



Contemporary Voices in Jewish-Christian Dialogue #3
Dr. Edward Kessler
(1963–)

Described as “probably the most prolific interfaith figure in British academia,” Edward Kessler has been a pioneering figure in Jewish-Christian (and Jewish-Christian-Muslim) relations in Great Britain for much of the last two decades. Dr Kessler was born in 1963, and after a Bachelor’s degree in Hebrew and Religious Studies from the University of Leeds (1985), he pursued a Master of Theological Studies at the Harvard Divinity School, and a Master of Business Studies from the University of Stirling. Following these studies, he opted to work in a family-owned business for several years, returning to the University of Cambridge for doctoral studies, and receiving his Ph.D. there in 1998.

In 1998, Dr Kessler collaborated with the Rev Dr Martin Forward to establish the Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations (CJCR) at Cambridge. Eight years later, two other centres were founded at Cambridge—the Centre for the Study of Muslim-Jewish Relations (CMJR) and the Centre for Policy Public Education (CPPE)—which were eventually brought under a single umbrella structure which today is known as the Woolf Institute; Dr Kessler currently serves as its Executive Director. As its Web site states, “the Institute studies how relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims can enhance our understanding of key concepts of public life: community and identity, mutual respect, personal responsibility, and social solidarity. Combining theology with the social sciences and the humanities, the Woolf Institute seeks to strengthen the ethical framework that is needed for our political, economic and social life”. In the years of its existence, the Woolf Institute has become one of the most fertile, respected and influential centres for interfaith study in the United Kingdom, hosting conferences and lecture series, publishing cutting-edge research, and offering various public education programmes which creatively present contemporary interfaith dialogue to non-specialist audiences. The Institute has made particularly good use of the modern electronic media, offering a number of its graduate courses online, to students around the world.

Dr Kessler has spoken, written and published widely in the field of interreligious dialogue, including almost a dozen books to date on various aspects of that subject:

- 1989: *An English Jew: The Life and Writings of Claude Montefiore*, London: Vallentine Mitchell, (2nd Edition, 2002)
- 2002: *Jews and Christians in Conversation: Crossing Cultures and Generations*, eds. E. Kessler, JT Pawlikowski & J Banki, Cambridge: Orchard Academic
- 2004: *A Reader of Liberal Judaism: Israel Abrahams, Claude Montefiore, Israel Mattuck and Lily Montagu*, London: Vallentine Mitchell
- 2004: *Aspects of Liberal Judaism: Essays in Honour of John D Rayner on the Occasion of His 80th Birthday*, eds. E. Kessler and D.J.Goldberg, London: Vallentine Mitchell
- 2004: *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- 2004: *Themes in Jewish-Christian Relations*, eds. E. Kessler & M.J. Wright, Cambridge: Orchard Academic
- 2005: *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, eds. E. Kessler & N. Wenborn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- 2006: *Challenges in Jewish-Christian Relations*, eds. J. Aitken & E. Kessler, New York: Paulist Press
- 2006: *What do Jews Believe?* London and New York: Granta Publications
- 2010: *Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- 2013: *Jews, Christians and Muslims*, London: SCM

Much of Dr Kessler’s work (including his doctorate) has centred on the intersections between Jewish and Christian Biblical interpretation, and he is currently working on completing a new book about Jesus, which is to be published late in 2015. His articles and opinion pieces have appeared in

a number of Jewish, Christian and secular newspapers and magazines, and in 2006, he was awarded the Sternberg Interfaith Award on behalf of philanthropist Sir Sigmund Sternberg, “in recognition of outstanding services in furthering relations between faiths”. In 2011, Dr Kessler was honoured by Queen Elizabeth II, who inducted him as a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE), in recognition of his energetic work to promote better understanding and improved relations between religious groups, nationally and internationally. Dr Kessler and his wife Trisha have three children.

Suggestions for further reading and study:

Dr Kessler’s faculty home page on the Web site of the Woolf Institute:

<http://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/people/profile.asp?ItemID=51>

YouTube video of Dr Kessler’s lecture on “The Social Media and Interfaith Relations” from 9th Doha Conference on Interfaith Dialogue: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1PP2GhL-wI>

Video of Dr Kessler’s lecture on “Jewish-Christian Relations in Light of Vatican II”;

<http://vimeo.com/63657965>