under those that espouse evangelization. When the Wittenberg authors seek support for their social measures, they draw not on Gerhard, but on the Roman Catholic theologian Jodocus Lorichius (1540-1612), who, for much the same reason as the Wittenbergers, had advocated integration of Jews into Christian societies.

**Conclusion**

Why do the Wittenberg theologians take a different course than Gerhard? Perhaps they were simply wiser on this point, their attitudes tempered by fresh memories of the War. Or perhaps Wittenberg academic traditions, characterized by a particular openness to rabbinic scholarship during the seventeenth century, gave these theologians a broader intellectual perspective. They are, at any rate, more pragmatically minded than Gerhard. They approach the question not with the aim of creating an ideal state (as was the case with Gerhard), but in response to a practical need: the Minden fathers wanted guidelines on how to regulate their personal and—above all—their business relations with Jewish neighbors. Revealingly, eighteen of the twenty regulations proposed by the Minde-ners deal with commerce and financial practices. Such interests call for a softer touch: forcing Jews to wear yellow cone-shaped hats (Gerhard), or burning down their synagogues (Luther) tends to impair business with them. However important economic interests
may have been for the Minden fathers, however, they were central neither to their query nor to the Wittenberg response. After all, there would be no need to consult theologians if all one wanted was to negotiate advantageous interest rates. The appeal to theology has a different purpose: theological principles are to be applied to public and civic practice. The Mindeners wanted more than merely profitable relations with Jews; they wanted theologically defensible relations with Jews as well. Addressing that need, the Wittenberg response enters into a kind of "public theology" that is both more forward-looking and pragmatic than the abstract, theoretical—and, in this case, ideological—approach of Gerhard in Book VI of his Loci, and also more deeply grounded in an ethos of long-term mission.

In that regard, the Wittenberg response needs to be viewed not only as a statement that arose within a specific historical context, but also as a statement designed to address a specific historical context. And that context held a number of distinct dangers for Jewish-Christian relations. Coming at the close of the Thirty-Years War, German communities again faced the kind of devastating hardship that preceded their mass expulsion of Jews in the fourteenth century and the smaller-scale persecutions of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. At precisely the same time, similar circumstances in Poland and the Ukraine led to mass pogroms that by some accounts killed as many as 100,000 Jews and brought extensive re-migration of Jews back to Western Europe. Economic interests notwithstanding, we sense a kind of impatience between the lines of the Minden documents, a resentment against their Jewish neighbors that could, if things got out of control, turn "ugly," as one says today. Another potentially flammable circumstance lay in the unfortunate legacy of the late Luther—something of which the Minden city people seem ominously aware. The potential for theologically-supported polarisation and conflict thus remains strong. That makes the Wittenberg response and its rejection of those attitudes all the more important. Luther's heirs hereby prevented that kind of legacy from developing; they nipped it in the bud. In that sense, their response is an interesting case study in how to manage the constructions of historical identity. Their judg-
ment of the situation also called for a more emphatic step away from the repressive and segregating legal traditions that still informed Johann Gerhard’s thinking.

The situation after the Thirty-Years War demanded new approaches and certainly a new tone. However deficient the Wittenberg vision may appear by today’s standards, by the measure of its own time, the approach is clearly conciliatory and aimed at countering polarisation. Taking a longer view of history, one may view these examples of early Lutheran attitudes toward Jews as steps in an evolving process away from restricted tolerance toward complete tolerance, away from segregation and toward integration. The process was continued by Lutheran Pietism and the Enlightenment and led, finally, to the accordance of full legal rights to German Jews during the nineteenth century. As for the Jews in Minden, they appear to have coexisted with their Christian neighbors continually—up until the catastrophe of the Third Reich.

This paper is based on a lecture held by the author at the University of Dunham, England, on March 14, 2005.

NOTES


4. In the early-modern period, Pope Paul IV promulgated a bull “Cum nimis absurdum” (1555) which effectively created a ghetto for Roman Jews.


EARLY LUTHERAN ATTITUDES TOWARD JEWS


11. Sennert put his plans for the library on paper, providing a helpful insight into the specific sources he valued. Andreas Sennert, Bibliotheca orientalis, sive Idea pleni systematis linguarum orientalium, maxime Ebraeae matris, Chaldæae, Syae, Arabicaeque, filiarum utpote trium primigenarum nobilissimarumque nee non Rabbinismi (Wittenberg, 1656).


13. Consilia I, 1049f.

14. Consilia I, 1050. The original German is far from straightforward, even by seventeenth-century standards. Its meaning hinges on the word “hiesig,” here used not locally or temporally—which would mean “Luther is not of the local or current mind,” “of our mind”—but instead in a less common, metaphorical sense to mean “this-sided” or “earthly.” One cannot rule out the possibility that the resulting ambiguity was intentional, as the Wittenberg authors are, quite clearly, of a different mind than the Reformer with respect to the repressive measures mentioned. On the other hand, their reference to “this-sided” motives also implies a warning to the Mindeners. As a subsequent passage indicates (see n. 18, below), some Christians may well have promoted repression of the Jews for personal gain—an example of an “earthly” motive.


16. Consilia I, 1050. For Luther’s letter to Josel, see WA Br 8: 89–91; LW 47: 61f. For further discussion of the letter and its historical and biographical context, see Martin Brecht, Martin Luther, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1987), 332–335.

17. Consilia I, 1050f. The authors list seven measures which, in their view, result from Luther’s communication to Josel. The measures themselves, however, are taken not from Luther, but follow other early–modern precedents, such as Bucer’s Hessian regulations, as the authors themselves mention. The seven measures include 1) forbidding the Talmud, 2) prohibiting the building of new synagogues (but allowing the further use of existing ones), 3) preventing Jews from debating Christians about the faith—unless invited to do so by a Christian pastor, 4) prescribing attendance at special worship services based on Old Testament texts, 5) prohibiting usury and 6) peddling and mongering (because it encourages fraud), 7) relegating them to occupations of manual labor. As unpalatable as these measures may seem, it is worth noting that they are considerably removed from those suggested by Luther in 1543.
18. *Consilia* I, 1051: "Jedoch wollen wir die scharffen sententias der Theologorum nicht also bald anfangs zu exequiren rahten/ damit sich die Jüden nicht zu beschweren/ als wenn man nicht Gottes Ehre zu retten/ sondern ihre Güther Preiß zu machen/ sie vertreibe/ sondern wenn man alle Mittel versuchet/ sie aber von Gotteslästern/ . . . und andern bösen Thaten nicht abstehen wollen."


20. *Consilia* I, 1051: "Zum Exempel es ist fürgegeben worden/ man solte ihnen ein geraum WüsteLand eingeben/ und dasselbe bauen lassen/ und sich ihrer Handarbeit nehren; Aber also würden sie nicht zur Erkändtniß Christi gebracht/ und deß Glaubens theilhaftig."


23. In doing so, Luther overlooks powerful medieval traditions (exemplified by popes such as Gregory the Great or Honorius III) that argued against coerced conversion. Nonetheless, he is right to point out that other approaches flourished as well.


25. *Consilia* I, 1051–1056. Retracing those historical precedents would exceed the scope of this paper.

26. *Consilia* I, 1057. In their response, the Wittenberg authors note that "reports have reached us that Jewish butchering practices . . . are unhealthy, not to mention the bad smell that stems from liberal use of garlic . . ." The response goes on to soften the Minden recommendation, conceding that Jews should not actually cut the meat, but should be permitted to "handle whole pieces" and thereby be integrated into Christian workplaces (in part to prevent them from using segregation and unemployment as an excuse for usury).


28. Drawing on a more extensive reading of Gerhard, the German theologian Frieder Lötzsch has found what he describes as "ausdrücklicher Judenhass" (explicit hatred of the Jews) at work in such views. F. Lötzsch, *Philosophie der Neuzeit im Spiegel des Judentums*. (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005), 80. A chapter of this recent work provides a helpful account of the attitudes of Gerhard, Abraham Calov and David Hollatz toward Jews and especially Jewish thought (66–102).

29. "Ne concedantur illis tales negotiationes, quae immediate ad cibaria et edulia spectant, quia foetido suo halitu, quem ex quotidiano allii usu contrahunt, carnes contaminat." Gerhard VI, 384 (That no such business be allowed them that directly examines staples and foodstuffs, because with their fetid breath, which they contract from daily use of garlic, they contaminate meats.—transl. Timothy Wengert). The Wittenberg
response echoes this widespread opinion, as well, albeit in a much weaker form (see n. 26, above).

30. "...innatus huic genti fastus..." Gerhard VI, 383.

31. Gerhard distinguishes between "free autonomy" for the Jews and a "restricted tolerance with certain conditions," clearly favoring the latter. Gerhard VI, 383.

32. Even the more positive aspects of Gerhard's treatment, such as those prohibiting coerced conversion, are part of a long-standing medieval tradition.


34. The Minden recommendations had called for this prohibition, which was then softened by the Wittenberg response. See n. 26, above.

35. Consilia I, 1051. The authors quote extensively from Jodocus Lorichius, Thesaurus novus utriusque theologiae theoreticae et practicae (Freiburg, 1609). Lorichius advocates integration as an occasion for mission.

36. Trepp, 72.