behind those works are the anxieties of scholars. As we know, parodies do not merely entertain; they can also do double-duty—by subverting cultural norms, and by reinforcing them. The *Alphabet of Ben Sira* does both: it mocks the somber sanctity of Rabbinic hagiography as found in *Pesiqta Rabbati*'s portrait of Jeremiah by creating a kind of anti-hagiography for Ben Sira's conception and birth; at the same time, it reinforces Rabbinic self-identity by mocking the *melamed* in the *Alphabet*-lesson.

To be sure, it is very important that scholars be careful not to read ancient texts anachronistically and read into them the conventions and predispositions of one's own, later age. In the case of parody, this is an especially challenging task if only because the very identification of a literary work as a parody is always an extremely subtle matter—a matter of literary discrimination—and we have, alas, no external evidence or proof that the *Alphabet* should be a parody. On the other hand, we know—if only because they were a little bit like ourselves—that the inhabitants of the Babylonian *yeshivot*, those ever-serious and grave Talmudists, must have done something in their spare time, must have had some form of entertainment. No less authoritative a figure than Maimonides tells us that even a philosopher engaged in difficult and weighty matters must have some outlet for relaxation, and as a prooftext he quotes an Aramaic saying, "The Rabbis, when they tired of their studying (*garsayhu*), used to speak among themselves words of amusement (*milei devedihuta*)."[50] The source for this prooftext has never been identified, nor do we know to which specific rabbis Maimonides was referring, but is it too remote to imagine that they may have been Maimonides's own Babylonian predecessors, the Geonim? Yes, scholars must always beware the trap of anachronism, but what greater anachronism can there be than to assume that the ancient rabbis lacked a sense of humor, or a gift for parody less literary or sharp than our own?

[50] Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam), "Shemoneh Perakim-Hakdamah Lemasekhet Avot," chap. 5, in Rabbeinu Mosheh ben Maimon, *Hakdamot Lefeirush Hamishnah* ed. M. D. Rabinovits; Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kuk, 1961), 189. I want to thank Yaakov Elbaum for referring me to this passage; on its background and later literary echoes, see Yaakov Elbaum, *Lehavin Divrei Hakhamim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2000), 84 n. 28. The phrase *milei devedihuta* is found twice in the Babylonian Talmud, in a story about the sage Raba who would preface his lessons with such "words of amusement" (*b. Shabb.* 30b; *b. Pesah.* 117a), but Maimonides's statement about Rabbinic entertainment is unattested elsewhere.

DOES RASHI'S TORAH COMMENTARY RESPOND TO CHRISTIANITY? A COMPARISON OF RASHI WITH RASHBAM AND BEKHOR SHOR

SHAYE J. D. COHEN

In numerous learned and elegant essays, James Kugel has demonstrated how Jewish exegesis of the Bible was provoked by the Bible itself. Ancient Jewish exegetes, and their medieval continuators, attempted to solve difficulties, clarify ambiguities, and fill in gaps that were—and are—evident to any attentive reader of the sacred text. But, of course, as our honoree knows well, exegesis can also be stimulated by factors external to the biblical text. This brief essay is devoted to the impact of one such factor, namely Christianity, on the biblical exegesis of Rashi and his school.

I. ANTI-CHRISTIAN EXEGESIS IN THE COMMENTARIES OF RASHI, RASHBAM, AND BEKHOR SHOR

Rashi (acronym for R. Shelomo [Solomon] b. Isaac, 1040–1105) was perhaps the most important and influential sage produced by the Jewish communities of medieval Christian Europe. His commentaries on the Bible and the Talmud have shaped the interpretation of those canonical documents from that day to this. His sons-in-law, grandsons, and their successors in northern France over the next generations followed his lead in writing commentaries and glosses on the Bible and Talmud. A common theme in these biblical commentaries is the relationship of *peshat*, the "plain" or "simple" meaning of a given biblical verse, to *derash*, its "homiletical," or "expounded" or "derived," meaning, especially the interpretation given to the verse in the Talmud and classic Midrash. In his commentary on the Torah, Rashi constantly balances *peshat* and *derash*. Two important successors who wrote commentaries on the Torah were Rashbam (acronym for R. Shmuel [Samuel] b. Meir, ca. 1080–ca. 1160), Rashi's grandson, and Bekhor Shor (cognomen of R. Joseph b. Isaac of Orleans, flourished in the third quarter of the twelfth century), a disciple of

Rashbam's younger brother R. Jacob Tam (ca. 1100–1171).[1] Rashbam was a brilliant exponent of *peshat*, arguing that his grandfather Rashi had not gone far enough in its pursuit. In one passage Rashbam even claims that Rashi conceded to him that "if he only had the time, he would have written new [revised] commentaries, based on the insights into the plain meaning of Scripture that are newly thought of day by day."[2] Bekhor Shor is a more complicated case; he too was a partisan of *peshat*, often following the interpretations of Rashbam, but he was also capable of flights of exegetical fantasy that seem to have been motivated by nothing more than a desire for originality and novelty. Here then are three Torah commentaries written in northern France by adherents of a single school over the course of a century or so: Rashi, Rashbam, and Bekhor Shor.[3]

Many scholars have noted the anti-Christian animus of the biblical exegesis of Rashi's school, even if there is some disagreement on its significance. Some scholars have argued that the polemic against Christianity was a central and defining element of the exegesis; in this view, the Christian appropriation of the "Old Testament" and the increasingly aggressive anti-Judaism of the Church impelled Rashi and his successors to search for the "plain meaning" of Scripture. In contrast other scholars have argued that the need for anti-Christian polemic was but one of many stimuli to the emergence of Jewish Bible exegesis in northern France in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. But all scholars seem to agree that Rashi, like Rashbam and

[1] Bibliographical note: I cite Rashi, Rashbam, and Bekhor Shor on Genesis from *Mikra'ot Gedolot Haketer* (ed. M. Cohen; 2 vols.; Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1997). I have also consulted *Torat Hayyim Hamishah Humshe Torah* (7 vols.; Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kuk, 5747/1987), which includes Rashi and Rashbam, but not Bekhor Shor; the edition of Rashi by H. D. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kuk, 5743/1983); *The Pentateuch with Rashi Hashalem* (3 vols. on Genesis; Jerusalem: Ariel United Israel Institutes, 1986); the edition of Rashbam by David Rosin 5642/1882; repr., Tel Aviv: Sifriyati, 5725/1965); and the edition of Bekhor Shor by Yehoshafat Nevo (Jerusalem, Mosad ha-Rav Kuk, 5754/1994). All translations in this essay are mine unless otherwise noted.

This paper has benefited much from the comments and suggestions of my friends Rabbi Reuven Cohn, Professor Martin Lockshin (York University), and Professor Ivan Marcus (Yale University), to whom I am most grateful.

[2] Rashbam on Gen 37:2 in *Rabbi Samuel ben Meir's Commentary on Genesis: An Annotated Translation* (trans. M. Lockshin; Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1989), 241–42.

[3] Rashbam and Bekhor Shor wrote commentaries on other biblical books too, but most of them are lost.

Bekhor Shor, used his commentaries on the Bible to defend Judaism and attack Christianity.[4]

In this brief essay I would like to propose a small but significant modification to the scholarly consensus. My thesis is that Rashi in his Torah commentary paid no attention to Christianity and its truth claims, in contrast with Rashbam and Bekhor Shor who did. In their Torah commentaries Rashbam explicitly rejects christological exegesis of Scripture, and Bekhor Shor explicitly rejects not only christological exegesis but also some of the core tenets of Christianity such as the Trinity and the Virgin Birth. These explicit and unambiguous passages allow us to see the anti-Christian intent of many additional passages that otherwise lack any signs of polemic. Rashi's Torah commentary, however, contains not a single explicit and unambiguous attack on Christian truth claims and Christian exegesis. In the absence of explicit polemic there is no methodological basis for positing the existence of implicit polemic. Rashi's Torah commentary is not a response to Christianity.

[4] The bibliography is enormous; I note the following. In general: E. I. J. Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic in Medieval Bible Commentaries," *JJS* 11 (1960): 115–35; Marianne Awerbuch, *Christlich-jüdische Begegnung im Zeitalter der Frühscholastik* (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1980); Avraham Grossman, "The Jewish-Christian Polemic and Jewish Bible Exegesis in Twelfth Century France," *Zion* 51 (1986): 29–60 [Hebrew]; Sarah Kamin, *Jews and Christians Interpret the Bible* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991) [Hebrew]. I have not yet seen *With Reverence to the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (ed. J. D. McAuliffe, B. D. Walfish, and J. W. Goering; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

On anti-Christian polemic in Rashi: Samuel Poznanski, *Mavo al Hakhme Tzorfat Meforshe ha Miqra, Kommentar zu Ezechiel . . . von Eliezer aus Beaugency . . . mit einer Abhandlung uber die nordfranzösischen Bibelexegeten* (Warsaw: Verein Mekize Nirdamim, 1913), xx [Hebrew]; Yitzhaq Baer, "Rashi and the Historical Reality of his Time," *Tarbiz* 20 (1950): 320–32 [Hebrew]; repr. in *Sefer Rashi published at the 850th anniversary of the death of R. Solomon Yitzhaqi* (ed. Y. L. Hakohen Maimon; Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kuk, 5716/1956), 489–502; E. I. J. Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic," 124–26; Samuel Krauss, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy from the Earliest Times to 1789 I: History* (ed. W. Horbury; TSAJ 56; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1995), 82–84; Judah Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic in Rashi on the Tanakh," in *Rashi: His Teachings and Personality* (ed. S. Federbush; New York: World Jewish Congress/Jewish Agency, 1958), 45–59 [Hebrew]; repr. in *Mehqarim u Meqorot* (2 vols.; Jerusalem: R. Mass, 1967), 1:101–16; Awerbuch, *Begegnung*, 101–30; Esra Shereshevsky, *Rashi the Man and his World* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1982), 119–32; Elazar Touitou, "Rashi's Commentary on Genesis 1–6 in the Context of the Judeo-Christian Controversy," *HUCA* 61 (1990): 159–83; Avraham Grossman, *The Early Sages of France* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995), 142–46, 205–7, 477–79 [Hebrew].

On anti-Christian polemic in Rashbam: Poznanski, *Mavo*, xlvii–xlix; E. I. J. Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic," 126 n. 29; Krauss-Horbury, *Controversy*, 84;

II. Rashi and Rashbam on Gen 49:10

A three-way comparison of Rashi, Rashbam, and Bekhor Shor on Gen 49:10 will make this point clear. (I discuss Rashi and Rashbam in this section, Bekhor Shor in the next section.) Genesis 49:10, perhaps the most famous Christian prooftext in the Torah, reads as follows: *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the staff from between his feet; Until Shiloh comes* [or: *until he comes to Shiloh*], *And the homage of peoples be his.* Here is Rashi:[5]

> *The scepter shall not depart from Judah*: from David onwards. These are the exilarchs in Babylonia who rule the people with a scepter, because they are appointed by the kingdom.
>
> *Nor the staff* disciples[6] *from between his feet*: these are the patriarchs of the land of Israel.
>
> *Until Shiloh comes*: the king messiah, because kingship is his (understanding the word *Shiloh* as *shelo*, "his"); and thus did Onqelos interpret it. A midrashic interpretation: (the word *Shiloh* should be understood as) *shay lo*, "tribute to him," as it says (Ps 76:12), *they shall bring tribute* (in Hebrew, *shay*) *to the awesome one.*

This exegesis can be understood as a response to the Christian reading of Scripture. Jews and Christians agree that the mysterious word *Shiloh* is the Messiah, but disagree, of course, on the identity of that Messiah. Christian exegetes from antiquity through the Middle Ages

Awerbuch, *Begegnung*, 143–53; Elazar Touitou, "Peshat and Apologetics in the Rashbam's Commentary on the Biblical Stories of Moses," *Tarbiz* 51 (1982): 227–38 [Hebrew]; idem, "The Exegetical Method of Rashbam against the Background of the Historical Reality of His Time," in *Studies in Rabbinic Literature Bible and Jewish History dedicated to Prof. E. Z. Melamed* (ed. Y. D. Gilat et al.; Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1982), 48–74 [Hebrew]; Grossman, *Early Sages*, 479–80. Elazar Touitou, *Exegesis in Perpetual Motion: Studies in the Pentateuchal Commentary of R. Samuel b. Meir* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2003 [Hebrew]) reached me after the completion of this essay.

On anti-Christian polemic in Bekhor Shor: Poznanski, *Mavo*, lxix; E. I. J. Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic," 127 n. 31; Krauss-Horbury, *Controversy*, 85; Awerbuch, *Begegnung*, 153–63; Nevo, introduction to his edition of Bekhor Shor, 9–10; Grossman, *Early Sages*, 493–95.

[5] In translating rabbinic texts I place in parentheses material that is implicit in the original or material that any reader schooled in rabbinic lore would instantly know; brackets indicate my additions to the text.

[6] I have rearranged the text to make it clear that "disciples" is a gloss on *staff*. Perhaps *talmidim* should be translated here "teachers" rather than "disciples." The Guadalajara 1476 edition of Rashi's commentary (see *Rashi Hashalem*, 3:311) omits *talmidim* and indeed the text is smoother without it.

uniformly understood *Shiloh* to refer to Jesus, so that the verse is a prophecy that Jesus will be the last king of the house of David. "When Jesus came the kingdom of Judah ceased."[7] The absence of Jewish national sovereignty, specifically Davidic kingship, after the time of Jesus is proof of the truth of Christianity. Rashi contends that the verse has yet to be fulfilled because *Shiloh*, the Messiah, has not yet come. The continued existence of Davidic royalty, exilarchs in Babylonia and patriarchs (*nesi'im*) in the land of Israel, disproves the Christian exegesis and Christian truth claims. Rashi's exegesis, it has been suggested, is a response to Christianity.[8]

This approach to Rashi on this verse, however, is neither demonstrable nor necessary; Rashi's exegesis may have nothing to do with Christianity. Rashi in his usual way is paraphrasing a piece of rabbinic exegesis that appears in slightly different forms in the Talmud and Midrash. In the talmudic version the point is that the exilarchs, the Davidic leaders of the Jewish community of Babylonia, who are called *scepter*, outrank the patriarchs, the Davidic leaders of the Jewish community of the land of Israel, who are called *staff*. No anti-Christian polemic here.[9] Had Rashi intended his comment to serve as a response to Christian exegesis, surely he would have updated his talmudic source to make it reflect the realia of his own time, for without such updating this reading of Scripture is not an effective response.[10] In the Talmudic period the exilarchs of Babylonia were indeed powerful figures who ruled the people with a scepter, but in Rashi's time they were but pale shadows of what they once had been.[11] In the

[7] This is the summary of the Christian argument in *Sefer Nizzahon* sec. 28; see David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of Nizzahon Vetus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979), 60, along with the note on 249. (*Sefer Nizzahon* was written in Germany about 1300). For an exhaustive survey of Christian exegesis of Gen 49:10, see Adolf Posnanski, *Schiloh: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Messiaslehre* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1904), 288–449; for a survey of some ancient Jewish exegesis of the verse see James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 469–74.

[8] See, for example, J. Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic," 52 (= *Mehqarim*, 1:111).

[9] *B. Sanh.* 5a and *b. Hor.* 11b; *Gen. Rab.* 97 (Theodor-Albeck ed., 1219); Posnanski, *Schiloh*, 33–34 and 117.

[10] For a good example of such updating, see R. Aaron ben Gerson Abulrabi (fl. ca. 1400) in Posnanski, *Schiloh*, 161–62 and xxviii–xxix n. 66.

[11] Avraham Grossman, *The Babylonian Exilarchate in the Gaonic Period* (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 1984), 11–12 [Hebrew]. I am grateful to my colleague Bernard Septimus for this reference.

Talmudic period the princes or patriarchs of the land of Israel were indeed "disciples" of the sages, but the office ceased in the fifth century C.E.; in Rashi's time the office did not exist. It is possible, of course, that Rashi was ill-informed about these matters and believed that even in his own time the Babylonian exilarchate still exerted great power and the Israelian patriarchate still existed, but surely it is simpler to assume that in his comment on Gen 49:10 Rashi is living in talmudic time, not his own. That is, he is not interested in shaping an exegesis that will be "useful" or "relevant" for his Jewish contemporaries in northern France in the eleventh century; his goal, rather, is to see the Torah as part of classical rabbinic literature, and classical rabbinic literature as part of the Torah.[12] If so, he does not have Christian exegesis in view.

Contrast Rashbam:[13]

> *The scepter shall not depart from Judah*: The kingship that was granted to him—namely, that all twelve of his brothers shall bow low to him (v. 8)—that greatness of his shall not cease, *nor the staff from between his feet*, nor shall power cease from his progeny, *until he* Judah *comes to Shiloh*—in other words until a Judaean king, Rehoboam the son of Solomon, comes to Shiloh, which is near Shechem, to renew the monarchy. However, then the ten tribes will desert him and proclaim Jeroboam king, leaving only Judah and Benjamin for Rehoboam the son of Solomon. *And his is the assemblage of nations*: The assemblage of nations that were subordinated by his father Solomon . . . gathered together there to proclaim Rehoboam king, as it is written, *Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to acclaim him king* (1 Kgs 12:1 and 2 Chr 10:1). Shechem is near Shiloh. . . .
>
> This interpretation is a refutation of [or: response to] the heretics.[14] *Shiloh* that is written here is just the name of a city. For there are no vernacular words in the Bible. Nor is *shelo*, "his," written here, as some Hebrews claim, nor *shaliah*, "messenger," as the Christians say.

[12] Cf. Moshe Greenberg, "Parshane Tzorfat [The Commentators of Northern France]," in *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (9 vols.; Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1982), 8:694 [Hebrew]: "[in Rashi's conception] the Bible and rabbinic literature are one world, and it is permissible to draw from the latter, which is far more extensive, to illuminate the former." My thanks to Ivan Marcus for this reference.

[13] Rashbam on Gen 49:10 (Lockshin trans., 359–63, slightly modified).

[14] The phrase is *teshuvah la minim*, which can be understood either as "refutation of the heretics" or "response to the heretics," as is well noted by J. Rosenthal, *Mehqarim*, 1:368, and by Elazar Touitou, "On the Meaning of the Concept *teshuvat ha minim* in the Writings of our French Sages," *Sinai* 99,3–4 (5746/1986 nos. 603–604): 144–48 [Hebrew].

> Jacob made explicit the true greatness of Judah, which was from David to Rehoboam, but did not wish to make explicit the diminution of that greatness; however, from the phraseology of the verse you may infer that from Shiloh onwards the greatness was diminished.

According to Rashbam this verse has nothing to do with messianic kings, either past (as the Christians would have it) or future (as Rashi says). Rather, it is entirely historical. Jacob prophesied that the royal power would not depart from the tribe of Judah until a Judaean king would go to Shiloh. This prophecy was fulfilled when Rehoboam son of Solomon went to Shechem, which is near Shiloh, to be installed as king. Shortly thereafter the northern tribes broke away from the southern, the kingdom of Ephraim was established, and the greatness of Judah was diminished. At that moment the scepter did indeed depart from Judah. "This interpretation is a refutation of [or: response to] the heretics (*minim*)," namely Christians.

Rashbam specifically rejects three versions of the messianic exegesis that is shared by Jews and Christians. First, "there are no vernacular words (*la'az*) in the Bible." David Rosin, the editor of the standard critical edition of Rashbam, conjectures that Rashbam is rejecting an explanation advanced by some unknown contemporary (Jewish? Christian?) that interpreted *Shiloh* as the French word *salut*, "salvation." Second, "nor is *shelo*, 'his,' written here, as some Hebrews claim"; this of course is the explanation advanced by Rashi (following the Targumim).[15] Third, "nor [is] *shaliah*, 'messenger,' [written here] as the Christians say." Rashbam here rejects the interpretation of the Vulgate, which takes *Shiloh* to mean *qui mittendus est*, "he who is to be sent." The messianic exegesis of Gen 49:10 in all its manifestations is wrong, says Rashbam.

This passage exemplifies three aspects of Rashbam's anti-Christian polemic in his Torah commentary: he explicitly rejects Christian interpretation of Scripture; in order to subvert Christian "messianic" exegesis he advocates "historical" exegesis; and when refuting Christian truth claims he refers to the Christians as *minim*, "heretics." All of these features recur in Bekhor Shor; none of them appears in the Torah commentary of Rashi. Let us look at each of these in turn.

[15] I do not know why Rashbam uses the locution "Hebrews" (*Ivrim*) here, which would seem to translate the standard Christian term *Hebraei*. As far as I know nowhere else does Rashbam use *Ivrim* in this sense.

III. Explicit and Implicit Anti-Christian Polemic

Rashbam cites and rejects the Christian interpretation of Gen 49:10. Similarly, in his comment on Exod 20:13 he cites and rejects the rendering of the Vulgate.[16] These two passages, each of which refers to Christians as *minim*, make it likely that the *minim* who appear elsewhere on the pages of Rashbam's Torah commentary are also Christians.[17] Additional passages, too, appear to be anti-Christian in spite of the absence of any reference to "Christians" or "heretics."[18]

Bekhor Shor attacks Christian exegesis and Christian truth claims far more often than Rashbam. He refers to Christians as "heretics" (*minim*), "gentiles" (*goyim*), "errant ones" (*to'im*),[19] and "nations" (*umot*); he explicitly and unambiguously attacks the Christian allegorization of the laws of the Torah, the veneration of images, the doctrines of the Trinity and the Virgin Birth, and the ritual of the Eucharist.[20] Additional passages also appear to be anti-Christian despite absence of any explicit reference to Christians.[21] Among these is Bekhor Shor's commentary on Gen 49:10:

> *The scepter shall not depart from Judah*: (Jacob) meant to explain to him (Judah) when the kingdom would be his, and said to him, "Do not think that you will be in poverty until the time of your kingdom arrives,

[16] Thus leading some scholars to suggest that Rashbam knew Latin. There is no sign whatsoever that Rashi knew Latin.

[17] In response to *minim* Rashbam offers rational explanations of biblical laws (Lev 11:3, 34; 19:19; Deut 22:6)—is it possible that Rashbam is combating Jewish "rationalist" heretics here?—and apologetic explanations of the actions of the Israelites (Exod 3:22; see Grossman, *Early Sages*, 491–92).

[18] With Deut 22:6, cf. Exod 23:19; with Exod 3:22, cf. Exod 11:2 and 12:36. See Elazar Touitou, "The Method in Rashbam's Commentary on the Halakhic Parts of the Torah," *Milet: Everyman's University Studies in Jewish History and Culture* 2 (Tel Aviv, 1985): 275–88, here 278–80 [Hebrew].

[19] This is also a common pejorative designation for the Crusaders.

[20] Polemic against the Christian allegorization of the laws of the Torah: Num 12:8 (a passage that also includes polemic against "some of our people," that is, Jews; cf. Lev 17:13 and Deut 6:9). Polemic against the Christian veneration of images: Exod 20:4; 33:25. Polemic against the doctrine of the Trinity: Gen 1:26; 3:22; 19:1; Deut 6:6. Polemic against the doctrine of the Virgin Birth: Gen 24:2. Poznanski (*Mavo*, lxix), followed by Krauss-Horbury (*Controversy*, 85), assembles all of these passages. Polemic against the ritual of the Eucharist: Exod 32:20.

[21] Poznanski (*Mavo*, lxix), followed by Krauss-Horbury (*Controversy*, 85), lists Gen 18:3 (cf. Gen 19:1) and Exod 31:18 as implicit anti-Christian polemic. In my forthcoming *Why aren't Jewish Women Circumcised?* I hope to demonstrate that Bekhor Shor's comment on Gen 17:11 is also directed against Christianity.

> because *the scepter* and governance *shall not depart from* you. They (your brothers) will always esteem you a great one, and stick and strap will (always) be in your hand."
>
> *(Nor) the staff (from between his feet)*: He will write and legislate decrees that are incumbent on others. In other words: *until Shiloh comes* you will be a magistrate and a ruler, but once *Shiloh comes* you will be a king. Once the day of Shiloh came, (meaning) that it was destroyed, then the kingdom of the house of David flourished, as it is written in the book of Psalms (78:60–68), *He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh . . . he rejected the tent of Joseph . . . he chose David his servant, and Jerusalem which he desired.*[22] This verse implies that (the rise of) the kingdom of the house of David depends on the arrival of the day of Shiloh (that is, its destruction). Jacob forecast to him that then he would be king, and until the destruction of Shiloh he would not be in a low state but would (carry) a stick and staff.
>
> When *Shiloh comes* (that is, when Shiloh is destroyed, then) *the homage of peoples will be his:* then all Israel will congregate to him in order to make him king. . . .

Like Rashbam, Bekhor Shor adopts a "historical" exegesis of the verse, but unlike Rashbam, who understood *scepter* and *staff* as signs of royal authority, Bekhor Shor understands them to be signs of non-royal authority.[23] For Rashbam this verse predicts when royal power will depart from Judah; for Bekhor Shor the verse predicts when royal power will come to Judah. The key is the phrase *until Shiloh comes/until he comes to Shiloh*. For Rashbam this meant that Judean royal power will endure until Rehoboam comes to Shiloh, that is, Shechem. Bekhor Shor, perhaps to avoid the obvious problem confronting Rashbam, namely that Shiloh is not Shechem, rather ingeniously understands *until Shiloh comes* to mean "until Shiloh is destroyed."[24] The destruction of Shiloh marks the ascent of the house of David. Until that point, Jacob says, non-royal authority will be his; after that point, Jacob implies, royal authority will be his.

Unlike Rashbam, Bekhor Shor does not mention here either Christianity or Christian exegesis. Nevertheless, we may be sure that Bekhor Shor intended his exegesis to be a response to, or a refutation of, the Christian reading of Gen 49:10 because Bekhor Shor

[22] Bekhor Shor's citation is not accurate; we may assume that he is citing from memory.

[23] Whether *scepter* and *staff* necessarily imply royal authority was much debated; see Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate*, 251.

[24] So too Ibn Ezra.

elsewhere explicitly and unambiguously attacks Christian exegesis.[25] Rashi's case is different: in the absence of any explicit and unambiguous polemic against Christian exegesis anywhere in his Torah commentary, we have no basis on which to attribute such intent to his commentary here. Explicit polemic allows us to see the implicit; in Rashi there is no explicit polemic.

IV. Historical Exegesis Versus Messianic Exegesis

Rashbam and Bekhor Shor, on Gen 49:10, adopt a "historical" exegesis to counter Christian "messianic" exegesis. The Christians think that the verse refers to their messiah, but in reality, say Rashbam and Bekhor Shor, it does not refer to any messiah, either theirs or ours. It refers to figures and events from the history of biblical Israel. Rashbam and Bekhor Shor know full well that the midrash had understood the verse to refer to the messiah, but for the sake of anti-Christian polemic they were prepared to reject rabbinic exegesis.

Rashi adopted this strategy in his commentary on the Psalms. On *Why do nations assemble . . . against the Lord and his anointed* (Ps 2:1), Rashi writes as follows:[26]

> Our rabbis interpreted the subject of the chapter as a reference to king Messiah. However, according to its basic meaning and for a refutation of [or: response to] the heretics it is correct to interpret it as a reference to David himself in consonance with what is stated in the Bible, *The Philistines heard that Israel had anointed David as king over them* (2 Sam 5:17), *the Philistines gathered their troops* (1 Sam 28:4) and they fell into his hand. It is concerning them that David asked here, *Why do nations assemble?*

Compare Rashi's comment on *The king rejoices in your strength* (Ps 21:2):[27]

> Our rabbis interpreted it as a reference to king Messiah, but it is correct to interpret it as a reference to David himself as a refutation of [or: response to] the heretics who find in it support for their erroneous beliefs.

[25] In addition, Bekhor Shor here, as so often, is trying to improve upon what Rashbam had said. Rashbam here is overtly anti-Christian, and we may safely assume that Bekhor Shor is, too.

[26] Rashi on Ps 2:1 in *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms 1–89* (trans. M. Gruber; South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 161; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 52.

[27] Rashi on Ps 21:1 (*Rashi's Commentary*, 123; Gruber trans.).

In these two passages there can be no question: the heretics (*minim*) whom Rashi is refuting are Christians.[28] Anti-Christian polemic is prominent throughout Rashi's commentary on Psalms, and historical exegesis is one of his techniques.[29]

The contrast between Rashi on the Psalms and Rashi on the Torah is striking. The anti-Christian polemic in the Psalms commentary is unmistakable and unambiguous; not so the Torah commentary, where, if it be found at all, it is mistakable and ambiguous. In their commentaries on Gen 49:10 Rashbam and Bekhor Shor apply the technique that Rashi promoted in his commentary on Psalms: in order to rebut Christian messianic exegesis they adopt a historical exegesis, even if that means rejecting the exegesis of the rabbis of the Talmud and Midrash. Rashi himself, however, in his commentary on Gen 49:10, was content to follow the messianic exegesis of the ancient rabbis.

V. Christians and Other Heretics

The word *minim* is the talmudic appellation for "heretics."[30] When Rashbam and Bekhor Shor use the word, they mean Christians. Rashi in his commentary on Psalms similarly uses *minim* to mean Christians, as we have seen, and this usage may well be found in his commentary on other books of the Prophets and Writings.[31] The usage in the Torah commentary, however, is different. In his Torah commentary Rashi refers to *minim* in only three passages. Of these, one almost definitely refers to Christians, one almost definitely does not, and one definitely is ambiguous. Let us look at these passages in turn.

[28] So much so that Gruber even translates *minim* "Christians." See Gruber, *Rashi's Commentary*, 54–55 n. 6.

[29] Anti-Christian polemic in the commentary on Psalms: Gruber, *Rashi's Commentary*, 10. Historical exegesis: Gruber, *Rashi's Commentary*, 394 n. 19 on Ps 84:10; Schereschevsky, *Rashi*, 123–24, regarding Psalms 40 and 80. Rashi uses the same technique elsewhere, too: E. I. J. Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic," 124–26; Awerbuch, *Begegnung*, 109; Grossman, *Early Sages*, 479.

[30] Which individuals or groups the Talmud had in mind with this designation is a much-debated question that does not concern us here.

[31] J. Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic." A study of Rashi's use of *umot*, "nations," and *umot ha'olam*, "nations of the world," is a desideratum.

Here is Rashi's comment on Deut 32:21, *They incensed me with no-gods, Vexed me with their futilities; I'll incense them with a no-folk, Vex them with a nation of fools*:

> *With a no-folk*: with a nation that has no reputation,[32] as it says, *Behold the land of the Chaldeans, This is a nation that should never have been*[33] (Isa 23:13), [and] concerning Esau it says, *You are most despised* (Obad 2).
>
> *A nation of fools* (in Hebrew, *naval*): These are the heretics, as it says, *The foolish one* (in Hebrew, *naval*) *says in his heart "There is no God"* (Ps 14:1).

Deuteronomy 32 sets forth the paradigm of Jewish history: Israel is chosen by God, becomes overconfident and arrogant, goes astray by worshiping other gods, and is punished by God for her disobedience. Rashi understands v. 21 to refer to the destruction of the first and second temples in Jerusalem, the first at the hands of the Chaldeans (= Babylonians), and the second at the hands of Esau (= Rome). Both the Babylonians and the Romans are nations-that-are-not-nations; each is a *no-folk*. The Babylonians, says Isaiah, should never have been, and the Romans, says Obadiah, are despicable. These are the agents by which God punishes Israel. Who then is *a nation of fools* by which God also punishes Israel? "These are the heretics (*minim*)," Rashi says, basing his interpretation on Ps 14:1 which shows that a *foolish one* is one who denies God, in other words, a heretic.

The heretics who vex Israel—surely Rashi means Christians.[34] Rabbinic exegetes and historians did not distinguish between pagan Rome and Christian Rome; both alike were Esau, and both alike were chosen by God to subjugate Israel.[35] As one of the signs of the end time, the Mishnah says, "the kingdom will be given over to heresy." Rashi explains, "The kingdom that rules most of the world shall become heretical and drawn after his error [perhaps a misprint for "drawn after the error of Jesus"]; his disciples were called heretics (*minim*)."[36] Until they are delivered by the messiah, Jews must endure the dominion of a "heretical" kingdom, that is, Christendom.

[32] Lit. "name."

[33] I am translating the verse as Rashi understood it; see his commentary on Isa 23:13.

[34] Whether Rashi's source, too, meant Christians is a separate question; see *b. Yebam.* 63b (the Vulgate text reads "these are the Sadducees" but all manuscripts and testimonia read "these are the *minim*") and *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 320 (Finkelstein ed., 367).

[35] Gerson D. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol," in *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 243–69, esp. 249.

I conclude that in his comment on Deut 32:21 Rashi refers to Christians and dubs them *minim*. Note, however, what this passage does not do: it does not dispute Christian truth claims or Christian exegesis of Scripture. Instead Rashi simply alludes to a fact that every medieval Jew knew all too well, namely, that God has given the Jews into the hands of the Christians. Christianity is not the subject of this—or, so I am arguing, of any other—passage of the Torah commentary.

In contrast, in his comment on Gen 6:6 Rashi also refers to *minim* but in all likelihood does not have Christians in mind. The verse reads, *And the Lord regretted that he had made humanity*[37] *on the earth, and his heart was saddened.* Rashi comments:

> *And the Lord regretted*: (Do not translate *vayinnahem* "regretted"; rather it should be translated "he was consoled.") God took consolation in the fact that he had created him (Adam, that is, humanity) among the terrestrial creatures, for had he been among the supernal creatures he would have incited them to rebel. (This is the interpretation of) *Genesis Rabbah*.[38]
>
> *And* humanity *was saddened* in God's *heart*: God intended to make him (humanity) sad. This is the interpretation of *Onqelos*.
>
> Another interpretation:
>
> *And the Lord regretted*: God's intention changed from mercy to justice. God (now) considered what to do with the humanity that he had made on earth. Likewise wherever in Scripture the expression *nihum* is used, it means "having second thoughts about what to do. . . ." [Rashi here cites several examples]. In all these verses the verb *n-h-m* denotes a change of mind.
>
> *And his heart was saddened*: God mourned the death of the work of his hands; (the verb was *saddened* means "mourned") just as in the verse (2 Sam 19:3), *the king was saddened by* (that is, mourned the death of) *his son*.
>
> And this I have written in order to refute [or: respond to] the heretics.

[36] *M. Sotah* end, *b. Sotah* 49b. Rashi's comment appears in the margin of the Vilna edition; perhaps *ta'ut shelo* is a misprint for *te'ut yeshu*. See Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic," 48 (= *Mehqarim*, 1:105).

[37] Lit. "the Adam," and so throughout.

[38] *Gen. Rab.* 27:4 (Theodor-Albeck ed., 258).

> A gentile once asked R. Joshua b. Qorha. He said to him, "Do you not believe that the Holy One, blessed be He, foresees the future?" "Yes," he replied. "But it is written and *his heart was saddened.*" R. Joshua said to him, "Have you ever had a son born to you?" "Yes." "And what did you do (when he was born)?" "I rejoiced, and made everyone else rejoice." R. Joshua then said, "And did you not know that your son is destined to die?" The gentile replied, "At a time of rejoicing—let there be rejoicing; at a time of mourning—let there be mourning." R. Joshua said, "Thus too is the way of the Holy One, blessed be He." Even though it is revealed before him that they were destined to sin and die, he did not refrain from creating them, for the sake of the righteous who would later emerge from them.

This passage, which is too long and too rich to be fully unpacked here, has three sections: the first interpretation of the verse; the second interpretation of the verse; and a story featuring a conversation between a gentile and R. Joshua b. Qorha.

One thousand years before Rashi, Philo of Alexandria devoted an essay to the difficulties raised by Gen 6:6. In fact, one does not need to be a philosopher to be troubled by this verse: How can God regret something he has done, and how can God become sad? Is God capable of emotions? Or, in philosophical language, is God mutable?[39] These questions are at the core of Rashi's exegesis. According to Rashi's first interpretation of the verse, God did not regret; rather God took consolation in the fact that he had made Adam a terrestrial creature. God was not saddened; rather God caused humanity to be saddened at the prospect of destruction by the flood. The subject of the verb "was saddened" is not God but humanity. This reading of the verse allows God to be immutable and unmoved. According to Rashi's second interpretation, God indeed did regret; he changed his mind. By applying the attribute of justice rather than the attribute of mercy, God decided to wipe out humanity and mourned the impending death of the work of his hands. In this reading God is mutable and moved. The story about the gentile and R. Joshua revolves around a slightly different but closely related question: Does God know the future? If he does—and of course all pious Jews believe that he does—what can the verse mean when it says that God's *heart was saddened*? Did not God know from the beginning of creation that human sin would necessitate the flood? R. Joshua's answer is that divine lamentation does not necessarily indicate the absence of divine foreknowledge. Just as we celebrate the birth of a baby, even though we know that this new human will eventually die, so too the Holy One, blessed be he, laments the impending death of the humans that he had created, even though he knew all along that this would be their fate.[40]

[39] Philo, *Quod Deus sit immutabilis.*

Between the second interpretation and the story Rashi adds the arresting comment, "And this I have written in order to refute [or: respond to] the heretics (*minim*)." Since Rashi often writes in the first person singular in his Torah commentary,[41] there is nothing particularly unusual about this sentence even if it is not precisely paralleled elsewhere. The sentence raises two problems: who are these *minim*, and what is the antecedent of the word "this"? The answer to the former question depends on the answer to the latter, so I begin with the latter. To what does "this" refer? The first interpretation? The second interpretation? The story? If I could, I would choose the first interpretation, which keeps God philosophically respectable by keeping him immutable and unmoved. Heretics argued that Gen 6:6 illustrates the philosophical crudity and un-Godlike characteristics of the biblical God, and Rashi is responding to them.[42] Alas, this reading, which makes so much sense, is impossible; I do not see how the word "this" can refer back to the first interpretation when it is sandwiched between the second interpretation and the story about the gentile and R. Joshua. The second interpretation and the story are closely connected: in *Genesis Rabbah* they form a single block of material, and both interpret the phrase *was saddened* to mean that God mourned.[43] Therefore Rashi's "this" must refer to the second interpretation and the story together. The heretic to

[40] As the commentators on Rashi observe, the parable does not really work; human mortality is a given for humans, a fact over which we have no control, while God certainly is in control of the fate that is meted out to humans. The commentators also debate how the last line of the story, which Rashi has added to his source (*Genesis Rabbah*), is to be combined with the story: does Rashi intend the line to be a continuation of the reply of R. Joshua? Or, as I have punctuated it above, is it meant to be a comment of Rashi on the story? I cannot pursue these questions here.

[41] See the list of such passages in Chavel's edition of Rashi, 630.

[42] Judah Rosenthal, *Hiwi al-Balkhi: A Comparative Study* (Philadelphia: Dropsie College, 1949), 11.

[43] *Gen. Rab.* 27:4 (Theodor-Albeck ed., 258–59).

whom Rashi is responding must have been arguing, like the gentile in the story, that God's sadness proves that God did not know the future. In response, Rashi says that God did not really feel sad; he mourned, and he mourned that which he knew all along would happen. Rashi thus protects the notion of divine omniscience from the attack of heretics, but apparently neither he nor his heretical interlocutor is perturbed by the regret, hence mutability, of God.

I am not sure that I have explained this Rashi correctly, but one point at least seems clear: the heretics (*minim*) whom Rashi is addressing are not Christians.[44] There is no sign or hint of Christianity anywhere in this passage, or, for that matter, in the story drawn from *Genesis Rabbah*. Bekhor Shor devotes his commentary on Gen 6:6 to a long discussion of divine regret and divine mutability; here too there is no sign or hint that Christianity is the target, and this in the work of a man who, as we have seen, was neither discreet nor cautious in his anti-Christian polemics.[45] I conclude that the *minim* addressed by Rashi are not Christians.[46]

About two hundred years after Rashi, this verse figured in Jewish-Christian polemic. In the middle of the thirteenth century (ca. 1260) in northern France, R. Joseph b. Nathan Official compiled his *Book of Joseph the Zealot*, a veritable encyclopedia of anti-Christian polemic. He systematically reviews the exegesis of those verses of the Hebrew Bible that Christians had adduced in support of their faith; needless to say, the Christian exegesis is always found wanting. On Gen 6:6 he writes that the Christians have argued that this verse, along with others, proves divine mutability: God changes his mind. This is entirely consistent with the idea, say the Christians, that God has withdrawn his Old Testament and replaced it with a new one.[47] This

[44] Poznanski, *Mavo*, xx n. 3. Even Touitou seems to concede this point, albeit tacitly; he once mentions Rashi's reference to *minim* in Genesis 6:6 ("Rashi's Commentary on Genesis," 170), but fails to discuss it anywhere in his article.

[45] Alas, Rashbam's commentary on Gen 6:6, as on most of the early chapters of Genesis, is lost.

[46] If not Christians, then who? I do not know. Perhaps Rashi was addressing some free-thinking Jews of his time and place (cf. nn. 17 and 20 above); perhaps he was addressing in the abstract all heretics, of whatever time and place, who might adduce Gen 6:6 as support for their heretical ideas. Poznanski, *Mavo*, lxix n. 2, is puzzled by the identity of the Jewish heretics denounced by Bekhor Shor.

[47] *Sepher Joseph Hamekane* (ed. J. Rosenthal; Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1970), 37–38 sec. 11.

remarkable argument turns a philosophical liability into a theological asset. Divine mutability is invoked as evidence of Christian truth! I cannot imagine this argument being advanced by Christian schoolmen, who of course believed that God is immutable and that the substitution of the Old Testament by the New was part of the divine plan from the beginning of creation.[48] Perhaps this was a "popular" anti-Jewish argument, advanced by Jewish apostates to Christianity. In any event, R. Joseph responds that God is not mutable and that those biblical verses that seem to suggest that he is are simply examples of "the Torah speaking in common language." R. Joseph then adduces Rashi's first interpretation to show that Gen 6:6 does not, in fact, support the notion of divine mutability. Rashi had thought that his *second* interpretation was a response to *minim*, but R. Joseph realizes that the *first* one is useful in order to rebut Christian claims. The *minim* addressed by Rashi are not Christians.

Rashi's third reference to *minim* is ambiguous. Genesis 1:26 has God say, *Let us make Adam in our image, after our likeness*—why the plural? In his first comment on this verse Rashi argues that God is giving an object lesson in humility, since he made a point of consulting his inferiors, the angelic members of his heavenly court, before creating Adam. He continues in the same vein:

> *Let us make Adam.* Even though they (the angels) did not assist him in the creation of Adam, and there is an opportunity for the heretics to LORD it (over us), (nevertheless) Scripture did not refrain from (using the plural, thus) teaching proper conduct and the measure of humility. (The lesson we are to learn is) that the great should consult and take advice from the small. If it had written, "I shall make Adam," we would not have learned that he spoke with his court, but (we would have concluded that he spoke only) with himself. The refutation of [or: response to] the heretics is written in the next verse, *And God created Adam* (Gen 1:27) (which is) written (in the singular and) not in the plural.

God alone created Adam, as the singular verb in Gen 1:27 makes clear. However, God consulted the angels of his heavenly court before

[48] Divine immutability: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.9, "On the Unchangeableness of God," in *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas* (ed. A. C. Pegis; 2 vols.; New York: Random House, 1945), 1:70–73. The replacement of the Old Law by the New Law was purposeful (and therefore not a symptom of God's change of plan): Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II.1.98.6 (*Basic Writings*, 2:815–16) and II.1.106.3 (*Basic Writings*, 2:952–54).

creating Adam, hence the plural of v. 26. Why did he consult them? In order to teach us proper conduct and the importance of humility: those who are great and powerful should consult their inferiors and should make a point of consulting their inferiors. This vital lesson would have been lost had Scripture written, "I shall make Adam." This lesson is so important that Scripture even used the plural in v. 26, knowing full well that the heretics (*minim*) might use it to support their baseless claim that God did not act alone when creating Adam. Heretics use this verse "to LORD it (over us),"[49] as if Scripture supports their heresy; but the lesson in proper conduct outweighs the threat from the heretics. Thus Rashi.

Rashi, in his usual way, is paraphrasing a talmudic-midrashic source.[50] That text is directed against heretics (*minim*) who believe in "two powers in heaven," that is, in the plurality of Gods. These heretics are not (necessarily) Christians; they are just as likely to be Jews who, like Philo, accept a developed Logos theology or who assign too high a role to angelic intermediaries.[51] As in his commentary on Gen 49:10, perhaps here too Rashi is living in talmudic time. Certainly there is no sign in Rashi's text that his *minim* are Christians or that the heretical theology that they espouse is the doctrine of the Trinity. (Contrast Bekhor Shor, who explicitly polemicizes here against the doctrine of the Trinity.)[52] Even without the presence of Christianity or Christian exegesis, the plural verb and pronouns of Gen 1:26 demand explanation.[53] When Jews became active in anti-Christian polemic they of course used Rashi's explanation to help rebut the christological reading of the verse,[54] but this fact does not demonstrate that Rashi himself intended his exegesis to serve as a response to Christianity. The *minim* addressed by Rashi in his commentary on Gen 1:26 may be Christians but are not necessarily Christians. The text is ambiguous. If we believe that Rashi's

[49] I translate *lirdot* as Rashi understood it; see Rashi on *b. Yoma* 40b.
[50] *Gen. Rab.* 8:8–9 (Theodor-Albeck ed., 61–63); *b. Sanh.* 38b.
[51] Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven* (SJLA 25; Leiden: Brill, 1977), 121–34.
[52] Rashbam here basically follows Rashi (God took counsel with the angels of his heavenly court). Christian exegetes knew—and rejected—this exegesis but did not associate it with Jews; see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.91.4 (*Basic Writings*, 1:877), behind whom ultimately stands Augustine, *Civ.* 16.6.
[53] See, for example, Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 51–52 and 79–80.
[54] *Yosef HaMekane* (Rosenthal ed., 31 sec. 3).

Torah commentary is a response to Christianity, no doubt we will identify these *minim* with Christians and adduce this passage as further proof that Rashi indeed is engaged in anti-Christian polemic. If, as I have been arguing here, we believe that Rashi's Torah commentary is not a response to Christianity, we will not identify these *minim* with Christians, and we will adduce this passage as further proof that Rashi is living in talmudic time.[55]

In sum, in only three passages of his Torah commentary does Rashi refer to *minim*. Of these, one refers to Christians, but that passage does not address Christianity, Christian exegesis, or Christian truth claims. One passage is inspired directly by *Genesis Rabbah* and clearly does not address Christianity. The third passage, also inspired by *Genesis Rabbah*, may be a response to the Christian reading of Gen 1:26, but is not necessarily so. This record cannot be squared with the view that Rashi conceived of his Torah commentary as a response to Christianity. If he had, his responses to *minim* would have been more pointed and more frequent, and the Christian identity of his opponents would have been more evident.

VI. Conclusions

In a recent study of "Rashi's Commentary on Genesis 1–6 in the Context of the Judeo-Christian Controversy," Elazar Touitou, a distinguished and learned interpreter of the exegesis of Rashi's school, argues that in the course of his Torah commentary Rashi "presented a Jewish position in the Jewish-Christian debate."[56] That is, Rashi was aware of Christian teachings and Christian exegesis of Scripture, and, although refraining from overt engagement with Christianity, carefully and deliberately presented interpretations that would be "potentially useful for anti-Christian polemic."[57] For example, Touitou argues that, in order to rebut the Christian doctrines of Original Sin and the Fall, Rashi chose to emphasize that Adam and Eve had sex and became parents while still in the Garden of Eden.[58] Touitou,

[55] Poznanski, *Mavo*, xx n. 3, thinks these *minim* are not Christians.
[56] Touitou, "Rashi's Commentary on Genesis," 183.
[57] Ibid., 170.
[58] This is by far the most convincing of the six conjectures advanced by Touitou, but here again the explanation is not necessary. Rashi is following *Genesis Rabbah*

following the consensus of modern scholarship, sees Rashi as an ardent but tacit defender of the faith throughout his biblical commentaries. In this article I am arguing that the scholarly consensus may well be wrong, at least with regard to Rashi's commentary on the Torah.

That Rashi's commentary on the Torah presents a "Jewish" reading of Scripture hardly needs to be said. That it was exploited by later Jewish apologists and polemicists in their struggle with Christianity also hardly needs to be said. But neither of these self-evident truths proves that the rebuttal of Christianity was on Rashi's agenda when writing his Torah commentary. The *Bavli*, the *Yerushalmi*, and the classical midrashim were also exploited by later writers and thinkers on the prowl for anti-Christian arguments, but no one[59] will suggest that the *Bavli*, the *Yerushalmi*, and the classic midrashim were written for the purpose of rebutting Christianity. Intent and self-consciousness are at the core of the problem before us: did Rashi intend his commentary on the Torah to respond to Christian exegesis? Did Rashi self-consciously shape his exegesis of the Torah so as to rebut Christian truth claims?

(and other sources), which was responding to various clues and problems in the text of Genesis; the ancient exegetes were not necessarily responding to Christianity, and there can be no certainty that Rashi was either. For an excellent discussion see Gary Anderson, "Celibacy or Consummation in the Garden? Reflections on Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Garden of Eden," *HTR* 82 (1989): 121–48, esp. 139: "The rabbinic position cannot be a reaction to a Christian position . . . the rabbinic idea of sexual relations before the fall [is] found in *Jubilees*." Touitou, like others before him, also conjectures that Rashi's comment on Gen 1:1, which defends the claims of the Jews to the land of Israel, is a response to the first crusade of 1096, or perhaps better, a response to the idea of a Christian crusade to reclaim the holy land—hence written long before 1096 ("Rashi's Commentary on Genesis," 171). This conjecture, too, is possible but unnecessary. If Rashi were responding to the Christian (and Muslim) claims to the land of Israel, he should have rewritten his midrashic source to emphasize the superiority of the Jewish claim to those of the "nations." But Rashi does not do this. Instead he defends the Israelites/Jews from the charge that they are "brigands" (on the grounds that they seized the land from the Canaanites) and says nothing about the subsequent claims of other peoples. This midrashic motif is pre-Christian; see not only *Tanh. Gen.* 4a (Buber ed.) and *Gen. Rab.* 1:2 (Theodor-Albeck ed., 4–5), which are Rashi's sources, but also *b. Sanh.* 91a, with the excellent discussion of Hans (Yohanan) Lewy, *Olamot Nifgashim: Studies in Jewish Hellenism* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1969), 60–78 [Hebrew]; German original in *MGWJ* 77 (1933): 84–99 and 172–80.

[59] More accurately: hardly anyone. Some scholars have suggested that *Genesis Rabbah* and *Song of Songs Rabbah* were redacted with Christianity in view.

In the absence of any explicit evidence that would support a positive answer to these questions, the scholarly consensus relies on "what must have been." Surely Rashi "must have" known what the Christians were saying, and surely when writing his commentary on the Torah, the most important books of the Jewish canon, he "must have" had Christian exegesis and truth claims in view.[60] This argument is a logical "vicious circle" that is impossible to break: we assume that Rashi's Torah commentary contains anti-Christian polemic; since the polemic is not obvious to the naked eye, we assume that it must be covert, implicit, disguised; having revealed and decoded the polemic, we pronounce our initial assumption correct. But what if our initial assumption is not correct? What if we assume that Rashi's Torah commentary does not contain anti-Christian polemic? In this case, there is no hidden polemic to discover. Indeed, the absence of explicit polemic betokens the absence of implicit polemic as well. The unambiguous and unmistakable anti-Christian polemic of Rashi on Psalms, and the explicit anti-Christian polemic of Rashbam and Bekhor Shor on the Torah, show what anti-Christian exegesis looks like. Anti-Christian exegesis is not to be found in Rashi's Torah commentary.

Upholders of the scholarly consensus, who argue that Rashi's Torah commentary is a studied if implicit response to Christian exegesis, will no doubt seek to buttress their position by appealing to the cultural connection between the Jews and Christians of northern France and the Rhineland. Scholarship of previous generations tended to emphasize the cultural isolation of Ashkenazic Jewry, in contrast with the fruitful symbiosis that characterized Jewish life in "golden age" Spain, but more recent work tends to emphasize the cultural connectedness of Ashkenazic Judaism as well. The cultural trends in Christian society in the eleventh and twelfth centuries produced analogous trends in Jewish society as well.[61] Therefore it is perfectly

[60] Kamin (*Jews and Christians*, 32) and Krauss-Horbury (*Controversy*, 83) are forthright on this point. Baer is one long exercise in "what must have been" ("Rashi and the Historical Reality of his Time"); against Baer see the strictures of Grossman, *Early Sages*, 161.

[61] See, e.g., Touitou, "Exegetical Method"; Ivan Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Yisrael Yuval, "*Two Nations in your Womb*" (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2000) [Hebrew]; Ivan Marcus, "A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis: The Culture of Early Ashkenaz," in *Cultures of the Jews* (ed. D. Biale; New York: Schocken, 2002), 449–516.

reasonable to assume that Rashi "must have" known what the Christians were saying and doing, and "must have" intended to respond to them.

I am not advocating a return to the "isolationist" scholarship of yesteryear; Ashkenazic Judaism must be studied within the context of its time and place. I do not dispute the assumption that Rashi must have known what Christians were saying and doing. I am simply disputing the assumption that Rashi's knowledge of Christianity was a formative factor in his composition of his Torah commentary. Of course Rashi must have known Christianity, but did he feel a need to respond to it? We can just as easily assume the negative as the positive. In writing his Torah commentary, Rashi was not following a model; his work is completely unprecedented in the history of Judaism. What assumptions can we bring to the interpretation of such an innovative work? I do not know, but I do know that a convincing argument needs evidence, and evidence for Rashi's concern with Christianity in his Torah commentary is absent. Surely the burden of proof is upon those who would have us believe that Rashi's Torah commentary is a response to Christianity; they have no proof.

Why then does Rashi care about Christian exegesis in his commentary on Psalms? Why the contrast between Rashi on the Torah and Rashi on the Psalms?[62] I am not sure of the answer, but I can see two possible solutions, each entailing its own problems and difficulties. First possible solution: perhaps Rashi privileged the Torah over the rest of the Bible. Perhaps he conceived of the Torah as the Jewish book par excellence, so much so that in his mind Christian exegesis could be ignored. No Christian argument concerning the Torah needed to be taken seriously. The rest of the Tanakh, however, was a different matter altogether, for here, especially in Isaiah and Psalms, Christians claimed to find the outlines of their faith, and the Jewish exegetical tradition was much thinner than for the Torah. In his commentaries on these books Rashi turned polemicist. This suggestion awaits full discussion; without a substantive

[62] The contrast between Rashi on Psalms and Rashi on the Torah exists even if my thesis is incorrect. I need to explain why Rashi on the Torah paid no attention to Christianity while Rashi on Psalms polemicized against it. Upholders of the consensus need to explain why Rashi on the Torah polemicized against Christianity discreetly and implicitly while Rashi on Psalms did so unambiguously and unmistakably.

grounding in Rashi's text it seems to suffer from the same logical circularity against which I have been arguing in this paper.

Second possible solution: perhaps the events of 1096 marked a change in Rashi's attitude towards Christianity. In that year the first crusade caused great destruction and loss of life in many of the Jewish communities of the Rhineland, and Ashkenazic Jews in general began to perceive themselves as a persecuted lot, a people of holy martyrs and sacrificial victims. Perhaps in this environment Rashi developed hostility towards Christianity, an attitude that manifested itself in his commentaries on Psalms and other books of the Prophets and Writings. This explanation might work if we knew the chronology of Rashi's commentaries, and if we could be sure that 1096 marked a change in Rashi's worldview. As to the former point, Poznanski makes the reasonable assumption that Rashi began with the commentary on the Torah and then proceeded to the other biblical books, more or less in order.[63] If so, we may safely assume that the Torah commentary was substantially complete—aside from revisions and additions[64]—long before 1096. May we assume that all of the anti-Christian passages in Rashi's commentaries, including the commentary on Psalms, were written or added after 1096? This assumption is certainly possible, but depends on the fact that 1096 was a pivotal year for Rashi—was it? Abraham Berliner, the editor of the first modern edition of Rashi's Torah commentary, a great scholar, and an expert in all of Rashi's oeuvre, could find only one passage in all of Rashi's commentaries that alluded to the events of 1096. Later scholars, of course, using a looser set of criteria, perhaps, found many additional passages.[65] The repercussions of the

[63] Poznanski, *Mavo*, xiv.

[64] Rashbam's comment cited above at n. 2 implies that Rashi did not revise his Torah commentary; on additions and revisions see Grossman, *Early Sages*, 210–12.

[65] According to Abraham Berliner, the comment on Isa 53:9 is "the only place" in which Rashi refers to the events of 1096; see his, "The Origins of the Interpretations of Rashi," in *Sefer Rashi*, 129–64, esp. 155 [Hebrew] (trans. of *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Raschi-Commentare* [Berlin: E. Rosenstein, 1903]). Other scholars see traces of 1096 in many other passages as well, all of them from the Prophets and Writings. See, e.g., Bernard Weinryb, "Rashi against the background of his Epoch," in *Rashi Anniversary Volume* (Texts and Studies 1; ed. H. L. Ginsberg; New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1941), 39–46, esp. 40 n. 7, and Baer, "Rashi and the Historical Reality of his Time," 495–501 (followed by Awerbuch).

events of 1096, and the extent of anti-Christian polemic, in Rashi's commentaries on the Prophets and the Writings—these questions merit renewed investigation.

In any case, however it is explained, there is a disparity between Rashi on the Torah and Rashi on the Psalms. Rashi on the Psalms, like Rashbam and Bekhor Shor on the Torah, refutes Christian exegesis and Christian truth claims, but Rashi on the Torah does not. Does Rashi's Torah commentary respond to Christianity? In the absence of any evidence that it did, the answer must be that it did not.

RASHI AND IBN EZRA ON THE *HITPAEL*: *PESHAT* IN THE MEDIEVAL DISPUTES OF HEBREW GRAMMAR

ISAIAH TESHIMA

In the 11th and the 12th centuries, Jewish exegetes known as *pashtanim* began to seek the literal meaning of the biblical text.[1] The greatest of these exegetes were Rashi and Ibn Ezra, each devoted to establishing the *peshat* of the Bible, the plain or literal meaning.[2] However, their quest for this literal meaning yielded very different understandings of the Bible. While an explanation of the differences can be approached from many angles, I would like to focus on aspect in Hebrew grammar as a factor which inspired different interpretations of the literal meaning of the text.

Scholars believe that the scientific study of the Hebrew language began in the 10th century with Saadiah Gaon, reaching its apotheosis in Spain as early as the middle of the 11th century.[3] In particular,

[1] There is extensive literature on the history of Jewish exegesis. In particular, I recommend the following: Menahem Haran, "Midrashic and Literal Exegesis and the Critical Method in Biblical Research," in *Studies in Bible* (ed. S. Japhet; ScrHier 31; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 45–56; Isaac L. Seeligmann, "Voraussetzungen der Midraschexegese," in *Congress Volume: Copenhagen 1953* (VTSup 1; Leiden: Brill, 1953), 150–81; Uriel Simon, "The Spanish School of Biblical Interpretation," in *Moreshet Sepharad: The Sepharadi Legacy* (ed. H. Beinart; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992), 1:115–239.

[2] The definition of the idea "peshat" is not self-evident. The difficulties are argued by Sarah Kamin with an overview of the debates of modern time such as between Abraham Geiger and Zacharias Frankel; see her *Rashi's Exegetical Categorization: in Respect to the Distinction between Peshat and Derash* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1986), 11–22 [Hebrew].

[3] The origin of Hebrew grammar is an interesting question. Profiat Duran (15th cent.) considers Judah b. Hayyuj and Abdul Walid ibn Janaḥ to be the first Hebrew grammarians. See *Maase Efod* (ed. J. Friendländer; Vienna: J. Holzwarth, 1865), 16. Whereas, Richard Simon and Hartwig Hirschfeld regard Saadiah to be the first Jewish grammarian. See Richard Simon, *A Critical History of the Old Testament* (3 vols.; London: Walter Davis, 1682), 1:192–93; Hartwig Hirschfeld, *Literary History of Hebrew Grammarians and Lexicographers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 11. But, the present state of Hebrew scholarship tends to consider the origin even before Saadiah. See Angel Sáenz-Badillos, "Hebrew Philology in Sefarad: The State of the Question," in *Hebrew Scholarship and the Medieval World* (ed. N. de Lange; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 38–59.