



# The Church of Scotland

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## Church and Society Council

### Surveillance and Social Justice – May 2017

#### Section 11. The Surveilled and Surveilling One

**11.1** In an approach aimed at redressing such dominating associations around God's watchful gaze, a number of theologians have advocated that we talk about 'surveillance from the Cross'.<sup>1</sup> Jesus was a man under surveillance, by the Pharisees, the Romans and his followers. More importantly, the Cross is not only an event but it discloses the character of the one crucified. It is the self-surrendering, caring Jesus who expresses his nature as God on the Cross.

**11.2** As one who himself knew surveillance, Christ watches the world. He places Himself in solidarity with all under surveillance, particularly those for whom the consequences of surveillance may be discriminatory. Surveillance from the Cross focuses our attention on the qualities of the One watching; One who is *with* us rather than dominating us.

**11.3** This understanding of God's watching over us (surveillance) distances the more imperialistic connotations of traditional images. Surveillance from the Cross affirms the possibility that 21<sup>st</sup> century surveillance systems can be acts of care. It rehabilitates our language about surveillance so that it cannot simply be dismissed as bad. At the same time, Jesus' solidarity with marginalised people turns attention to the ways in which contemporary systems of monitoring reinforce (or even create) new forms of injustice and discrimination.

[See the full report](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Stoddart, *Theological Perspectives on a Surveillance Society: Watching and Being Watched* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011). There are not many other theological treatments of surveillance but important contributions are made by David Lyon, 'Surveillance and the Eye of God,' *Studies in Christian Ethics* 27: 1 (2014), 21-32; David Lyon, 'Whither Shall I Flee? Surveillance, Omniscience and Normativity in the Panopticon,' *Christian Scholars Review* 14: 3 (1995), 302-12. In Sweden, Susanne Wigorts Yngvesson of Stockholm School of Theology is currently developing theological work on surveillance, particularly around the tradition of the eye of God.