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TRINITARIAN AND MULTIPLICITY POLEMICS IN THE BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES OF RASHI, RASHBAM, AND BEKHOR SHOR

I

The Old Testament was the single most important source for proof-texts in Jewish-Christian polemics of the High Middle Ages. Christians attempted to show that doctrines such as the Trinity and virgin birth were implicit and sometimes even explicit in Biblical verses. Moreover, the Old Testament foretold the suffering to be endured by the Jews following their repudiation of Jesus, and the ultimate salvation that Jesus would bring to his followers. The use of the Old Testament in this manner was not an innovation of the Christian polemicists in the High Middle Ages. Since the days of the Church Fathers, leading Christians had adduced Old Testament verses as proofs for their doctrines and had even collected them in literary form.¹

From the Jews' standpoint, the Old Testament *was* their doctrine. Thus, the task of the Jewish polemicist was to demonstrate how a given Biblical verse does not support the proof which the Christians wished to derive from it. To cite but one example, F. Talmage has shown that R. David Kimḥi, a leading medieval Biblical commentator and polemicist, used five types of arguments to disprove christological interpretations of various Biblical verses.² Of course, it was only the Old

Testament which could be cited by both Jewish and Christian polemicists for their completely opposed purposes. Unlike the New Testament, the Old Testament possessed validity (if not the same significance) for both Jews and Christians. Thus, any decisive victory or defeat in the battle of polemics could only be achieved on the battlefield of the Old Testament.³

Any student of history is aware of the magnitude and multitude of public and private Jewish-Christian disputations throughout the Middle Ages. These disputations show extensive use of the Old Testament by both Jewish and Christian disputants. Together with collections of important polemical verses compiled by both Jews and Christians, these disputations helped individuals defend or understand their religion in the face of private polemical challenges. As scholars have shown, it is clear that medieval Jewish commentators used their Biblical commentaries to provide polemical responses or interpretations for their readers.⁴ If a Jew could respond to the Christians' interpretations of Biblical verses, he could remove the very heart of Christian polemics.

The Northern French Biblical exegetes in the eleventh and twelfth centuries often commented on the verses used as proof-texts for doctrines of Christianity. Occasionally, these exegetes clearly indicated a polemical interpretation by using the phrase *teshuvah laminim* (answer or refutation to the Christians) or by explicitly mentioning the Christian interpretation of the verse and its incorrectness.⁵ More often, however, we find that a particular exegete interpreted a christological proof-text in a manner which refuted the Christian interpretation, without mentioning the Christians or their doctrine.

Several questions arise from such interpretations. Did the exegete write his comment for polemical purposes or solely for exegetical purposes? Scholars have already argued the degree of priority which Rashi attached to polemical interpretations in his works. Indeed, Y. Baer implies that whole sections of Rashi's commentaries were primarily intended as polemical refutations.⁶ The problem is intensified when we consider that many comments did not directly refute the christological

proofs but merely presented alternate explanations for a Biblical verse or section.⁷ Is there a particular style or phrasing which an exegete developed to present polemical material?

This study will not resolve the questions of polemical priority and intent in the commentaries of the Northern French exegetes. We will indicate and analyze the Trinitarian and multiplicity polemics which may be found in the commentaries to the Pentateuch of Rashi, Rashbam and Bekhor Shor, and attempt to formulate their styles of interpreting Trinitarian proof-texts. As we will see, the Christian proof-texts for the doctrine of the Trinity are based, for the most part, on apparent inconsistencies in Biblical grammar. For example, Genesis 1:26 reads:

And God said 'Let us make man in our image . . .

The plural verb and pronouns used when referring to God seem to offer an excellent proof-text for the doctrine of the Trinity which states in part that there is only one God of one substance and one Divine nature and that this God has three coequal Persons — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (as formulated by Tertullian — *tres personae una substantia*).⁸ For a Jewish exegete, however, who agreed that there is only one God of one Divine nature, but of course deemed the concept of three Persons to be incompatible with the concept of God's unity, this verse presents an exegetical problem. How can the Biblical text use a plural verb when referring to God? Clearly, Rashi, Rashbam and Bekhor Shor, whose primary exegetical goal is to arrive at *peshuto shel mikra*, the 'simplest' meaning of a Biblical verse,⁹ must resolve this problem. But the resolution will also serve as a refutation to the Christian interpretation. Thus, in the case of Trinitarian proof-texts, *peshat* and polemics coincide.¹⁰ Our investigation will undoubtedly shed some light on the problems we have outlined and provide material for further study.

II

Before we analyze the interpretations of the Northern

French exegetes, we must first review two Talmudic *sugyot* which deal with the refutation of Biblical proof-texts for multiplicity. The refuters in each *sugya*, R. Yoḥanan in B.T. *Sanhedrin* 38b and R. Simlai in P.T. *Berakhot* 9:1, were both second generation Palestinian Amoraim. In both sources, the *minim*, whom we will identify shortly, would present the Amora with a Biblical verse which implied multiplicity. The Amora would refute the proof from another verse, usually in close proximity to, or on the same topic as, the verse presented. He would show that grammatically, the Bible refers to one God with no multiplicity implied. Let us look once again at Genesis 1:26. The respective Amoraim were asked if multiplicity was not implied by God's saying,

Let us make man in our image . . .

The Amoraim responded that in the very next verse we read,

And God created (in Hebrew, third person singular verb form) man in His image . . .¹¹

The creation of man was done by one God. Therefore, the plural form in 1:26 must be there for a different reason. This process is described by both Amoraim as follows: "Any source perverted (to imply multiplicity) by the *minim* can be answered by source material from very close proximity" (lit. *teshuvatan bezidan*).¹²

Each Talmudic source discusses several 'multiplicity' verses. The Palestinian source also appears in several midrashim with some enlightening variant readings.¹³ We must now attempt to identify the *minim* who asked the questions in these sources. Were these *minim* Christians or members of some heretical group? It should be noted that while the Northern French exegetes were responding to known Christian polemics,¹⁴ even if the Talmudic *minim* were definitely not Christians, we can be sure that the Northern French exegetes would in some way make use of these sources.

Most texts record that *minim* asked the questions. Variant readings of the Palestinian text record *to'im* (mistaken ones).

Rashi in his commentary on the Babylonian source has R. Yoḥanan saying that "any source perverted by the *zedokim* . . . can be answered . . ." *Min* literally means heretic. It is used in many different contexts in Talmudic literature. The exact religion or ideology which *minim* represents is a matter of great controversy among historians and undoubtedly depends on and varies with the context and period of the sources in which this term appears. According to R.T. Herford, ". . . wherever the Talmud or Midrash mentions *minim*, the authors of the statement intended to refer to Jewish Christians."¹⁵ However, a *min* may be an heretical Jew who believes, for example, in *shtei reshuyot* (dualism or multiplicity of the Divine being).¹⁶ This term might also refer to an outright dualist. Parenthetically, with regard to the readings *to'im* and *zedokim*, one must examine the possibility of censorship regarding these sources. The former term is milder than *min* and the latter often refers not to the Second Commonwealth sect but is a general name for heretics.¹⁷

Whether the *minim* in these sources are those who believe in the Trinity or merely in two gods (dualists) is of serious consequence. There is a fundamental difference between the multiplicity presumed in the Trinity and the multiplicity presumed in dualism. Believers in the doctrine of the Trinity are insistent that while each of the three Persons is God, still there is only one God. Thus, the fact that in Genesis 1:26 God says "Let us make . . ." and in 1:27 we read "And God created" (singular verb) might not serve to refute a Trinitarian proof-text. On the contrary, believers in the Trinity would be quick to point out that God can be represented by singularity or multiplicity, and the two representations may be used interchangeably. Indeed, this concept formed an important question of the Christian to whom Jacob b. Reuben responded in his *Milhamot HaShem* (France, 1170). Within the Biblical account of Creation, both singular and plural verbs are used to describe God's actions. The Christian explains this as showing that the One is included in the Three Persons and the Three are included in the One; they are inseparable. Theoretically, the Christian might res-

pond similarly to the Amoraic solution concerning Genesis 1:26. The same reasoning might be applied to some of the Talmudic refutations of other proof-texts of the *minim*.¹⁸

Interestingly, if the questioners were dualists who believed in separate deities, the Talmudic answers would suffice. If the multiplicity in one verse could be contradicted by the unity of God in a related verse, the dualists would have nothing more to say. The possibility that the questioners were dualists is indicated by their initial question to R. Simlai: "How many gods created the world?" This would not be the phrasing of a believer in the Trinity.¹⁹ On the other hand, there are also questions from verses which mention three names of God, which fit more closely with the belief of the Christians. In any event, not all the Talmudic *teshuvot bezidan* are totally conclusive refutations of Christian polemicists.²⁰

If multiplicity was not implied in the verses cited by the *minim*, what accounts for the wording in these verses which prompted the *minim* to ask their questions? This was asked of R. Simlai by his students: "You were able to push them (the *minim*) away; but what will you answer to us (regarding the explanation of the verse)?" In each verse, R. Simlai shows a particular nuance which can be learned from the plural form. The Babylonian Talmud answers its own question as to why the plural forms are used by citing another principle of R. Yoḥanan, that God does not do anything without consulting his *pamalya shel ma'alah* (heavenly entourage). While this answer might satisfactorily explain the use of the plural verb in Genesis 1:26, this answer does not explain the problems in every verse cited as an example of multiplicity within God.

The efforts to refute the claims of the *minim* were undoubtedly undertaken because of the serious difficulties which their charges presented. Their questions were not the results of textual emendation or interpolation. The seventy elders who, according to tradition (B.T. *Meg.* 9a), translated the Torah into Greek for Ptolemy II also had to deal with the problem presented by Genesis 1:26. Thus, the Greek translation read: "I will make man . . ." ²¹ The reliance of the Northern French ex-

egetes on these Talmudic sources will depend on each exegete's use in general of sources of this type and perhaps on the conclusiveness of the suggested answers. We will also see that they too recognized that there were two aspects to the interpreting of these verses: refutation of the Christian interpretation and presenting an interpretation which explains the repetition of names of God or use of a plural verb when referring to God.

III

Let us now look at how Rashi, Rashbam and Bekhor Shor dealt with the problems in Genesis 1:26. The Christian polemical interpretation is: The Father said to the Son — "Let us make man in our image . . ." ²² Rashi comments that "Let us make . . ." refers to God and the angels. The angels are being consulted for a twofold reason — to signify God's modesty, and to show that angels were jealous since man was made in their image. ²³ Therefore, just as God consulted with the Divine agencies (*Pamalya shel ma'alah*) at other times, here too he consulted with them. Rashi interprets that God was asking 'permission' of the angels to create man. God was saying to the angels in effect, — "Just as there are beings in the heavens who resemble Me, namely you the angels, so too there should be beings in the lower world who resemble My form to preserve the balance of the Creation." In the second part of his lengthy comment on this verse, Rashi states that God said "Let us make . . ." to the angels even though they had no actual role in man's creation. Although this wording would give the *minim* ²⁴ an opportunity to cite this verse as a proof-text for multiplicity, the Torah did not wish that the readers miss the lesson that a superior being should still consult with his underlings. Had the verse been written "I will make . . ." we would not have known that God was talking to his court (lit. *beit din*). In any event, Rashi continues, the answer to the multiplicity proof of the *minim* is found in the very next verse (lit. *teshuvah bezido*) — "And God created man . . ." In this verse, a singular Hebrew verb is used.

From his comments, it is clear that Rashi was aware of the

polemical significance of this verse. He mentions the standard Talmudic refutation of the multiplicity interpretation of this verse. Rashi, as is his exegetical tendency,²⁵ uses Talmudic material to arrive at *peshuto shel mikra*. He gives R. Yoḥanan's explanation for the plural verb, that God was consulting His heavenly entourage. Rashi goes further and gives two reasons for the consultation in this case, both of which have Talmudic or midrashic sources.²⁶ The first two of several 'answers' for this verse which R. Yosef Official gives in his handbook for refutation of polemics, *Sefer Yosef HaMekane* (N. France, 1275), are the Talmudic *teshuvah bezido* and Rashi's comment and examples that God was consulting with his *pamalya*.²⁷ Thus, even the *peshat* aspect of Rashi's comment is valuable polemical material.

Rashbam explains Genesis 1:26 by inserting a phrase: "And God said to his angels, Let us make man . . ." He also gives other examples of this type of consultation.²⁸ Thus Rashbam, without referring to the Christian polemicists, has certainly contested their explanation of the plural verb. Moreover, Jacob b. Reuben was asked by his Christian questioner about the phrase 'in our image' in Genesis 1:26. The Christian explained that the Father said to the Son, "Let us make man in our image," namely in the image of the Trinity. This Trinity reference is strengthened by 1:27 — "And God created man in His image . . ." Here for the Christian was an expression of God as three and God as one! Jacob b. Reuben answered by saying that 'in our image' cannot refer to God Himself because He has no image or form. Similarly Rashbam explains that 'in our image' refers only to the angels. He explains 1:27 as follows: "And God created man in his own image which was the image of the angels . . ."²⁹ Thus the Trinitarian references in these two verses are removed by Rashbam.

Bekhor Shor has several different comments on this verse.³⁰ If a Christian says that the plural verb and the plural possessive in the phrase, "And God said, Let us make man in our image," show that the subject, God, is plural (i.e. the

Trinity), one should answer that we find many singular subjects modified by plural verbs and vice versa in the Bible. Thus, although God is expressed in Hebrew by *E-lohim*, which grammatically seems to be a plural form, it is a singular word in this verse. Another explanation for the plural verb is that God consults with His entourage, as can be seen in other instances.³¹ God and His heavenly court are not discussing the creation of man in their image in terms of any actual characteristics, because no images or forms can be ascribed to God. Rather, God says to the angels, "Let us make man in our image insofar as we dominate and rule over others. So too, let man's image be one of dominion and rulership." Or, "Let us make man in the image which we have selected." Indeed, the verb 'to make' implies modification rather than creation. Just as God gave dominion over others to the angels and heavenly beings, he wishes to give it to man as well. Therefore, it is proper for God to consult the angels. He is not consulting them about creation, in which they have no role. He is consulting them regarding the placement of man in an important worldly position, a situation where angels can play a role. Thus in 1:27, "And God created" is clearly understood. Interestingly, Bekhor Shor suggests that the phrase 'in the image of God' which in that verse is expressed by *bezelem E-lohim* uses *elohim* as judge. That is to say, God created man in His image, in the image of a judge (a figure of authority).³² This is the correct exegesis of the verse according to Bekhor Shor.³³

Bekhor Shor then once again addresses himself directly to the Christian claim. "And to their (the Christians') foolishness that the verse (1:26) refers to the Trinity, and therefore 'Let us' is written, answer them the following . . ." According to the doctrine of the Trinity, all the Persons are equal. Each one is God.³⁴ If so, why does one (the Father) have to direct the other (the Son) and call them (all three Persons) together? All the Persons should have had the same thought and action in mind! Here Bekhor Shor has borrowed a tactic of the Jewish polemicists. A good way to disprove the Christian interpretation of a verse is to show how that interpretation is at odds with

known Christian doctrine. In order to conform to the doctrine of the Trinity, the verse should have read: "And they said, Let us make man . . ." In its present singular form, the verb shows that one God was summoning the others.³⁵

A verse which presents a problem similar to that of 1:26 is Genesis 11:7. Referring to the treatment of the builders of the tower of Babel, God says:

Let us go down and mix up their languages . . .

The elders who composed the Septuagint were compelled to translate the verb in the singular to eliminate the problem which the Hebrew text presented.³⁶ While several of the Northern French exegetes comment elsewhere that a singular subject-plural verb form is not unknown in Biblical Hebrew, Rashi is the only one who comments on the verse itself. In a statement very similar to his comment on 1:26, Rashi explains that God consulted with His heavenly court out of His great modesty. Interestingly, this verse was one of those presented to R. Yoḥanan by the *minim*. The *teshuvah bezido* which R. Yoḥanan gives from Genesis 11:5:

And God went down (singular verb) to view the tower.

The reason for the plural verb is then explained more fully by R. Yoḥanan's principle of God's consulting with his *pamalya*. While this verse and refutation are not mentioned in any of the handbooks of polemical refutation, the polemical significance of Rashi's comment is certainly evident. What must be further investigated is Rashi's use of the phrase "*beit din*" both here and in Genesis 1:26.

In his commentary to Genesis 3:22,

And God said, Verily man has become like one of us . . .

R. Yosef Bekhor Shor first cites the Talmudic explanation of the plural form using Rashi's phraseology. It is the modest manner of God that had Him consult with His servants (the angels). Furthermore, it is the way of modest figures to refer to

their servants as equals. Then, Bekhor Shor refers specifically to believers in the Trinity. If a Christian claims that this verse implies the doctrine of the Trinity because of the plural pronoun, how does he explain the singular verb at the beginning of the verse (And God said . . .)? This verb form shows, for a Christian, that one of the Persons was the leader. But according to the doctrine of the Trinity, all three Persons are equal! For the Christian, the verse should have read: "And They (the Trinity) said,"³⁷ 'Verily man has become like one of us . . .'

R. Joseph Bekhor Shor is the only Northern French exegete to comment on Genesis 3:22 for its significance as a Trinitarian proof-text. We also do not find this verse discussed in the medieval Jewish handbooks of Christian polemics.³⁸ Yet, from the direct response of Bekhor Shor, it may be assumed that someone proposed this verse to him or he overheard such a proposal of this verse as a Trinitarian proof-text. The same reasoning might hold true for Rashi's unique comment on the previous verse. The question remains as to what Rashi and Rashbam do with Genesis 3:22. By not commenting on it in any way to explain the plural pronoun, Rashi seems to be ignoring a *peshat* problem. His comment on this verse, found almost identically in the commentary of Pseudo-Jonathan, is that God is saying, "Just as I am unique in heaven, man is unique on earth (since he is the only earthly creature to know the difference between good and evil)." Coincidentally, the comparing of God's uniqueness in heaven and man's uniqueness on earth is also found in Rashi's comment on Genesis 1:26. But Rashi's comment here does not explain the use of the plural pronoun. Perhaps Rashi and others are relying on the *pamalya* concept and feel that they do not have to belabor its usage. Or perhaps they are relying on a simple answer which would explain all such plural forms. It is quoted in *Sefer Yosef HaMekane* on Genesis 1:26 — "I have heard that it is the way of great men to speak in the plural, or colloquially, to use the 'royal we'."

A different, but glaring, grammatical problem is presented by Genesis 19:24 —

And God rained down sulfur and fire from God from heaven.

The repetition of God's name appears to be superfluous. The Christians interpret this verse as referring to the Father and the Son, who are both called God.³⁹ This verse is also discussed in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 38b). A *min* suggested to R. Yishma'el b. Yose that a pronoun would have sufficed at the end of the sentence. The repetition of God's name indicates multiplicity. The answer, which originated with R. Meir and became known to many people, was from Genesis 4:23:

And Lemekh said to his wives . . . Wives of Lemekh, hear my statement . . .

This verse demonstrates that it is a convention of Biblical Hebrew to repeat the subject's name rather than use a pronoun.

Rashi quotes this principle of Biblical grammar without mentioning a source. Indeed, the midrash quotes this principle without mentioning its value for polemics. Both this principle and *teshuvah be'zido* are direct refutations of the Christian interpretations. They show that a particular verse, in its most accurate interpretation, does not indicate multiplicity. There is an important difference, however, between using *teshuvah be'zido* for refutation and using principles of Biblical grammar. Using the former method does not explain the unusual form found in a particular verse. It merely shows that the Christian explanation regarding that unusual form is incorrect. Using rules of Biblical grammar for refutation, however, accomplishes two goals. The Christian interpretation is refuted. Moreover, the existence of a grammatical anomaly, such as the use of a plural verb with a singular subject, or, as in Genesis 19:24, the repetition of a subject rather than use of a pronoun, is explained.

Rashbam's interpretation of Genesis 19:24 is taken from a different midrashic explanation. The first name of God in this verse refers to the angel Gabriel while the second name of God refers to God Himself. *Hizkuni* explains that Gabriel is represented by the first name of God because he was the angel in charge of fire. This explanation and Rashi's are mutually ex-

clusive. For Rashi, the first name of God is for God Himself; for Rashbam it represents Gabriel. On the one hand, Rashbam's solution for the grammatical problem makes the text less awkward. On the other hand, it requires the introduction of extraneous information — that Gabriel is called by God's name. This use of midrashic information is not usual for Rashbam. In any event, Rashbam at least gives an alternate explanation for the two names of God in the verse. This explanation does not refute the Christian interpretation. They can merely substitute Jesus' name for Gabriel's. The author of *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan* (Germany, 1300)⁴⁰ refutes the Christian interpretation in two ways: If the Christian interpretation is correct, it would seem that the Son acts at the command of the Father. In addition, where is the third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit? The author then gives an alternate explanation of the verse which is not particularly forceful against the interpretation of the Christians: God rained down via the clouds, which control rainfall, sulfur and fire even though the clouds normally do not perform that function; from God this directive was issued. Bekhor Shor states that it is explicit in '*halakhah*' (perhaps the Talmud or the explicit rules of Biblical grammar) that repetition of the subject is proper usage (as with the wives of Lemekh), and in this case, "this is *peshat* . . ." This resolution of the grammatical problem can be automatically used as a polemical refutation, as could any Jewish resolution of the problem.

The plural nature of the word *elohim* and its use as a name of God is also the subject of exegetical polemics. Of course, Christians point to this word as a clear sign of multiplicity within God, particularly when God is called by this name and a plural verb is used. Such is the case of Genesis 35:7 —

... there, God (*E-lohim*) appeared (plural verb) to him (Jacob) . . .

The Talmud gives a *teshuvah bezido*; but R. Yohanan's explanation that God consults with His *pamalya* does not explain the use of the plural verb in this case. Rashi comments that we often find in the Bible the word *elohim* used not as a name of

God but meaning master or lord, modified by a plural part of speech. In some cases, only one master is being represented by *E-lohim*; still a plural modifier is used. Thus, when *E-lohim* is used as a name of God, Who is obviously one, we should not be surprised if we find a plural verb used. An almost identical comment, in which many examples are cited, is made by Rashi on Genesis 20:13 —

When God (*E-lohim*) led (plural verb) me from my father's house.

The convention of Biblical grammar which Rashi uses to explain the plural form in this verse obviously will refute the explanation of Christian polemicists. R. Yosef Bekhor Shor explains that *elohim* in Genesis 20:13 refers not to the unique God of Israel, but to the many heathen gods. He interprets the verse as follows: "When the heathen gods led me from my father's house . . ." Abraham states that he left his father's house in order to escape these gods. On Genesis 35:7, Bekhor Shor comments that both God and His angels appeared to Jacob; hence the plural verb is used. In his comment on Genesis 1:26, he mentions that the *minim* try to cite proofs of multiplicity within God from verses where *E-lohim*, meaning God, is modified by a plural part of speech. As Rashi had done, he shows that this form is found many times in Biblical Hebrew and therefore cannot be used as a proof by Christian polemicists.⁴¹

Another category of Biblical verses cited by the Christians as Trinitarian proof-texts centers around a different type of textual difficulty. It consists of verses which repeat God's name, or descriptions of God, for no apparent purpose. The best example is Deuteronomy 6:4, which, according to Jewish tradition, is translated "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One." Christian polemicists maintained that the three names of God in this verse represent the three Persons, and furthermore, the verse tells us that they are one. The opposing Jewish and Christian translations are based on the fact that this verse does not actually contain any form of the verb "to be." The omission of the verb is easily explained for the Jews. In

Hebrew, the present tense of the verb "to be" is always omitted when followed by predicate nominatives or adjectives. Thus, the Jewish translation is the only correct one based on the Hebrew language. The Christians interpret the verse literally. The verse for them reads — Hear O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is one.

Rashi, in his comment on this verse, simply presents the correct interpretation with a small embellishment. God who is our God now and not the God in the eyes of the other nations will someday be the God for all, as noted by the prophet Zekhariah . . .⁴² Rashbam writes: "God who is our God and we have no God except Him; He is one, you may worship only Him and no other." Once again, the simple explanations of Rashi and Rashbam also give the Jewish answer to the Christian interpretations. R. Yosef HaMekane uses the simple translation of the verse to respond very directly to the Christian polemicists — God is our God; and that God which is ours, He is one — He is not composed of a Trinity.⁴³ It is interesting to note that, as Maimonides points out, this verse, which in Jewish tradition is the most important one for stressing the unity and oneness of God, is in the Christian tradition an Old Testament proof-text for the Trinity.⁴⁴

Bekhor Shor also maintains that the verse of *Shema Yisrael* specifically denies the doctrine of the Trinity.⁴⁵ He first shows that the verse contains three names of God to show that God, who is the God of Israel, is one; He is not one of many gods. And for those who claim that the three names of God are present in this verse to describe the Trinity, (namely three who are one God), there is a *teshuvah bezido*. In the very next verse we read: "And you shall love the Lord (your) God . . ." Only two names of God are mentioned in this verse. According to the doctrine of the Trinity, either one or three names should have been mentioned in this verse, if in fact this section of the Torah refers to the Trinity.⁴⁶ Note that Bekhor Shor borrows the phrase *teshuvah bezido* but certainly does not use it as the Talmud does. Thus, the verse must instead mean: And you shall love the Lord who is your God. Just as 6:4 doesn't refer to

the Trinity, so too 6:5 speaks of only one God. Bekhor Shor closes with a sharp attack on the doctrine of the Trinity. According to the Christians, 6:5 as it appears would have to be saying that every human should love two Persons of the Trinity. The third Person seems to be missing. It must be that the Person who was separated from the other two, and entered Mary's womb (i.e. Jesus), should not be loved!

There is one remaining Trinitarian proof-text in the Pentateuch which we must examine. In Genesis 18:1, God appears to Abraham, and in 18:2 we read that Abraham looked up and saw three people standing over him. Christian polemicists claimed that the three people who seem to be related to the appearance of God to Abraham represent the three Persons of the Trinity.⁴⁷ Rashi, using the midrash, identifies the three people as three angels. Rashbam maintains that 18:2 explains 18:1 — God appeared to Abraham in the form of the angels which he sent.⁴⁸ Rashbam cites several Biblical verses in which angels are referred to by the name of God. The explanations of Rashi and Rashbam do not refute the Christian explanation; they merely present an alternate explanation. It should be noted that the Christian use of 18:2 as a Trinitarian proof-text does not begin with a *peshat* problem as was the case with all the proof-texts presented thus far. They take advantage of the juxtaposition of God's name and the phrase 'three people' (*lit. sheloshah anashim*). Yet there is a *peshat* problem in these two verses which leads Rashi and Rashbam to identify the three people as they do. Indeed, Rashi and Rashbam must first deal with two related questions: who are the three people, and how is their entrance connected with God's appearance to Abraham? The answers to these two questions can then be applied to solve a *peshat* problem: it would seem from the text that the three people interrupted God's appearance to Abraham. Rashi resolves this problem by quoting the midrash that the three people were angels who had come to visit Abraham after his circumcision, and that Abraham was justified in politely interrupting his discussion with God in order to take care of them as he would ordinary men. Rashbam, perhaps wishing to insert less into the

text in his search for *peshat*, also asserts that the people were angels, but that these angels are called by the name of God found in the previous verse. Thus the angels are called a Divine name in 18:1 and are called people in 18:2. There was no interruption created by the angels; the story begins with their appearance.

We have mentioned that the explanations of Rashi and Rashbam at best offer an alternative to the Christian explanation. The alternative in this case is not a very strong one since the only difference between the Jewish and Christian explanations is the meaning of the word *anashim*. R. Yosef Bekhor Shor comments that the pure *peshat* is that the *anashim* are humans. This is because the angels do not eat and drink or rest in peoples' homes as the three people in this story did.⁴⁹ Bekhor Shor notes that his interpretation is against the rabbinic tradition that the people were angels. Of course, this tradition cannot be dismissed, and it is perhaps for this reason that Bekhor Shor does not develop his interpretation for any other verses in this section. But he maintains that it is forbidden to teach that they were angels since this may be used by the Christians as a proof that Jesus could eat even though he was divine. As far as this being a Trinitarian proof-text, Bekhor Shor rejects this with a *teshuvah lamini* in his own sarcastic style. If in fact the three figures in the verse are the three Persons of the Trinity, why did Jesus need to enter Mary's womb to receive nourishment? Here the three ate meat and drank without having to enter a womb! On Genesis 19:1, Bekhor Shor cites that verse and another as *teshuvot* which exegetically disprove the Christian claim. In 19:1, two angels (of the three that came to Abraham) arrive in Sodom. If these three figures represent the Trinity, where is the third equal Person? Similarly in 19:13, the angels tell Lot that God sent them to destroy the city. If for the Christians the three Persons are equal, which one gave this order to the other two?⁵⁰ *Milhamot HaShem*, *Sefer Yosef HaMekane* and *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan* cite these or similar refutations of the Trinitarian proof-text of Genesis 18:2.⁵¹

IV

We may conclude from our study that there is a good deal of material in the commentaries of Rashi, Rashbam and Bekhor Shor which could be used by a Jew to refute or suggest alternate explanations to Trinitarian and multiplicity proof-texts. Indeed, there is hardly a verse in the Pentateuch which was used by medieval Christian polemicists to indicate the Biblical acknowledgement of the doctrine of the Trinity, which was not dealt with in some way by these Jewish exegetes. This fact in itself is not surprising. Since Trinitarian proof-texts were formulated in verses which usually presented difficulties to anyone seeking *peshuto shel mikra*, it is to be expected that the Northern French exegetes would attempt to resolve the *peshat* problems and therefore make a contribution to the handbooks of polemical responses as well.

What must be noted is the organized and consistent manner in which each exegete interpreted the various proof-texts. The interpretations were consistent with each exegete's style of Biblical exegesis; but more importantly, there seems to be a certain style of polemical interpretation which each exegete used and certain terms and nuances which characterize the exegetes' interpretations of the proof-texts. If we look at Rashi's comments, we note sources which are for the most part Talmudic or midrashic. This is quite common, since Rashi is committed to using rabbinic sources to arrive at *peshuto shel mikra*.⁵² But looking further, it is very interesting to note that most of these sources are from *sugyot* dealing with the *minim*. Not only does Rashi quote R. Yoḥanan's concept of God consulting with His *pamalya* (Genesis 11:7), but he quotes, at one point, the accompanying *teshuvah bezido*, even though this answer has little exegetical value (Genesis 1:26). Where R. Yoḥanan's concept may not be clearly applicable, Rashi uses rules of Biblical grammar (Genesis 20:13 and 35:7). One of these rules was also used when responding directly to *minim* (Genesis 19:24).

As for Rashbam, he also follows his normal exegetical tendencies and does not rely as heavily on the Talmudic

sources as Rashi does.⁵³ However, the four verses on which we have presented Rashbam's interpretations are characterized by two similarities. In two of the verses, Rashbam inserts extraneous information into his interpretations (Genesis 1:26 and Deuteronomy 6:4). In the remaining two, Rashbam explains that the name *elohim* refers not to God but to angels. He supports this idea with other Biblical verses and with a midrash (Genesis 19:24 and 18:2).

R. Yosef Bekhor Shor obviously was interested in directly refuting the Trinitarian proof-texts which Christians might present. He borrows Rashi's interpretations and even utilizes one for a verse where Rashi himself did not use it (Genesis 3:22). Moreover, aside from two unique textual explanations (Genesis 20:13 and 18:2), Bekhor Shor introduces a completely new approach for dealing with Trinitarian proof-texts. He will question a Christian interpretation because it contradicts Christian doctrine, and will then even ridicule the doctrine (Genesis 1:26, 3:22, 18:1 and Deuteronomy 6:4). While this is a deviation for a member of the Northern French *pashtanim*, the deviation is not uncharacteristic for Bekhor Shor. For R. Yosef Bekhor Shor had several non-exegetical aims which caused him to digress in his commentaries.⁵⁴ The best known is the elimination of anthropomorphisms which are indicated by several verses.⁵⁵ It would seem that refuting Trinitarian proof-texts is another of his aims.⁵⁶ His reason for deviating from *peshuto shel mikra* is readily understood. Arguing against a Christian interpretation from other Christian doctrines is perhaps the most convincing argument which can be cited in a polemical debate.⁵⁷ It is for this reason that such arguments are found so often in Jewish polemical handbooks.

NOTES

1. See, for example, the collection of Isidore of Seville in A.L. Williams, *Adversus Judaeos* (Cambridge, 1935), pp. 282-89. See also James Parkes, *The Conflict of Church and Synagogue* (repr. New York, 1974), p. 99. Cf. Rashi on *Shabbat* 116a, s.v. *debei aveidan*.
2. See F. Talmage, "R. David Kimḥi as Polemicist", *HUCA XXXVIII* (1967), p. 215ff.
3. Cf. *Sefer Yosef HaMekane*, Y. Rosenthal ed., (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 125-38 for a collection of medieval Jewish polemics on the New Testament. Cf. *Sefer Milḥamot HaShem*, Rosenthal ed., (Jerusalem, 1963), chap. 11.
4. See Y. Baer, "Rashi and the Historical Reality of His Time" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* XX (1939) p. 325 ff, E.I.J. Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic in Medieval Bible Commentaries", *The Journal of Jewish Studies* XI (1969), p. 115 ff, and Y. Rosenthal, *Meḥkarim* (Jerusalem, 1966), v. 1, p. 115f.
5. See S. Posnanski, *Mavo Al Ḥakhmei Zarfat Mefarshei Hamikra* (Jerusalem, 1965), pp. XX, XLVIII, CI; and Orlian, *Sefer HaGan of R. Aharon HaKohen* (unpublished dissertation, Yeshiva University, 1973), p. 105, n. 15.
6. Baer, *op. cit.* Cf. Y. Rosenthal, *Meḥkarim*, p. 116.
7. Note, however, that authors of handbooks of Jewish polemics of his period, such as *Sefer Yosef HaMekane*, would cite interpretations which could be used in arguments with Christians no matter what the exegete's intent.
8. *Milḥamot HaShem*, p. 40, n. 25. Cf. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1977), pp. 45-46.
9. The approach and attitude of each of these exegetes towards *peshuto shel mikra* is different. See Posnanski, *op. cit.*, pp. XIV-XVI, XLI-XLV and LIX-LXVIII, and M. Segal, *Parshanut HaMikra*, Jerusalem, 1971, pp. 63-65, 71 and 74-77. On Rashbam, cf. D. Rosin, *R. Samuel b. Meir als Schrifteklerer* (Breslau, 1880), p. 77ff.
10. On the connection between *peshat* and polemics, cf. E.I.J. Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-19. Often, responders to Christian exegetical polemics are called *potrim*; see for but one example *Sefer Yosef HaMekane*, p. 75. The connection between this use of the word and the use of the word in conjunction with *peshat* (as in *Pitronot* of Menahem b. Ḥelbo) must be investigated.
11. The response according to the Palestinian Talmud was slightly more detailed. The next verse does not read, "And God created (plural) man in their image . . . Rather it reads . . . etc."

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12. Cf. *Bereshit Rabbah*, (Theodor-Albeck ed., pp. 62-63) for different wordings of this principle. See also Rashi on *Sanhedrin* 38b — "Any source perverted by the *zedokim*," and below.
13. See W. Bacher, *Aggadot Amora'ei Erez Yisrael* (Tel Aviv, 1926), v. 1, pt. 2, p. 47 and p. 321.
14. On Rashi's use of the word *minim*, see Posnanski, *op. cit.* p. XX and n. 3, and Rosenthal, *Mehkarim*, p. 105.
15. See his *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (New Jersey, 1966), p. 379. Cf. Orlian, *op. cit.*, p. 105, n. 16.
16. See G.F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Century* (Cambridge, 1962), v. 3, p. 68f, and G. Alon, *Mehkarim BeToledot Yisrael* (Tel Aviv, 1967), pp. 203-05. Regarding belief in two deities, see *Hullin* 87a. Plurality of gods may be a heathen Christian or Gnostic belief; see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem, 1941), p. 355, no. 24. On the change in the meaning of the term *min* see Buechler, *Studies in Jewish History*, (London, 1956), p. 247 and p. 271. On the *min* as a denier of God's unity, see Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance, 3:7.
17. See Zeitlin, *Studies in the Early History of Judaism* (New York, 1973), v. 2, p. 259.
18. E.g. Genesis 35:7 and 11:7 as presented in *Sanhedrin* 38b.
19. Cf. *Bereshit Rabbah*, 8:9 — "How many *reshuyot* created the world . . ."
20. Note that Jewish polemicists do, however, cite singular verbs against Trinitarians.
21. Cf. *Mekhilta, Parashat Bo*, section 14 (Horowitz ed., p. 15b) and *Soferim*, 1:8. The LXX, as with most of the changes listed in these sources, does not make this change but records "Let us make . . .".
22. *Sefer Yosef HaMekane*, p. 31.
23. Note that for Rashi, *zelem* here means form and *demut* means intellect.
24. See above, n. 14.
25. See Posnanski, p. XIVf.
26. See *Sanhedrin* 38b and *Maharsha ad. loc.*, and *Bereshit Rabbah* 48:1.
27. See above, n. 22.
28. Note that his examples are slightly different from those of Rashi, cf. *Sefer Yosef HaMekane*.
29. *Commentary of Rashbam on the Torah*, D. Rosin ed., p. 8. All references to Rashbam's commentary are to this edition.
30. *Commentary of R. Yosef Bekhor Shor to Bereshit and Shemot*, A. Jelinek ed. (Leipzig, 1855; reprinted, Jerusalem, 1976), p.7. All references to Bekhor Shor's commentary are to this edition. Cf. *Tosafot HaRosh Al HaTorah, ad.loc.*
31. Lit. *pamalya*. Cf. examples of Rashi and Rashbam above.
32. Cf. Exodus 22:8. See also the comment of a contemporary Italian ex-

- egete, that the name of God in 1:27 does not refer to God Himself, in A. Berliner, *Peleitat Soferim* (Mainz, -1872), Hebrew section, p. 3. My teacher, Dr. David Berger, has informed me that the motive for Bekhor Shor's comment may be the Christian argument that the angel interpretation is idolatrous because it attributes the same images to God and to the angels.
33. Cf. Orlian, *op. cit.*, chap. 6, regarding the affinity of Bekhor Shor and the commentaries of the Tosafists on the Torah; the comment of *Sefer HaGan* on this verse is almost identical to Bekhor Shor's comment. See below, n. 50.
 34. See above, n. 9.
 35. Cf. *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan* (repr. Jerusalem, 1965), p. 4 col. 5.
 36. See *Megilah* 9a, and above, n. 21.
 37. The plural nature of the name *elohim* would lend itself to taking a plural verb. Cf. the commentary of R. Yosef Kara to the Former Prophets (Epenstein ed., Jerusalem, 1972) on Joshua 24:19, I Samuel, 4:8, and II Samuel, 7:23, and his commentary on Exodus 32:4, see Berliner, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
 38. Cf. Justin Martyr's use of this verse in "Dialogue with Trypho," *The Ante-Nicene Church Fathers*, Roberts and Donaldson ed. (Grand Rapids, 1956), v. 1, p. 228.
 39. See *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan*, p. 10, col. 17.
 40. *ibid.*
 41. See above, n. 37. Thus R. Yosef Kara's comments, particularly on Joshua 24:19, which was presented to R. Simlai as a multiplicity proof-text, also could refute a Christian claim.
 42. Cf. *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan* on Deuteronomy 6:4 (p. 29, col. 55) and on Zekhariah 14:9 (p. 74, col. 146) for a more direct refutation of that verse as a proof-text.
 43. *Sefer Yosef HaMekane*, pp. 57-58.
 44. See Maimonides: *Ma'amar Tehiyat HaMetim* in Kappah, *Igrot HaRambam*, (Jerusalem, 1972), pp. 69-70.
 45. See J. Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (New York, 1961), pp. 18-19.
 46. See above, Genesis 19:24. Generally, this is a problem with *E-lohim* which may indicate only two Persons. Cf. comment of *Nizzahon Yashan* on Genesis 2:7 (p. 5, col. 8) in which another name of God is added to *E-lohim* to represent the Trinity. Cf. *Sefer HaGan* on Genesis 18:2 (Orlian, Hebrew section, p. 19), and below, n. 50.
 47. *Milhamot HaShem*, p. 45.
 48. Cf. *Hizkuni*. See also Rashbam on Exodus 3:4.
 49. Cf. B.T. B.M. 84b and Tos. *ad. loc. s.v. nirin*.
 50. We find almost the identical comments in *Sefer HaGan*, see Orlian, *op. cit.*, Hebrew section, pp. 19-20. Orlian suggests the possibility that this section may have been copied from *Sefer HaGan* into the commentary

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- of Bekhor Shor, due to the affinity of these two works (*ibid.*, pp. 59-60). Cf. Posnanski, *op. cit.*, p. 60, n. 1, and p. 99, n. 1.
51. *Milhamot HaShem*, pp. 46-48, Yosef HaMekane, p. 39, and *Nizḥaḥon Yashan*, p. 8.
 52. See above, n. 25.
 53. See Posnanski, *op. cit.*, pp. XLI-XLV.
 54. *ibid.*, pp. LIX-LXIII. Cf. G. Walter, *Joseph Bechor Shor* (Leipzig, 1890), pp. 20-25.
 55. Cf. comment of R. Saadiah Gaon in Geiger, *Parshandata* (Leipzig, 1855), p. 50.
 56. Cf. Posnanski, *op. cit.*, p. LXIX.
 57. There is evidence that both R. Yosef Kara and R. Yosef Bekhor Shor engaged in at least minor disputations. See Posnanski, *ibid.*, pp. XXXVI-XXXVII, LVI, LXIX-LXXX, Rashbam, according to Posnanski, also had personal contact with Christian polemicists, but the sources Posnanski cites do not conclusively prove this (pp. XLVIII-XLVIX). Cf. the commentary of Rashbam to Psalms edited by I. Satanov (Berlin, 1894) on Psalms 110:1 (p. 234) where Rashbam mentions a disputation he participated in. This edition, however, has been totally discredited by scholars; see D. Rosin, *Commentary of Rashbam to the Torah* (New York, 1949), p. XIX. Rabbi S. Mandelbaum has told me that the entire work is a forgery, although we know from the *Arugot HaBosem* of R. Abraham b. Azriel that Rashbam did write a commentary to the book of Psalms.

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