

The Diaspora of Israel according to Rabbi Y.L. Askénazi (Manitou)  
A Meeting of two Diaspora at the Orsay Seminary in Paris,  
1946–1970

*Yossef Charvit*

Some of the landmarks in the history of French Jews in modern times have experienced encounters between Ashkenazi and Sefardi jews. A unique seminary that was erected in Paris ("Orsay") after the Second World War is an experience of this kind. Rabbi Y.L. Ashkenazi (Manitou), who presided this meeting, points to the dynamics of sociology and the identity system that emerge from it. Manitou emphasizes that "the encounter between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim was very important. In those days, it was a very positive experience. At the micro-sociology level, the Ashkenazi and Sefardi Jewish communities met. Two Jewish dynasties that separated for hundreds of years met with admiration and glory", in his own words. This Beit Midrash provided an educational and conceptual response to Shoah refugees on the one hand and to the Ashkenazi members of the pre-war French jewish community, on the other. These two were subject to existential distress and the slippery slope of assimilation. Their encounter with Rabbi Ashkenazi teachings, that derived from the teachings of Algerian scholars and the Sefardi diaspora, resulted in the restoration of their Jewish identity and the acquisition of tools for dealing with the challenges of modern Jewish existence, as evidenced by students such as Georges Weiss, Stefan Moses, Pierre Simsovic, Miriam Doress-Herr, Francine Kaufmann and Marcel Goldman. My article therefore discusses the general and personal nature of this intersectional encounter.