

Woolf Institute Statement on the Death of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

It is with great sadness that the Woolf Institute learned of the death of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks on Saturday 7th November. Rabbi Sacks became a Patron in 2000, visiting and speaking at the Institute (originally called the Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations) on 12 occasions. He was not only a leader of the Jewish community but a leading voice in interfaith, especially Jewish-Christian, relations.

His interest in and support of the Woolf Institute was epitomised by his willingness to lecture to our students and staff (as well as the wider Cambridge academic community) on almost any subject, such as the importance of covenant (2000), the significance of dialogue (2006) and rebuilding trust (2013).

Two highlights stand out: firstly, his trip in December 2011 to the Holy See and meeting Pope Benedict XVI with Dr Ed Kessler and giving a lecture at the Gregorian Pontifical University entitled 'Giving a Soul to Europe'; secondly, planting a tree at Wesley House (Cambridge), in 2006, marking the creation of a new programme in Muslim-Jewish relations and speaking on interfaith dialogue.

Ed Kessler recounts the time when Rabbi Sacks visited his home in Cambridge and mentioned to him that his son was having a bar-mitzvah the following spring. Some months later, on the Friday morning before the bar-mitzvah, the phone rang and Rabbi Sacks was on the line. "Hello, Rabbi Sacks", Ed said, "what can I do for you?". Rabbi Sacks replied, "It's not you I wish to speak to, Ed, it is your son. I want to wish him well tomorrow and tell him about his bar-mitzvah Torah portion!" Ed, his son and the whole family were very moved by this act of friendship.

Lord Woolf said "Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks was a remarkable man, writing more than 30 books, none more important than *The Dignity of Difference*, which epitomised the importance of fostering better understanding between religions, which is what the Woolf Institute seeks to achieve. We will miss him and send our condolences to Elaine and the family."

Shabir Randeree, Chair of the Woolf Institute board of Trustees said "May the wonderful Rabbi Sacks rest in peace. He was the most amazing intellect, a man of God in every way. We mourn his loss along with his family and all of the British Jewry."