

# OVERVIEW



**Ekklesia is an independent change network promoting transformative ideas about politics, society and beliefs**

Changing Ideas  
Changing World  
Changing Outlook

## 1. About Ekklesia

Ekklesia is an independent change network promoting transformative ideas for a better world. Our aim is to connect positive beliefs and ethics with politics.

We seek to be a ‘theatre for ideas’, combining reflection, action and culture. Our roots are in Christian social thought, but people of other convictions (both non-religious and religious) are vital partners. Our vision is one of justice, peace and sustainability for people and planet.

Established as a citizen-based think tank in 2001/2, Ekklesia has evolved into a reflection, briefing, policy, publishing, academic and advocacy organisation. We seek to be small, mobile, flexible and intelligent.

We now feel that the designation ‘change network’ captures most of what we seek to do better than the corporatised and much-abused term ‘think tank’, though we will use the latter as a secondary description in the public policy area.

In any case we remain committed to a style of practical and theoretical investigation which could reasonably be described as “thinking without tanks”.

Over the past 20 years well over 200 people have contributed directly to our work, including (at different stages) some 20 associates, two directors, three associate directors, a chief operating officer, an administrator, a publishing manager and seven board members.

At its peak, Ekklesia has attracted several thousand people a day to its website, briefings and reports. At present we have over 25,000 followers on our various social media accounts, and we receive around a million visits to those per month.

## 2. People

Ekklesia was originally set up to operate ‘virtually’, with its freelance / volunteer staff operating from different locations. From 2014–16 we were able to employ part-time staff and maintain a small office in London. We are now working on a voluntary and contract basis.

We have relocated to Edinburgh, Scotland, but engage with partners in other parts of the British and Irish isles and beyond. Our current core personnel are:

*Director* – Simon Barrow (Scotland)

*Associate Director* – Jill Segger (England)

*Production and Publishing Consultant* – Bob Carling (England)

*Associates:* Bernadette Meaden (England), Savitri Hensman, (Sri Lanka/UK), John Gillibrand (Wales), Doug Hynd (Australia), Harry Hagopian (MENA), Jake Cunliffe (USA).

### 3. History

The idea for Ekklesia was conceived in 2001 by Jonathan Bartley, who remained with us until June 2016. We launched in 2002, initially operating virtually. We were Britain's first independent think-tank examining and reporting specifically on politics and belief in public life from a progressive, values-driven, change-oriented angle.

Our initial inspiration was the levelling, liberationist and 'peace church' (Quaker and Mennonite) strand within Christianity – the part of it that feels "called out (ekkleisia) of empire" to be and do something quite different. That is still part of our identity, but we have gone on to make good friends and allies among those of different faith stances, as well as Humanists and others for whom experiences of institutional religion have been abusive, imprisoning or harmful.

In recent years Ekklesia has broadened its base of engagement, analysis and support to look at beliefs, ethics and politics in a broader, dialogical context. That has led us to speak out strongly on issues such as the need for economic and social equality, practicing nonviolence, racism, sexism, disability rights, support for migrants and refugees, climate justice, alternatives to prison, the dangers of authoritarian religion, inclusive education, opposing discrimination against LGBTQIA+ people, and more.

As well as briefing, commentary, reports, interventions in public policy, consultations, engagement with the media, academic work, research, events and publishing, Ekklesia has actively supported campaigns for social change and partnered with others in the NGO and 'citizen think-tank' sector. We have also raised in excess of £300,000 for good causes over the years, through Fairtrade affiliates and book sales.

Ekklesia is now based in Scotland, with associates in other parts of these islands and beyond. We have therefore taken an increasing interest in Scottish politics, independence, Celtic spirituality and Northern European politics, culture and ecology.

In 2016 we established Ekklesia Publishing and have produced ten titles to date, with more to come. (There are 21 books featuring the work of Ekklesia staff and associates overall.)

As of 2021, Ekklesia has been operating for 20 years. We intend to celebrate that landmark later in the year. Plans include a published collection entitled *Thinking Without Tanks: Beliefs, Politics and Ethics Beyond Christendom*.

### 4. Funding

Ekklesia exists financially on modest income from publishing, project fees, and donations.

We receive no large corporate or political contributions and we are not affiliated to any party, religious organisation or commercial interest group.

We are a company limited by guarantee, structured and operating on a not-for-profit basis. Since 2016 we have existed on donor and project/sales income averaging at £4,000 per year. We are always happy to answer questions about finance and believe strongly in transparency for the think-tank sector.

From 2013 to 2016 only, Ekklesia received regeneration funding from a charitable trust. Our annual income peaked at £92,000 during that period.

The maximum individual contribution we have ever received is £2,500. Over the past twenty years we have had small donations from over 500 individuals, to whom we are extremely grateful.

We would especially like to thank the Rev Willard E. Roth, Alice M. Roth, Frank Strang, and Bishop David Atkinson for their kind support in helping to make this new site and our publishing sites possible.

Ekklesia's entry on WikiCorporates, via On Think Tanks, can be found online.

We will shortly be announcing a new financial partnership scheme.

## **5. Projects, Briefing and Commentary**

Ekklesia provides regular briefing, research, engagement and commentary on public issues, with a developing focus on:

- Truth-telling in Public Life
- Emotionally Intelligent Politics
- Negotiating Just Futures
- Examining Our Beliefs
- Opposing Religious Authoritarianism
- Reclaiming Democratic Space
- Exploring Change Agency
- Activating a 'Theatre for Ideas'

In 2021 and beyond, we are looking to develop projects, activities and ideas around these eight areas of concern.

Our regular news briefing and commentary (updated daily) can be found on the front of this site, and is archived here. The focus of this is on promoting transformational change; highlighting work for peace, justice and sustainability; and supporting initiatives for a better world.

## **6. Values**

Our ten core 'benchmarks' for moving towards a better society, and working/voting for a genuinely common good, were first enunciated in 2015.

They were consciously designed to be sharable by people of goodwill from different faith traditions, and among those of non-religious convictions, too.

- A commitment to favouring the poorest and most vulnerable
- Actively redressing social and economic injustices and inequalities
- Welcoming the stranger and valuing displaced and marginalised people
- Seeing people, their dignity and rights as the solution not the problem
- Moving from punitive ‘welfare’ to a society where all fare well, including UBI/UBS
- Promoting community and neighbourhood empowerment
- Food, education, health, housing, work and sustainable income for all
- Care for planet and people as the basis for human development
- Investing in nonviolent alternatives to war and force as the basis for security
- Transparency, honesty, representativeness and accountability in public and economic life

Underpinning these, in the political realm, is a commitment to subsidiarity, popular sovereignty, proportional representation, and participatory/deliberative democracy as ethical imperatives.

Ekklesia’s approach is also rooted in virtue ethics. This involves a focus on exploring what ‘the good’ means in tangible terms; a refusal to separate means and ends; attention to how we need to be shaped as people and communities to help realise a good society (character formation); and nurturing the particular habits and practices required to direct interpersonal life towards love as well as justice: things like nonviolence, forgiveness, sharing, creativity, solidarity, restoring and repairing.

In the past, we agreed a Values Statement and full FAQs. These will be updated in due course.

## **7. Reports and Policy**

Over the past twenty years Ekklesia has produced over 120 public policy reports and research papers, as well as publishing ten books ourselves and contributing to numerous other publications – monographs, journals, magazines and newspapers.

We have also made submissions to a range of public policy consultations at Westminster (UK Government) and Holyrood (Scottish Government), as well as to church and civic bodies, in recent years. The latest include:

- Faith Engagement (a response to the UK Government)
- Digital Ethics: A Framework for Trust (comments to the Scottish Government)
- Equally Safe (response to a Scottish Government consultation)
- Hate Crime and Public Order (response to a Scottish Government consultation)
- Talking Fracking (response to Scottish Government consultation on UOG)

Our research, policy and consultation material from 2004 to 2020 can be found online at our old site ([www.old.ekklesia.co.uk](http://www.old.ekklesia.co.uk)).

## 8. Papers

Ekklesia is pleased to work with independent researchers and academics, educational institutions, NGOs and other partners in making high-quality research and comment available as part of an expanding public conversation about beliefs, values, ethics, politics and public life.

Subjects we have covered include religion in public life, the changing nature of secularity, religious fundamentalism, truth-telling and ethics, disability and welfare, nonviolence and Remembrance, free speech issues in tertiary education, reforming faith schools, sexuality, challenging Christian exclusivism, disestablishment, Europe and the EU, independent politics, assessment of party policies across the UK for General elections, and much more.

Our latest papers include:

- *Redemptive Justice?* A framework for engaging survivors of church related abuse
- *Seeking truth and freedom in a post-truth world.* Reflections on the work of philosopher Michael Polanyi
- *The 2019 general election and beyond.* Including Ekklesia's ten 'benchmarks' for a better society

## 9. Affiliations and Allies

Over the past twenty years, Ekklesia has helped to found, collaborate with and/or support a range of research and public engagement initiatives allied to priorities in our own work.

*These partnerships currently include the following:*

- Ekklesia co-founded the Accord Coalition in 2008, with the aim of substantially reforming faith schools in England and Wales, so as to eliminate discrimination on religious grounds in election, staffing, teaching about religion and belief, and assemblies. In this we cooperate with Humanists UK and with other faith-based organisations who oppose such discrimination. Our director is also a trustee of the Inclusive Education Trust, the charitable arm of Accord. We share similar concerns in Scotland, where we are now based.
- Since 2018 we have been delighted to be co-sponsors of the annual Solas Festival, held in Perthshire, Scotland, and remotely, having first been involved with the Festival in 2016. Solas Festival – Scotland's midsummer festival – has been running since 2009. The all-age, weekend-long celebration of music and the arts is designed to entertain, inspire and challenge.
- In 2014 we formed a partnership with Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church in London. This radical Christian community, which has a history including links to Martin Luther King Jr. and the suffragettes, has hosted and co-hosted a range of Ekklesia events over the years. It has also been our office base (up to 2016 – we are now based remotely, from Edinburgh, Scotland) and our registered address. We have organised three events funded by the Seth Stephens bequest, and plan more in the future.
- Since 2009, when it was founded, we have been pleased to collaborate with Dr Simon Duffy and the excellent Centre for Welfare Reform.

- From 2011 to 2015, and now from 2020 onwards, we are in partnership with the Critical Religion Association, which pioneers post-colonial approaches to academic research and teaching in the areas of religion and belief.
- We have assisted with the work of High Profiles, whose interviews engage with people who help to shape our world or the way we perceive it. We want to learn more about their values, beliefs and principles and the experience of life that has formed them. Both our current and former director have conducted interviews for High Profiles.
- Since 2018 we have been working with the Speak Out Survivors network, which produced the powerful book *Letters to a Broken Church* through Ekklesia Publishing in 2019.
- In 2020 we formed a partnership with Beer and Theology Cambridge, offering informal seminars on Zoom on the first Friday of each month. We currently offer hosting for these.

*In the recent past, our collaborations have included:*

- Among other publishing partnerships, co-publishing *Scotland 2021* (September 2016) with Bella Caledonia, an online magazine combining political and cultural commentary.
- Since 2012, participating in advisory boards on religion and belief at the University of Edinburgh and the University of Stirling.
- From 2012 to 2015, Ekklesia co-sponsored the Festival of Spirituality and Peace (now Just Festival) in Edinburgh. We have also been involved in the Greenbelt Festival over the years.
- From 2011 to 2015 and beyond we have collaborated with the Spartacus network, War on Welfare and other campaigning groups of disabled people on issues of disability and social security. These continue to be important concerns for Ekklesia.
- In 2008 we helped Oikocredit, the global ecumenical the fair finance cooperative that invests directly in disadvantaged communities, to get going in the UK.
- From our earliest days in 2002 we were involved in the Anabaptist Network and peace church activities in the UK and beyond, including working with Christian Peacemaker Teams in the UK and internationally. We also partnered with the then London Mennonite Centre and Metanoia Books for a number of years, and were part of the ‘Root and Branch’ network.

## 10. Events

Ekklesia works with allied and sympathetic organisations on discussion and research/investigation gatherings. We are hoping to launch a new series of online events in 2021, and to make podcasts and videocasts available through this site.

Speakers at our past events have included former Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams, Muslim scholar Professor Mona Siddiqui, Rabbi Jonathan Romain, refugee activist and scholar Professor Alison Phipps, disability activist Juliet Marlow, religion scholar Professor Naomi Goldenberg from the University of Ottawa, Scottish political commentator Dr Gerry Hassan, Middle East commentator and lawyer/ecumenist Dr Harry Hagopian, Christian Aid Scotland director the Rev Sally Foster-Fulton, and human rights activist and humanist Peter Tatchell.

Our series of interfaith events with our partners at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church in London will be continued as soon as we are able.

In recent years we have run events in Scotland and England at the Solas Festival, Greenbelt Festival, and Just Festival.

We also engage in private round-tables or networks to discuss sensitive issues in a confidential format, or to bring together people with radically differing perspectives in a human, personal way. Issues covered have included sexuality, end of life issues, and abuse in church and other institutions.

## 11. Press and Social Media

Ekklesia is pleased to engage with a wide range of press, general and academic media, and social media on a wide range of topics.

We can offer both advocacy-angled commentary on a range of issues (ethics, beliefs and politics; nonviolence, the problem of Christian nationalism and supremacism; many specific policy issues) and also balanced and informed briefing on particular questions of interest to the media that have an ethics or belief angle.

Over the years, Ekklesia has featured in the national and international press, BBC television and radio, LBC, Premier, and many other broadcast outlets.

On social media, we offer regular comment and analysis via our Twitter account, which offers both up-to-date news and detailed coverage of public policy issues, civil society campaigns, budgets and elections. Less used to date (though we will be expanding these) is our Facebook page (for contact and updates) and our Facebook group (for discussion). We are looking at using Instagram moving forward.

## 12. Services

Ekklesia is able to offer, by special arrangement, a range of high-quality professional services in a cost-effective way. Feel free to ask us about:

- Speakers for conferences and discussion groups
- Consultancy on organisational change, publicity, etc.
- Training and development for NGOs
- Collaboration on establishing and running events
- Publishing opportunities in various media

## 13. Book Publishing

**Ekklesia Publishing** was established in 2016 and has so far produced ten titles in under five years, with another three in process for 2021. Our aim is to bring to market high quality books which help change the way we look at the world based on the values of social justice, peacemaking, sustainability and inclusion.

Many of our authors and contributors write from a progressive Christian perspective, but we want to encourage conversation across a spectrum of beliefs and spiritually informed perspectives, religious or otherwise.

Ekklesia Publishing seeks to build a bridge between disciplined thinking and popular expression and discussion. Ekklesia Publishing has its own website

**Siglum** is a new imprint supported by us which focuses on the illuminative and transformative possibilities of the arts, music and culture. Its logo is a dove, the universal sign of peace. Launched in 2019 we have two new titles, on poetry/prose and sport, with a third on music due later in the year. Siglum Publishing has its own website.

Books recently published include:

- *Letters to a Broken Church*, edited by Janet Fife and Gilo (2019)
- *Hope Rediscovered: Biblical Wisdom for an Anxious World*, by David Atkinson – with a foreword by Archbishop Rowan Williams (2019)
- *Words Out of Silence*, by Jill Segger (2019), with a foreword by Rachel Mann
- *Keeping Faith With Hope: The Challenge of Israel-Palestine*, by Harry Hagopian (2019), with a foreword by Rami G. Khouri.

## 14. Advocacy

Ekklesia is a change network as well as a citizen-based think tank. Over the past 20 years we have not only contributed to research, reflection and policy, we have also matched words with actions through lobbying, advocacy and campaigning.

That has included:

- *Working with disabled people's organisations (DPOs), like the WOW Campaign, on welfare reform and social security issues;*
- *Supporting survivors of church-related abuse in pushing for change and recompense;*
- *Bringing church leaders and influencers together to oppose benefit cuts;*
- *Proposing and pressing for alternatives to austerity in the economic realm;*
- *Co-founding the Accord Coalition to work with religious and non-religious partners in advocating the reform of faith schools;*
- *Working as part of the Commission on Civil Society and Democratic Engagement on lobbying issues at Westminster;*
- *Promoting ethical investment (and divestment from harmful industries) within the churches;*
- *Regularly promoting the WCC Thursdays in Black campaign against gender-based violence and rape;*
- *Advocating for refugees, migrants and human rights;*
- *Publicising the work of groups like Stop Funding Hate;*
- *Pressing on debt and for a Financial Transaction Tax through the Robin Hood Tax Campaign;*
- *Collaborating with Operation Noah and climate activism;*
- *Working against racism, colonialism and white supremacy;*

- *Drawing attention to the need for recognition of the Armenian Genocide and working on other MENA and Israel/Palestine concerns;*
- *A call for change in British housing policy;*
- *Engagement with issues around the Scottish independence referendum;*
- *Pressing for electoral reform through Power 2010 and other agencies;*
- *Opposing Christian Nationalism, narratives of persecution, and other forms of authoritarian and regressive religion;*
- *Advocating for disestablishment of the Church of England;*
- *Critiquing and opposing creationism / ID with the BCSE;*
- *Working for marriage reform;*
- *Looking to re-imagine Remembrance and encourage nonviolence;*
- *Handling UK press work for the Christian Peacemaker Teams activists held captive in Iraq for 118 days;*
- *Advocating LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the church... and much more.*

We have also helped raise funds for other causes – including £250,000+ over the years for Fairtrade agencies, £1,600+ for Ministers and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors (MACSAS), and £5,000+ for African development projects through the Homeless World Cup.

## 15. Academic

One of our functions as a change network and think-tank is to offer an interface between academic research or commentary, on the one hand, and a wider audience found in NGOs, the media, civic and religious networks, and advocacy organisations on the other.

Over the years, we have been involved with academic conferences and events at universities in Rennes (France), Edinburgh and Stirling (Scotland), Surrey, Manchester and Oxford (England), Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (USA), and elsewhere.

We are also keen to encourage the work of independent academics and researchers, and to publish or co-publish with them.

Ekklesia director Simon Barrow is currently a member of the advisory board for the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the University of Edinburgh, and for the Religion Advisory Board within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of Stirling.

## 16. Critical Religion

We have worked with, and co-published materials from, the Critical Religion Association in past years – notably from 2011 to 2015. That included a UK visit by religion scholar Professor Naomi Goldenberg from the University of Ottawa, Canada, in 2012.

Critical Religion material published on Ekklesia during the first phase of our collaboration can all be found online via our website.

You can access the new Critical Religion Reader, edited by Melanie Barbato, Cameron Montgomery and Rajalakshmi Nadadur Kannan (CRA, 2020) via Scribd.

We look forward to re-establishing and renewing our relationship with CRA (and with the dynamic, post-colonial, phenomenological approach of ‘critical religion’) fully in 2021, as part of our engagement with several academic institutions.

## 17. Audiovisuals

Since 2017 Ekklesia has participated in a range of videocasts and broadcast events, mostly in partnership with others. We will be consolidating some of these onto a new YouTube channel in 2021.

We also have plans for a series of podcasts, including ones on the theme of ‘ChangeMaking’. Please watch out for further updates and information.

We would like to thank and acknowledge UnSplash for use of images on our website.

## 18. Library

Recent books by Ekklesia staff and associates:

- Simon Barrow (w. Gerry Hassan, eds.), *Scotland After the Virus*, Luath Press, 2020.
- Bernadette Meaden, *Illness, Disability and Caring*, DLT, 2020.
- Harry Hagopian, *Keeping Faith With Hope: The Challenge of Israel Palestine*, Ekklesia, 2019.
- Jill Segger, *Words Out of Silence*, Ekklesia/Siglum, 2019.
- Simon Barrow (w. Gerry Hassan, eds.), *Scotland the Brave?* Luath, 2019
- Simon Barrow (ed.), *Feast or Famine? How the Gospel Challenges Austerity*, DLT, 2017
- Virginia Moffatt (ed.), *Reclaiming the Common Good*, DLT, 2017 – inc. several Ekklesia contributors
- Savitri Hensman, *Sexuality, Struggle and Saintliness*, Ekklesia, 2015.
- Simon Barrow (w. Mike Small, eds.), *Scotland 2021*, Bella Caledonia/Ekklesia, 2016.
- Symon Hill, *The Upside-Down Bible*, DLT, 2015.
- Jolyon Mitchell, Owen Gower (eds.), *Religion and the News*, Ashgate, 2012 – inc. Simon Barrow
- Tricia Gates Brown (ed.), *118 Days: Christian Peacemaker Teams Held Captive in Iraq*, CPT, 2010 – w. Simon Barrow
- Simon Barrow (ed.), *Fear or Freedom? Why a Warring Church Must Change*, Shoving Leopard, 2008 (Foreword: Desmond Tutu)
- Simon Barrow, Jonathan Bartley (eds.), *Consuming Passion: Why the Killing of Jesus Really Matters*, DLT, 2006.
- Jonathan Bartley, *Faith and Politics After Christendom: Church As a Movement for Anarchy*, Paternoster Press, 2006.
- Richard Franklin, *Towards the Abolition of the Nation State*, Sarum College/Ekklesia, 2004.
- Jonathan Bartley, *The Subversive Manifesto*, BRF, 2002.

Plus a further five books by other authors from Ekklesia Publishing.

Later in 2021/2 we plan to provide an online library of our own resources published over the past two decades. In the meantime, we are pleased to commend collections of articles and policy proposals from those whose research we value and connect with. These include:

Centre for Welfare Reform – library  
Common Weal – policy library  
Robin Hood Tax Campaign – library  
Prime Economics – library

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Our sincere thanks to all who have been part of the Ekklesia journey over 20 years.

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**Simon Barrow**  
*Director*  
*January/February 2021*

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