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Conference: Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophical Interpretations and Religious Perspectives

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- 1 This international conference, held at the Maison de France on the Hebrew University of Jerusalem campus from May 20 to 23, 2002, enabled participants to enjoy almost 40 lectures in Hebrew, English and French.
- 2 Introduced by a superb lesson by Father Xavier Tilliette, Emeritus Professor at the Catholic Institute in Paris and the Gregorian University in Rome, its high point was an evening in the central auditorium of the Hebrew University where several hundred people came to hear Georges Hansel, Marie-Anne Lescourret and Shalom Rosenberg before viewing the film made by Salomon Malka for Emmanuel Levinas' 80th birthday.
- 3 Born in Kaunas in 1905 and educated at the University of Strasbourg and then in Germany where he was Husserl's last assistant, Levinas was a teacher and a thinker, a universalistic philosopher and a scholar of Judaism. With his mixture of cultures, Jewish, French, Russian and German, he was one of the initiators of phenomenology in France. After his doctorat d'état, *Totality and Infinity* (1961), he was appointed professor at Poitiers, Nanterre and then at the Sorbonne. In a permanent dialogue between Athens and Jerusalem, his works, superbly written, testify to a path which led him beyond classical metaphysics and modern idealism, from "the Ionian Isles to Iena" to the discovery of "otherness than being", of the "humanism of the other" towards a radical heterology showing that it is the Other who forms my subjectivity, in the dereliction and the affirmation of the face, a trace which calls me, provokes me, invokes me. A prolific author, Levinas dialogued with philosophy and thought, in particular that of Buber, Rosenzweig and naturally Heidegger. Derrida but also Ricoeur and Marion were privileged witnesses as were his numerous students. *Difficult Liberty* placed him for many years at the center of intellectual debate in France and in Europe. His various 'Talmudic Readings' did much for the rediscovery of Judaism in the West. For a long while, Israel

was recalcitrant to his thought, too theological for some and too secular for others. Now, he is now regularly translated into Hebrew and the focus of a surprising amount of interest. This conference was also an excellent time for exchanges and encounters; the CRFJ was happy to have been associated with it.