# Lisa Fredman

# The Motif of Enticement to Christianity in Rashi's Commentary to Proverbs<sup>1</sup>

The presence of anti-Christian polemic is a known phenomenon in Rashi's commentary to the Bible. Rashi utilized his commentary as a vehicle to strengthen the faith of the Jewish people through the refutation of basic Christian beliefs connected to the Old Testament. Scholars debate the amount of anti-Christian polemic found in his commentary; Baer was the first to investigate this phenomenon and believed that it was the primary factor in Rashi's decision to compose his commentary.<sup>2</sup> Rosenthal takes a more moderate position and enumerates many interpretations in which Rashi speaks up against Christological interpretations, but he is not prepared to assert that an anti-Christian bias was the sole thrust of Rashi's exegesis as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Most Rashi scholars, including Touitou, Kamin, and Grossman have followed in Rosenthal's footsteps.<sup>4</sup>

More recently, Shaye Cohen has drawn a distinction between Rashi's Torah commentary and his commentary to some books of the Later Prophets and Hagiographa.<sup>5</sup> He demonstrates that whereas the former does not respond to

- 3 Yehuda Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic in the Biblical Commentaries of Rashi," *Mehkarim u-Mekorot*, vol. 1 (Hebrew; R. Mass, 1967), 116.
- 4 Elazar Touitou, "Rash's Commentary on Genesis 1–6 in the Context of Judeo-Christian Controversy," Hebrew Union College Annual 61 (1990): 81-159; Sarah Kamin, "Rashi's Commentary on the Song of Songs and Jewish-Christian Polemic," in Jews and Christians Interpret the Bible (Hebrew; Magnes, 20082), 22–57; Avraham Grossman, Rashi (Littman Library, 2012), 10–11.
- 5 Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Does Rashi's Torah Commentary Respond to Christianity? A comparison of Rashi with Rashbam and Bekhor Shor," *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation—Essays in Honor of James Kugel*, ed. H. Najman and J. Newman (Brill, 2004), 72–449.

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Professor Jordan Penkower for reviewing this paper and offering valuable comments and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Yitzhak F. Baer, "Rashi and the World around Him," Binah: Studies in Jewish History, Thought and Culture 3 (1994) 101–117. (Translated from the Hebrew: Sefer Rashi, ed. Y. I. Ha-kohen Maimon; Mosad ha-rav Kuk, 1956.)

Christianity, the latter does.<sup>6</sup> Not all agree with this distinction; those that differ detect anti-Christian polemic in Rashi's Torah commentary as well.<sup>7</sup>

(hereafter RPC). Yet regarding Rashi's commentary to Proverbs there is scholarly consensus that it contains anti-Christian polemic. Baer was the first to note its existence in passing, Rosenthal investigated this phenomenon, and Grossman noted additional examples and explanations.<sup>8</sup> Rashi's Proverbs commentary contains more than fifty-five polemical comments directed against Christianity. In these glosses, Rashi emphasizes the enticement of the Jews, the embezzlement of Jewish money, and the willingness of the Jewish people to forfeit their lives for the sake of God.9 This article will focus specifically upon the theme of Christian enticement because it is the primary polemical theme of Rashi's commentary to this book; it is mentioned more than fifteen times. We will take a closer look at these glosses with the goal of trying to better understand the identity of these enticers and the content of their seduction and to gauge their impact upon the Jewish community in northern France in the eleventh century.<sup>10</sup>

- 6 This distinction primarily rests upon the degree to which Rashi's commentary interfaces with Christian exegesis and truth claims, although elsewhere in his article Cohen expands the definition to include interfacing with Christianity: "Christianity, Christian exegesis, or Christian truth claims." See Cohen, "Does Rashi's Commentary Respond to Christianity?" 460–61, 467, 472.
- 7 Devorah Schoenfeld, *Isaac on Jewish and Christian Altars* (Fordham University Press, 2013), 26; Touitou, "Rash's Commentary on Genesis," 159–81.
- 8 Baer, "Rashi and the World," 109; Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic," 106-7; Avraham Grossman, Rashi ve-ha-pulmus Yehudi-Notzri, (Hebrew; Bar-Ilan University Press, 2021), 114–20, 276–81; Avraham Grossman, "Nusah perush Rashi la-Nakh ve-ha-pulmus Yehudi-Notzri" (Hebrew), Sinai 137 (2005): 47–58; Avraham Grossman, "The Tension between Torah and Hokhmah (Wisdom) in Rashi's Commentary to the Bible," in Teshurah le-'Amos: Collected Studies in Biblical Exegesis Presented to Amos Hakham, (Hebrew; Tevunot Press, 2007), 13–28; Avraham Grossman, "Rashi's Rejection of Philosophy: Divine and Human Wisdoms Juxtaposed," in Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook 8 (Stuttgart:Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2009), 95–118.
- 9 Some of these glosses are analyzed in Rashi's Commentary on the Book of Proverbs, ed. L. Fredman (Hebrew; World Union of Jewish Studies, 2019), 51–64; Grossman, "Nusah perush Rashi la-Nakh," 55–47.
- 10 The version of Rashi's commentary utilized to detect anti-Christian polemic will be: Fredman, *Rashi on Proverbs*; see preceding note.

### A. Terms indicating enticement in Rashi's Proverbs commentary

Rashi uses a variety of terms to describe enticement to Christianity. At times these words are of a general nature, and it is therefore difficult to pinpoint the type of enticement referred to, but in other cases Rashi utilizes more specific terms in his gloss or in the wider context of the gloss to help clarify the nature of persuasion. Below the terms are listed, ordered from the less specific to the more precise. We will explore each term individually and then view them as a collective.

#### 1. The root sut/סות/1.

The Hebrew root *sut/*<sup>11</sup> appears sixteen times in Rashi's commentary to this book.<sup>11</sup> Traditional biblical dictionaries translate the root *sut* as "to incite," "to allure," or "to entice."<sup>12</sup> However, in modern usage, the verb "to incite"—in contrast to the verb "entice," which connotes persuading or alluring by arousing hope and desire<sup>13</sup>— sometimes connotes prompting to action, encouraging someone to riot.<sup>14</sup> In light of this distinction, we will henceforth translate the root *sut* as "to entice, persuade, allure, or seduce" in the body of this essay, but will preserve the language of "to incite" when found in the existing English translations of Rashi's commentary.

Because the root *sut* is of a general nature, in the following gloss to Proverbs 11:9 the identification of the enticer is difficult to pinpoint:

With his mouth, the flatterer—the flatterer, who entices/*mesit* his friend on an evil way, destroys him with his mouth.<sup>15</sup>

- 13 The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, ed. J. Stein (Random House, 19839), 476.
- 14 The Random House Dictionary, 720.
- 15 English translations of the biblical text are taken from the New Jewish Publication Society of America Tanakh (Jewish Publication Society, 20032). The English translation of Rashi's commentary is based primarily upon the Judaica Press translation, Proverbs: A New English Translation, trans. and notes A. J. Rosenberg (Judaica Press, 1993). At times, changes have been made to this translation to match the English to the wording in Fredman, Rashi on Proverbs, and to match the lemmas of the glosses with the New Jewish Publication Society's translation of the Proverbs text.

<sup>11</sup> Hasatah 1: 22 (twice), 2: 12, 6:13, 7:10, 9:7, 10:10, 11:9, 15, 14:15 (twice), 17:12, 20:19, 26:4–5, 19:23.

<sup>12</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Brill, 1995), 749, s.v. ,1 סות "to mislead, incite"; s.v. 2 סות, "to entice away"; Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Clarendon Press, 19728), 694, s.v. , סות "to incite, allure, instigate."

Yet, in the other cases (fifteen in number), the proximity of the term to other, more specific language and the use of similar imagery in other glosses help us connect the enticement to Christianity.

# 2. The root sut/סות and halaklak/הלקלק

Rashi's commentary to Proverbs 26:23 reads:

So are **burning lips**—which pursue people to entice them/*lehasitam* with smooth and hypocritical talk/*be-halaklakot*.

Rashi often uses the term *be-halaklakot* found at the end of the gloss to refer to the smooth speech of Esau and his descendants.<sup>16</sup> As will be seen below (section A 5), Esau and his progeny are identified with Christianity in Rashi's Bible commentary. Hence, the term *be-halaklakot* can hint to the identity of the enticer, one promoting Christianity.

# 3. The juxtaposition of the roots sut/סות and pth/פתה/and

The pairing of the roots sut/ סות and pth/ entice) <sup>17</sup> occurs twice in RPC, such as in the following gloss:<sup>18</sup>

**Is one** [who cheats his fellow]—an inciter/*mesit* who tempts/*ha-mipateh* his friend from ways of life to ways of death, and when his friend realizes that he is misleading him, he says, "I am joking."

Although both roots are of a general nature, the juxtaposition of the two signals Christian enticement, as already noted by Rosenthal with regard to Rashi's commentary to Song of Songs.<sup>19</sup>

# 4. The root *sut*/סות and mention of idolatry

Although, due to technical reasons, Rashi did not halachically deem the Christians of his time as idolaters, he still classified Christianity as idol worship and designated

<sup>16</sup> See Rashi to Ps. 5: 10; Dan. 8:24, 11:32.

<sup>17</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, vol. 3 (Brill, 1996), 984–85, s.v. מתהן , "to persuade, entice"; Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 834, s.v. מתה, "to persuade, entice, deceive."

<sup>18</sup> See Rashi to 26:19.

<sup>19</sup> Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic," 107.

it with the appellation *avoda zara*.<sup>20</sup> Six times the root *sut* is joined with the term idolatry; in four of the cases, other terms designating Christianity are mentioned as well,<sup>21</sup> but in the two remaining cases, only these two terms are present, such as in the following example.<sup>22</sup>

Proverbs 26:4 and 5 contradict one another. Verse 4 warns the reader not to answer a fool according to his foolishness, whereas verse 5 states the opposite: Answer the fool! Rashi reconciles the contradiction in the following way:

**Do not answer a fool**—with words of quarrel and contention lest you become like him. **Answer a fool**—who comes to incite you to idolatry/*le-hasitkha le-avodah zarah*; let him know his folly, **else he will think himself wise**. The meaning of these two verses is explained in [the verses] themselves: **Do not answer**—in a matter in which you will become like him if you answer him. **Answer a fool**—in a matter in which if you do not answer him, **he will think himself wise**.

Each verse is identified with a different type of quarrel. The former describes a foolish argument conducted in a quarrelsome tone. To that, the text warns, "Do not answer," because the outcome will be that both parties will be deemed foolish. Whereas the latter, which states: "answer him according to his folly" is referring to a fool enticing another to Christianity. In this case one must respond appropriately and effectively in order that the "fool," the enticer, not see himself as correct. This comment is original to Rashi.

Although the above contradiction was resolved in the Talmud (b. Shabb 30b), Rashi chooses to ignore the resolution posed there equating the first verse: "Do not answer the fool," with one discussing worldly matters, and the subsequent phrase: "Answer the fool," with one speaking words of Torah. Rashi's disregard for this talmudic resolution is surprising in light of the fact that the theme of Torah is the primary motif of Rashi's allegorical commentary to Proverbs. Yet it would seem that his desire to repel the danger of enticement to Christianity takes precedence in his gloss to these verses.

<sup>20</sup> Israel Elfenbein, "Rashi in His Responsa," in Rashi, His Teachings and Personality, ed. S. Federbush (World Jewish Congress, 1958), 90; Teshuvot Rashi, ed. I. Elfenbein (Hebrew; New York, 1942), 337 (no. 327); Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic," 110; Jacob Katz, Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times (Behrman House, 1961), 24–36.

<sup>21</sup> Such as the appellations Esau and min, which will be discussed below in paragraphs 5 and 6.

<sup>22</sup> See Rashi's gloss to 11:15.

#### 5. The root *sut/*סות and idolatry and Esau

Proverbs 14:10–16 is composed of seven verses that ostensibly have no thematic connection between them. Rashi brings two original explanations to explain the verses in succession. The former expounds the verses as distinguishing between the righteous and the wicked, and the latter distinguishes between Esau and Jacob. The following is Rashi's second explication:

Another explanation: The heart alone knows its bitterness—Israel, who are of embittered heart in exile, for they are killed for the sanctification of the Name and in its joy—in the future [no stranger shall mingle]. The house of the wicked will be demolished—the house of Esau. A road may seem right to a man—The road of idolatry seemed right in the eyes of Esau, "a man of the field" (Gen. 25: 27) but in the end, etc. Even in laughter—that the Holy One, blessed be He, laughs with them in this world. Their hearts will ache in the future.... An unprincipled man reaps the fruit of his ways—Esau. A good man of his deeds— Jacob. A simple person believes—their words and is enticed after them; a clever man ponders—and will not be enticed.

Rashi's gloss identifies the generic words "man" and "wicked" with Esau.<sup>23</sup> In rabbinic thought, Esau is viewed not only as the biological son of Isaac and Rebecca but also as the progenitor of the Roman Empire and the Christian church.<sup>24</sup> Rashi adopts this association, and in his Bible commentary Esau becomes synonymous with Christianity.<sup>25</sup>

The above gloss presents a sharp contrast between Jews (Jacob) and Christians (Esau). Presently, the heart of the Jewish people is embittered in exile because they are being killed for the sake of Heaven, in contrast to the Christians, who are laughing with God. Yet, in the future, the tables will be turned: the Jews will be joyful and Christian

<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in Rashi's commentary to Psalms; see Avraham Grossman, "Rashi's Commentary on the Psalms and the Jewish-Christian Debate," in *Studies in the Bible and in Education, Jubilee Volume in Honor of Professor Moshe Ahrend*, ed. D. Rappel (Hebrew; Touro College, 1996), 63-67.

<sup>24</sup> Gerson D. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altman (Harvard University Press, 1967), 18-48; Grossman, *The Early Sages of France*, 145, 206.

<sup>25</sup> Avraham Grossman, "Pulmus dati ve-megamah hinukhit be-perush Rashi le-Torah," in Pirkei Nechama, 187-205; Avraham Grossman, Rashi: Religious Beliefs and Social Views (Hebrew; Alon Shevut, 2007), 137-70; Gilad Gevaryahu, "Nusha'ot Rashi le-Tehillim ve-hatzenzurah," Mehkarim be-Mikra u-bemahshevet Yisrael 1 (Hebrew; Kiryat Sefer, 1989): 61-248.

hearts will ache. Cognizant of the fleeting nature of the present, the clever man will not be enticed by the words of the Christians, whereas the simple man will be.

The content of this gloss undermines the well-known Christian claim that the lowly state of the Jews in exile proved that the special status of the chosen people had been transferred from the Jews to the Christians due to their rejection of Jesus. The Christian success, so they claimed, was proof of their replacement as the "*Verus Israel*." Rashi's original response is clear: the status quo is only temporary; in the future, the Jews will be joyful and the Christians pained.

#### 6. Sut/סות and Minim

Five times the word *Minim* appears in conjunction with the term *sut*: four times the enticers are called *ha-Minim ha-mesitim*<sup>26</sup> and once they are called *mesitim ve-Minim*. In Rashi's commentary to the Bible, the term *Minut* primarily refers to Christianity and the term *Minim* to the Christians.<sup>27</sup> In his uncensored gloss to Daniel 12:10, Rashi writes: "for example the heretics/*ha-Minim*, the students of Jesus/*Yeshu*."<sup>28</sup> At times in Rashi's commentary to the Bible, his use of this term is copied straight from talmudic sources, and therefore its appearance in his commentary does not refer to the followers of Jesus but rather other ancient heretics. This is not the case with regard to his Proverbs commentary; here the terms *Minut* and *Minim* appear a total of twelve times and can be identified confidently with Christianity. Six times the use of these terms *Minut* /*Minim* is original to Rashi and therefore it has no talmudic precedent; the remaining six mentions are connected to the motif of the *isha zara*/strange woman.<sup>29</sup> The *isha zara* is identified with *Minut* and specifically the teachings of the disciple of Jesus of Nazareth as seen in the uncensored versions of the Talmud (b. Avoda Zara 17a).

- 26 Ha-Minim ha-mesitim: 2:12, 7:10, 17:12; ha-Minin ha-mesitim:6:13.
- 27 Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic"105 and n24; Elazar Touitou, "On the Meaning of the Concept *Teshuvat ha-Minim* in the Writings of our French Sages," *Sinai* 99:3–4 (Hebrew; 1986): 48–145; Elazar Touitou, *Exegesis in Perpetual Motion* (Hebrew; Bar-Ilan University Press, 2003), 39 and n26; Cohen, "Rashi's Torah Commentary," 459.
- 28 See Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah [Mikra'ot Gedolot "Haketer"], ed. M. Cohen, (Hebrew; Bar-Ilan University Press, 2019), 84.
- 29 Minut :2:16, 5:3, 6:24, 9:17, 23:28; all mentions are connected to the the *isha zara*. Minim: 1:22, 2:12, 6:1, 13, 7:10, 17:12, 18; all mentions are original to Rashi excluding 7:10, which is connected to the *isha zara* theme. See Fredman, "Rashi's Women: Prototypes in Proverbs," *Tradition* 53:2 (2021): 18–23.

Let us look at a number of examples of Rashi's use of the term ha-Minim ha-mesitim.<sup>30</sup>

# I. Ha-Minim ha-mesitim:

Proverbs 6:12–15 describes the ways of an unscrupulous man, Rashi glosses the following:

**Walks with a crooked mouth**—He walks with crooked lips. **He winks with his eyes**—winks of deceit. **Points with his fingers**—They are all expressions of hinting: one applies to the eye, one to the foot, and one to the finger, but the main idea is that it is speaking of *ha-Minin* who entice/*ha-mesitim* people to idolatry.

Rashi's gloss highlights the fact that Christian enticement is all-encompassing: all organs of the body are mobilized in the effort to persuade the Jew to leave his faith. Connecting the meaning of this verse with Christian enticement is original to Rashi.

The Proverbs text (17:12) states: "May a bereaving bear encounter a person rather than a fool with his folly," and Rashi glosses:

**May a bereaving bear**—It is better for a person that a bereaving bear encounter him rather than one of the foolish *ha-Minim* who entice/*ha-mesitim* him to idolatry.

*Bereshit Rabbati,* the midrash ascribed to Rabbi Moshe ha-Darshan (eleventh century), connects our verse with Esau.<sup>31</sup> Although Rashi often quotes from Rabbi Moshe ha-Darshan's writings in his commentary to the Bible, it is unclear whether Rashi is familiar with the specific work entitled *Bereshit Rabbati* and how much of this compendium emanates from Rabbi Moshe ha-Darshan.<sup>32</sup> *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* also connects the motif of the bereaving bear with Esau but does not mention our verse.<sup>33</sup> Rashi narrows the identification of the bereaving bear specifically to the medieval Christian enticer from the clan of Esau.

What were the *Minim* saying? Why were they deemed so dangerous? Proverbs 2:12 states, "It will save you from the way of evil men, from men who speak duplicity/*tahpukhot*," and Rashi glosses:

<sup>30</sup> See Grossman, "Rashi's Rejection of Philosophy," 14-111.

<sup>31</sup> Midraš Berešit Rabbati, ex libro R. Moses ha-Daršan, ed. Ch. Albek (Hebrew; Mekize Nirdamim, 1940; reprint 1966), Vayishlah, 149.

<sup>32</sup> See Hananel Mack, Me-sodo shel Moshe ha-darshan (Hebrew; Bialik, 2010), 94–188, 39–223.

<sup>33</sup> *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, trans. and annotated G. Friedlander (Sepher-Hermon Press; 19814), chapter 37, "Jacob and the Angel," 281.

**Who speak duplicity**—These are *ha-Minim* who entice/*ha-mesitim* Israel to idolatry and distort/*u-mehapkhim* the Torah to evil.<sup>34</sup>

Rashi linguistically links the actions of the Christian enticers with the biblical text through the use of the root hpkh/  $\pi eq$  (overturn):<sup>35</sup> "men who speak duplicity/ tahpukhot " (Prov. 2:12) are the Christian enticers who distort or overturn/*u*-mehapkhim the Torah.

A similar accusation of the Christian distortion of the Torah is found in Rashi's uncensored gloss to the Talmud:

b. Rosh ha-Shana 17a:*ha-Minim*—the students of Jesus of Nazarene, who distorted/*hapkhu* the words of the living God to evil.<sup>36</sup>

What Christian "distortion of" the Torah "to evil" is intended? Rashi is referring to the bringing of scriptural proofs from the Old Testament by Christian scholars and polemicists to prove the truthfulness of Christian beliefs. Scholars have shown that in the Early Middle Ages, the arguments brought by Christian theologians were repetitive and consisted mostly of the rehashing of arguments from earlier church fathers.<sup>37</sup> Although Rashi's knowledge of Christianity was limited, <sup>38</sup> he was familiar with the technique of twisting the meaning of the Old Testament ("*mehapkhim* the Torah") in order to support Christian doctrine.

## II. Mesitim ve-Minim

Only once does Rashi utilize the term *mesitim ve-Minim*; this phrase is found in his gloss to the opening chapter of Proverbs (v. 22) and thereby becomes Rashi's introductory comment to the theme of enticement:

**You simple ones**/petayim—those who are enticed/ *ha-mitpatim* by enticers/ *mesitim* and Christians/*ve-Minim*. **Love simplicity**/peti—enticement/*hasatah*.

- 34 There is no known source for this gloss.
- 35 Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 245, s.v. הפך, "turn; overturn"; Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, vol. 1 (Brill, 1994), 253: s.v. הפך, "to turn, to overthrow."
- 36 See Rashi to b. Berakhot 12b, s.v. Minut.
- 37 Bernard Blumenkranz, "The Roman Church and the Jews," in *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict*, ed. J. Cohen (New York University Press, 1991), 193–230; Amos Funkenstein, "Changes in Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Twelfth Century," in *Perceptions of Jewish History* (University of California Press, 1993), 78–172.
- 38 Daniel Lasker, "Jewish Knowledge of Christianity in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish Intellectual and Social History*, ed. D. Engel, L. Schiffman, and E. Wolfson (Brill, 2012), 100.

Rashi's gloss states the reason why they are considered "simple ones": because they are enticed by *mesitim ve-Minim*.

Note the conjunction *vav* connecting the nouns *mesitim* and *Minim*; this letter, which is present in all the reliable manuscripts, indicates that it is the accurate version of Rashi's text.<sup>39</sup> What is the meaning of this conjunction? Although in Biblical Hebrew this letter embodies a variety of meanings,<sup>40</sup> and Rashi's Bible glosses often distinguish between them,<sup>41</sup> here the *vav* is found not in the biblical text, but rather in his gloss. What is the relationship between the two nouns connected by this letter?

## a. The meaning "and"

At first blush, one would assume that it is a connective *vav*, meaning "and"; two sources of enticement are therefore intended: enticers and Christians. Yet in section A (1-6) above, we have seen that the root *sut* is used almost exclusively to describe enticement to Christianity. Who would be enticing to Christianity barring the Christians (*Minim*) themselves?

Perhaps the former group (*mesitim*) can be identified with Jewish apostates or Jews who are veering toward Christianity. After all, Rashi would not call Jewish apostates *Minim*, because to them he applied the talmudic dictum (b. San 44a): "Even though he sinned, he remains a Jew." Yet throughout his oeuvre, Rashi uses more specific language to refer to wayward Jews, such as: *poshei Yisrael, meshumad,* and *mumarim.*<sup>42</sup> This suggestion, therefore, does not seem tenable.

It has been noted regarding his talmudic commentary that Rashi often explicates the difficult word in a passage by juxtaposing two synonyms, connecting them by the letter *vav*. Fraenkel explains that the purpose of the two synonyms is to highlight the shared meaning between them. Because each synonym embodies its own nuance, the exact explanation of the difficult term under discussion can therefore be found at the specific point of overlap between the two.<sup>43</sup> Applying this theory to our gloss, the

- 39 See Fredman, Rashi on Proverbs, 93.
- 40 Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT, vol. 1, 257-59.
- 41 Isaac Avinery, Heikhal Rashi, vol. 3 (Hebrew; Heikhal Rashi, 1956), 28–120; Esra Shereshevsky, Rashi: The Man and His World (Sepher-Hermon Press, 1982), 80–81; Chanoch Gamliel, Linguistics in Rashi's Commentary (Hebrew; Bialik, 2010), 184–96.
- 42 Poshei Yisrael Rashi to Ex. 30:34; Isa. 29:9; Ps. 10:15; Songs 2:13, 7:14; meshumad Rashi to II Kings 18:22; Ezek. 44:7; mumarim Rashi to Dan. 11:14.
- 43 Jonah Fraenkel, Rashi's Approach in His Commentaries to the Babylonian Talmud (Hebrew; Magnes, 1974), 96–103.

terminology *mesitim ve-Minim* would signal not two groups but one, whose definition is defined as the point of contact between the two.

A similar type of word pair can be found in Rashi's gloss to Zech. 13:4:

"A hairy mantle—So is the custom of *mesitim ve-medihim*/those who entice and draw away.".

Upon closer examination, we see that whereas the synonyms in the Zechariah gloss are evenly matched ("entice" and "draw away"), ours are less so. The first term, *mesitim*, is a broader category and the latter, *Minim*, more specific; the former is a common noun and the latter a proper one. We would therefore like to propose an alternate meaning.

# b. The meaning "that is"

Often Rashi views the conjunction *vav* as "explaining or identifying the word immediately preceding, in the sense of "that is/".<sup>44</sup> Avinery notes, upon close perusal of Rashi's style, that many instances which have been explicated as *vav* connective really embody the definition of "that is," in particular, when the conjunction *vav* is found in between two verbs or descriptive terms.<sup>45</sup> The meaning of the prefix *vav* in our gloss would be: "Inciters/*mesitim* [that is] *Minim*."

One might query why Rashi veers here from his regular manner of phrasing in his Proverbs commentary, *ha-Minim ha-mesitim*. The answer lies in a close reading of the gloss as an extension of the biblical text:

**You simple ones**/petayim (1:22)—those who are enticed/*ha-mitpatim* by enticers and Christians/*mesitim ve-Minim*. Love simplicity/peti—enticement/*hasatah*.

In his opening comment, Rashi linguistically links the word *petayim*/simple ones to the root *pth*, to be seduced/*ha-mitpatim*; they are simple because they are seduced by seducers/*mesitim ve-Minim*. And similarly, in his closing comment, *peti*/simplicity is defined as enticement/*hasatah*. Note that both of Rashi's comments juxtapose the roots *pth* and *sut*, and as noted earlier, these roots are often paired by Rashi to describe Christian enticement.<sup>46</sup> Hence, one can conclude that Rashi deliberately chose the word order *mesitim ve-Minim* in order to pair the word *mesitim* with its lemma (*petayim*) derived from the root *pth*, thereby juxtaposing the two roots.

<sup>44</sup> Avinery, Heikhal Rashi, vol. 3, 123, and vol. 2 (Hebrew; Heikhal Rashi, 1949), 28; Shereshevsky, Rashi: The Man and His World, 81; Gamliel, Linguistics in Rashi's Commentary, 190.

<sup>45</sup> Avinery, Heikhal Rashi, vol. 3, 123.

<sup>46</sup> See Section A 3 above.

Because this gloss introduces the important theme of enticement, Rashi then adds the word *ve-Minim* to identity the enticers: "Inciters/*mesitim* [that is] *Minim*/ Christians."

In conclusion, Rashi has used a variety of terms to describe Christian propaganda. An analysis of his glosses has revealed that he was aware of the techniques of the Christian missionizer and understood the potential impact upon his people. The large number of original glosses that he composed along with the intensity of his language to describe the persuasion clearly indicate the danger Rashi perceived in the Christian propaganda efforts.

#### **B.** Jewish comportment

How did the Jews conduct themselves in light of the Christian propaganda? Proverbs 9:7 describes the danger of rebuking a wicked man: "To correct a scoffer or rebuke/ *mokhiah* a wicked man for his blemish is to call down abuse on oneself." Regarding this verse, Rashi writes:

**Rebuke**/*mokhiah* a wicked man for his blemish—It is a blemish [upon] the one who reproves [him], for this one berates him/*me-harpo* and does not heed him. This is a warning that it is forbidden to speak with those who entice/*ha-mesitim*, even to reprove them/*le-hokhiham* and to draw them near/*ule-korvam*.

The application of this verse to enticers is original to Rashi; he states that it is forbidden to speak to them. The gloss is linguistically linked to the biblical text through use of the root ykh/to reprove.<sup>47</sup> Let us compare this comment with Rashi's gloss to Song of Songs (7: 9–10), which also discusses communication with a seducer:

And let your breasts be now—And now, cause my words to be realized, that you will not be seduced/*titpeti* after the nations, and may the good and wise among you be steadfast in their faith, to retort/*le-hashiv devarim* to those who seduce them/*le-mepatim*, so that the small ones among you will learn from them. And your palate is like the best wine—be careful with your answers/*be-teshuvotayikh* that they should be like the best wine. That glides down smoothly to my beloved—I am careful to answer/*le-hashiv* them that I will remain steadfast in my faith, that my palate will go before my beloved with straightforward love, which emanates from the heart, and not from deceit and guile.

Let us begin with the similarities. Both glosses discuss how to respond to enticement. The Proverbs gloss uses the root *sut* to describe the seducers, and the gloss on Song of

<sup>47</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT, vol. 2, 410, s.v. יכח, "to rebuke, to reproach."

Songs uses the sister root *pth*. Additionally, both glosses contain the root *zhr*/caution, warning—once in the former gloss and twice in the latter. Rashi's use of this term emphasizes the danger he deemed in conversing with the enticers.

But whereas the former states that it is forbidden to speak with the seducers, in the latter, the elders, the wisest of minds, are directed how to respond. Their answers should be as good as fine wine in order to set a standard of excellence for the laymen. An additional difference is the verb used to describe speech: the former uses the verb "to speak/*daber*," while the latter utilizes the root "answer/*shuv*".

The two glosses seem to be contradictory. What is permitted according to Rashi—to speak or not to speak?

One can propose that the sources are directed to different groups within the nation. The Song of Song's gloss addresses the elders and scholars of the generation; they are charged to answer the enticers effectively. Our Proverbs gloss, however, is directed to the laymen; they are forbidden from responding.

Yet the Song of Song's gloss concludes with the phrase "so that the small ones among you will learn from them." "The small ones," that is, the laymen, are to learn from the responses of the scholars. But why must they learn if it is forbidden for them to respond? Through a close reading of both texts, let us fine-tune the distinction between the glosses.

The comment to Song of Songs, with its emphasis on the verb "to answer," is referring to the classic scenario in medieval times where the Christian enticer confronts the Jew with a claim and the Jew needs to know how to respond effectively to it.<sup>48</sup> Rashi directs the greatest minds of the generation to provide quality answers that could be repeated by the less knowledgeable. The Proverbs gloss is describing a different situation. The warning not "to speak" describes a scenario in which the Jew is seeking out the enticer; he is making the first move. This type of conversation is absolutely forbidden. The closing phrase "even to rebuke them and to draw them near"

48 Touitou has noted that in the writings of the Northern French exegetes from the school of Rashi, the phrase *teshuvah le-Minim*, in contrast to the phrase *teshuvat ha-Minim*, can mean a challenge posed to the *Minim*, i.e., that the Jew is directly confronting the Christian and not responding to a Christian claim. The former meaning, to confront, is untenable regarding the Song of Songs gloss for two reasons. First, the phrase *teshuvah le-Minim* does not appear, and in its place is written: *le-hashiv devarim le-mepatim*; the term *Minim* is not even mentioned. Second, the content of our gloss is one of responding and not confronting. After all, the "smaller ones" are supposed to learn from the answers of the "elders," and Rashi would not be encouraging the "small ones" to challenge Christian enticers. See Touitou, "The Concept *Teshuvat ha-Minim*," 48-144.

indicates that at times Jews were promoting discussions with Christians in order to convince them of the truthfulness of Judaism.

Does this gloss reflect historical reality? Were Jews sometimes on the offensive during Rashi's lifetime?

Berger has shown that a substantial number of anti-Jewish treatises produced by Christian theologians in the eleventh and twelfth centuries state that the impetus for their writing was the Jewish challenge.<sup>49</sup> The Jewish challenge refers to Jews who posed questions to Christians regarding the Christian religion. Berger writes:

The evidence, moreover, does not allow the assumption that these discussions were necessarily initiated by proselytizing Christians.... Whether Jews or Christians initiated these exchanges, the indications are overwhelming that they were real and frequent.<sup>50</sup>

Berger concludes that prior to the thirteenth century, due to the absence of an organized, full-scale Christian missionizing movement, there existed "lively, regular, often friendly debates between Jews and Christians, which were sometimes begun by the Jewish participant."<sup>51</sup>

Rashi's Proverbs gloss seems to be warning against these interfaith encounters initiated by a Jew. It is important to note, however, that the tone of the exchange described by Rashi is not a friendly one; Rashi forbids speaking to the enticer because he will taunt you and not listen. Rashi's use of the root *hrp* (to taunt)<sup>52</sup> is sharp language the Bible utilizes to describe the speech of Israel's enemies, such as Goliath (I Sam. 17:36), the Rav-Shakeh (II Kings 19:4), and by Rashi himself to describe warring families who come to him for mediation.<sup>53</sup>

What was the goal of these discussions initiated by Jews? Katz sees a proselytizing component.<sup>54</sup> Berger discerns a different goal, "Jews challenged Christians as an expression of pride—to raise their own morale and to discomfit their opponents."<sup>55</sup>

The closing phrase of Rashi's Proverbs gloss, "and to draw them near/*ule-korvam*," seems to strengthen the former view. The specific case Rashi discusses describes

- 49 Berger, "Mission to the Jews," 585-91.
- 50 Berger, "Mission to the Jews," 586.
- 51 Berger, "Mission to the Jews," 591; Daniel Lasker, "The Jewish Critique of Christianity: In Search of a New Narrative," in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations, vol. 6 (2011), 1-9.
- 52 Koehler and Baumgartner, HALOT, vol. 1, 355, s.v. II חרף, "to annoy, taunt."
- 53 Elfenbein, Teshuvot Rashi, 81-82 (no. 70).
- 54 Katz, Exclusiveness and Tolerance, 81.
- 55 Berger, "Mission to the Jews," 91–590.

a desire to bring the other party closer to Judaism.<sup>56</sup> Regardless of the motive, Rashi unequivocally warns his reader not to initiate this type of discussion.

Although one cannot glean from the aforementioned gloss the frequency of these exchanges, the mere fact that this type of encounter is alluded to indicates that it was not a onetime incident.

#### C. The impact

With an understanding that there is ongoing enticement to Christianity and at times it is Jews who are initiating interfaith discussion in eleventh-century Northern France, can we gauge the impact of this behavior upon the Jewish community? Two glosses in RPC shed light upon the consequences.

Proverbs 9:13–18 describes the behavior of Madame Folly; she is foolishness personified as a woman who tries to entice youths to enter her home by saying, "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten furtively is tasty" (9:17). Upon this verse Rashi writes:

**Stolen waters are sweet**—The pleasure afforded by intimacy with a single woman does not equal that afforded by intimacy with a married woman. And also, regarding the *Minut*, **stolen waters are sweet**, for they were afraid to do it in public, but did it in secret.

Rashi, based on the Talmud (b. San 26b), sees our verse as a metaphor for adultery; intercourse with a married woman is more pleasurable. Rashi's second explanation then expands the metaphor to spiritual adultery, worshipping other gods. "Stolen waters" are describing people who are involved in *Minut* /Christianity, worshipping other gods, yet he describes these people as worshipping in secret because they are fearful of public worship. This explanation is original to Rashi. It is difficult to apply the latter explanation to the Christians because, as the majority religion, they had free reign to worship publicly. The logical conclusion is therefore that this verse refers to Jews who practice Christianity privately.

Rashi directly acknowledges the reality of Jewish apostasy. Proverbs 23:26-28 warns against the dangers of the foreign woman. The warning concludes with the verse "She, too, lies in wait as if for prey, and she will increase the faithless among men;" on this verse, Rashi writes:

<sup>56</sup> If Rashi was referring to a Jewish apostate, we would expect the use of the root *shuv*; see Elfenbein, *Teshuvot Rashi*, 188-91 (nos. 168-170).

[16]

And she will increase the faithless among men-multiplies in Israel/ marbeh be-

*Yisrael* those who are treacherous to God. Regarding *Minut* the text is speaking. Once again there is no known source for Rashi's comment. Rashi is describing large-scale conversion to Christianity during his lifetime.

Although the reasons for conversion are varied and complex, Christian enticement played a significant role, enticement which emphasized the correct Christological interpretation of scriptural verses in contrast to the erroneous Jewish explanation.<sup>57</sup> Rashi's commentary acknowledges the impact of the enticer's power of persuasion.

In the aforementioned gloss to Prov. 23:28, Rashi acknowledges the multiplicity of Jews betraying God. Does this comment reflect historical reality? Was there large-scale conversion to Christianity during Rashi's lifetime?

Historians emphasize the difficulty in coming to a conclusive answer regarding the number of Jews in Ashkenaz who embraced Christianity during the Middle Ages. The fact that there are many rabbinic *responsa* dealing with questions of Jewish apostacy does not indicate the rate of occurrence, because even the isolated case had to be addressed by the rabbinic authorities.<sup>58</sup> The general consensus, though, was that it was a limited phenomenon.<sup>59</sup>

Although Rabbeinu Tam (Rashi's grandson) wrote that "More than twenty bills of divorce involving apostates were executed in Paris and [Île-de-] France,"<sup>60</sup> Katz believes that this number was an aggregate one culled from different time periods rather than referring to one specific occurrence.<sup>61</sup> Grossman, on the other hand, believes that this number is indicative of widespread apostasy, taking into consideration the small size of medieval Jewish communities in the twelfth century.<sup>62</sup>

The plethora of statements in RPC, a non-halachic work, warning against Christian enticement and even acknowledging in one gloss widespread apostacy, seems to

- 60 Translation taken from Malkiel, "Jews and Apostates," 8.
- 61 Katz, Exclusiveness and Tolerance, 67.
- 62 Grossman, The Early Sages of France, 503.

<sup>57</sup> Such as the apostates Peter Alfonsi and Herman of Cologne, see Shereshevsky, "Rashi's and Christian Interpretations," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 61 (1970): 76; Berger, "Mission to the Jews," 87–586; Jeremy Cohen, "The Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate: Peter Alfonsi, Hermann of Cologne and Pablo Christiani," *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. T. Endelman (Holmes & Meier, 1987), 23–35; Touitou, "Rashi's Commentary on Genesis 1–6," 168.

<sup>58</sup> Katz, Exclusiveness and Tolerance, 67; Cohen, "The Medieval Jewish Apostate," 23.

<sup>59</sup> Grossman, The Early Sages of France, 500–503; David Malkiel, "Jews and Apostates in Medieval Europe—Boundaries Real and Imagined," Past and Present 194 (2007): 7–9.

support the latter view that apostacy was a more common occurrence than otherwise thought. Berger draws a similar historical conclusion:

In the last generation, arguments have been presented for a variety of theses that would have seemed implausible thirty years ago... that sharp polemical exchanges, sometimes initiated by Jews, took place on the streets and even in homes, that Jews were sorely tempted by Christianity and converted more often than we imagined.<sup>63</sup>

#### D. The commentary to Proverbs and the theme of enticement

At this point we must query why Rashi choose to incorporate so many overt comments regarding Christian enticement specifically in his Proverbs commentary. Although this question is difficult to answer, we will attempt to address it from two different angles; the two are not mutually exclusive.

## 1. Historical consideration: The dating of the commentary

Although the position of the Jews in Northern France was relatively stable throughout Rashi's lifetime, his Proverbs commentary seems to have been written late in life, close to the period of the First Crusade when conditions between Jews and Christians worsened. Poznanski posits that Rashi began his commentary to the Bible with his glosses to the Pentateuch, continued with his commentary to the Prophets, and ended with the Hagiographa.<sup>64</sup> Gelles adopts this view and brings additional support.<sup>65</sup> Based on Rashi's *responsa* and notes in his Talmud commentary, Gelles claims that Rashi completed his talmudic commentary by the mid-1080s and then began writing his Bible commentary. According to this calculation, Rashi's commentary to Proverbs, a book of the Hagiographa, was written toward the end of his life. Although Grossman is not totally convinced by the above calculations, he also believes that RPC was written late in Rashi's life, albeit not necessarily after the First Crusade (1096).<sup>66</sup> This would place the dating of the composition of RPC close to that of his glosses to Psalms and

<sup>63</sup> David Berger, "A Generation of Scholarship on Jewish-Christian Interaction in the Medieval World," *Tradition* 38:2 (2004): 5.

<sup>64</sup> Samuel Poznanski, Mavo al Hakhmei Tzorpat meporshei ha-Mikra (Mikize Nirdamim, 1913), xiv.

<sup>65</sup> Benjamin Gelles, Peshat and Derash in the Exegesis of Rashi (Brill, 1981), 43–137.

<sup>66</sup> Grossman, "Nusah perush Rashi la-Nakh," 57–58 and n50.

Song of Songs<sup>67</sup> and would explain the centrality of Jewish-Christian polemics in all three compositions. As tensions rose and conditions worsened, Jews became more susceptible to the impact of Christian propaganda.

#### 2. Literary considerations

An additional consideration is a literary one and connected to the nature of the book. Proverbs is part of the collection of wisdom literature whose authorship was attributed to Solomon. Grossman notes that Rashi's thought process might have been the following: If Solomon, the wisest of all men, warns against Christian incitement; this could be a powerful incentive for the Jew to take heed of his warnings. And because a proverb naturally embodies a moral lesson which can be understood on more than one level, it was quite natural for Rashi to apply the allegorical message to the Jewish-Christian debate.<sup>68</sup>

Whereas Grossman's comments apply to the authorship and genre of Proverbs, I would like to go a step further and focus on the contents of the book. Whybray notes the important role of speech in Proverbs and summarizes the work of other scholars regarding this motif. Skaldny detects that more than 20 percent of the proverbs in collections 2 (chaps. 10:1-22:16) and 5 (chaps. 25-29) deal with the spoken word.<sup>69</sup> Aletti draws attention to the fact that in collection 1 (chaps. 1-9) there is particular emphasis "on speech as a means of seduction and persuasion."<sup>70</sup>

Rashi clearly discerned the centrality of speech in Proverbs and applied those proverbs to the historical reality of his time. The theme of Christian enticement becomes the nucleus of Rashi's polemical comments in this commentary; approximately one-third of his polemical comments there are connected to this theme. Once this kernel is established, Rashi then expands and includes other polemical motifs such as the embezzlement of the Jews and *kiddush Hashem*,<sup>71</sup> but these other themes take a secondary position to the primary theme of enticement.

- 68 Grossman, "Nusah Perush Rashi la-Nakh," 57.
- 69 Udo Skladny, Die altesten Spruchsammlungen (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 70; Roger N. Whybray, The Book of Proverbs, a Survey of Modern Study (Brill, 1995), 140.
- 70 J. N. Aletti, "Seduction et parole en Proverbes I–IX," Vetus Testamentum 27:2 (1977), 44–129; Whybray, Proverbs, 141.
- 71 Embezzlement: 11:16, 15:19; kiddush Hashem: 7:19-20, 17:26, 14:10-15.

<sup>67</sup> Grossman believes that Rashi's Psalms commentary was written after the First Crusade; see Grossman, "Rashi's Commentary on the Psalms," 59–74.

The aforementioned reasons, therefore, coalesce into one. The plethora of glosses warning against enticement to Christianity are a natural outgrowth of the nature of Proverbs and reflect the heightened tensions between Jews and Christians in the final period of Rashi's life.

#### **E.** Conclusion

A nuanced reading of Rashi's glosses to Proverbs has uncovered hints to the complex landscape of Jewish-Christian relations in Northern France in the final quarter of the eleventh century. Religious discussions and debates centering upon the correct interpretation of the Old Testament were common, and they were often, but not always, initiated by Christians. At times, Jews challenged the dubious Christological reading of the Bible in order to prove the truthfulness of Judaism. Rashi warns the Jews from taking the offensive and initiating discussion.

The theme of Christian enticement is mentioned more than fifteen times in RPC, and the majority of these glosses are original to Rashi; they rest upon no rabbinic antecedents. Rashi uses a variety of terms to describe this seduction to Christianity, among them the terms *Minim* and *Minut*. Their appearance, twelve times in RPC, equals the sum total of times the root *min* is mentioned in Rashi's glosses to all the other biblical books!<sup>72</sup> Although at first blush RPC does not meet the formal criteria set by Shaya Cohen to detect anti- Christian polemic in Rashi's writings, namely, explicit and unambiguous attacks on Christian truth claims and Christian exegesis,<sup>73</sup> Cohen notes looser signs for detecting anti-Christian animus, including an expectation that Rashi's "responses to *minim* would have been more pointed and more frequent, and the Christian identity of his opponents would have been more evident."<sup>74</sup>

Our findings fulfill this latter set of informal criteria. The quantity, originality, and explicit language of Rashi's Proverbs glosses clearly express his grave concern regarding the persuasive power of Christian propaganda and an awareness of its destructive impact upon the medieval Northern France Jewish community.

<sup>72</sup> See Haketer editions of the Bible: Gen. 1:26, 6:6; Deut.32:21; II Kings 20:9; Isa. 1:28, 38:8; Ps. 2:1, 21:2; Ecc. 7:25, 26; Dan. 12:10.

<sup>73</sup> Cohen, "Rashi's Torah Commentary," 451, 472.

<sup>74</sup> Cohen, "Rashi's Torah Commentary," 467.