

## **Halachic Rulings of the Rabbis of Istanbul, Saloniki and Izmir in the Face of Protestant Missionary Activities During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

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The Halachic rulings by the rabbis of Istanbul, Saloniki and Izmir, beginning in the 1830's through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, reflected their determined opposition to the intensive and multi-faceted evangelical activity of three Protestant missionary organizations which were active among the Jews in these cities. As a result of these missionary activities there were dozens of cases of Jews who had converted, both in Istanbul and Izmir but not in Saloniki.

In seeking the conversion of the Jews the following methods were employed. Jews were invited to visit their churches and the mission houses; the printing of Bibles and of the New Testament, translating them and other Christian writings into Ladino and distributing them among the Jews; visits to the homes and shops of Jews; and delivering sermons during the administration of medical care as well as the establishment of schools for Jewish children. The Halachic ruling which mainly viewed excommunication as an important tool against the missionary activities was intended primarily to provide the rabbis with a united front, in order to give a Halachic basis in their struggle against the missionizing.

This article deals with the rabbinic rulings which dealt with the various types of missionary activities. The varied evangelical activities, included the distribution of Bibles by the missionaries; the giving of holy books to converts and missionaries; friendly relations with the missionaries; sending boys and girls to Christian schools; receiving assistance from missionaries during times of need, and receiving medical assistance in missionary clinics and hospitals which it opened.

It can be learned that the rabbis of Istanbul, Saloniki and Izmir wrote Halachic rulings which mainly opposed interactions between Jews and missionaries. And yet, one can see that among them, that there were different attitudes towards receiving or purchasing books from the missionaries.