

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY – TUESDAY, 29TH OCTOBER, 2024
PROFESSOR TINA BEATTIE – writer and Catholic theologian

Good morning.

This weekend saw the end of a three-year process of consultation in the Catholic Church, which sought feedback from Catholics around the world on a variety of issues. One topic proposed for discussion was the ordination of women as deacons. An international survey of 17,000 Catholic women submitted to the Vatican found that the majority of respondents supported women's ordination. However, the role of women in the church remains highly divisive, with conservatives insisting there's no theological justification for ordaining women. The discussion was sidelined, as it has been several times before.

I share the disappointment of those who had hoped for a more open dialogue, but despite my frustrations, I remain within this vast community of prayer, worship and theology, for it extends far beyond institutional Catholicism. Like all great religious traditions, the Catholic Church is a custodian of living stories and expressions of yearning and hope that speak to the human condition. For me, there's a creative tension between the opportunities and challenges of modern society, including feminism, and enduring sources of meaning rooted in historical communities of faith.

The Catholic magazine, *The Tablet*, has an interview this week with psychiatrist and philosopher Iain McGilchrist. He is an influential critic of modern Western society, on the basis of his theory that modernity has privileged the mechanistic, practical and self-interested left hemisphere of the brain, while neglecting the values of imagination, creativity and generosity associated with the right hemisphere. As a result, he argues, we've cut ourselves off from sustaining networks of connection with nature, with the divine, and with one another, and we're losing our sense of wonder and our capacity for humility.

McGilchrist is one of several thinkers who have turned to the Christian tradition in the quest to make sense of the failures and sorrows of our turbulent times. Others include historian Tom Holland and singer/songwriter Nick Cave. I'm inspired by such thinkers who, while not identifying with the institutional Church, are breaking open the tradition and affirming Christianity's capacity to nurture a sense of meaning earthed in wonder and sustained by hope.

In the Gospels, Jesus warns his disciples that new wine cannot be put into old wineskins because they will burst. Perhaps the old wineskins of Christian institutions are being burst open by new wine fermenting on the margins, where many of us are seeking a path of wisdom through the tangled relationship between modernity's aspirations and Christian inspiration.