



# The Church of Scotland

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## Church and Society Council

### Surveillance and Social Justice – May 2017

#### Section 12. Relational knowledge

**12.1** Some Christians feel uncomfortable talking of God's *surveillance*, even when this is articulated as the caring gaze of Jesus. Quaker theologian Rachel Muers has explored the idea of relational knowledge as a challenge to de-contextualised and objective information *about* someone.

**12.2** True knowledge is not about information possessed, shorn of context or wrenched from the matrix of relationships in which it is gained. Knowledge arises within specific relationships which carry and invest knowledge with responsibilities. Muers builds this model of 'hearing knowledge' from God's way of knowing which, she argues, is 'knowledge within the context of God's relation to what – and whom – God knows.'<sup>1</sup> God's knowledge is thus relational or covenantal knowledge; God does not gather information about us.

**12.3** We have here a theological critique of contemporary datafication. In counterpoint to much of modern surveillance, a Christian theology of surveillance is built on relational knowledge and has care and solidarity at its heart.

[See the full report](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Muers, *Keeping God's silence : towards a theological ethics of communication* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2004), p. 194.