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Beholding: Recovering the apophatic as a stance for Christian Communities engaging in mission.

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Abstract

In a post-Christendom and post-colonial world Christian communities struggle to deal with the loss of their historical power and a new vulnerability to the possibility of death.

In this paradigm shift, still usefully delineated by David Bosch and others the task of local churches, however constituted, is understood as forming Christian community around God's mission in the world.

To put it another way, discerning or 'paying attention to' the presence and activity of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit in the world is at the heart of participating in the *missio Dei*.

In the biblical and Christian traditions there is a rather forgotten way of 'paying attention' that is grounded in the 'paradox of intention', negative or apophatic stance which states that trying to reach God can only be done so by letting go of the intention to do so.

Recent research into the functioning of the human brain (Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and Emissary*, 2018, Yale UP) locates the ability for this apophatic or 'beholding' stance in the right brain, while left brain 'linearity' has predominated over the past few centuries. In this paper I will connect McGilchrist's work with that of Maggie Ross on Silence (DLT, 2014 & 2018) in order to recover the apophatic as a stance that local Christian communities can take in mission which renegotiates their power and allows them to look their vulnerabilities, even to death, in the face.