

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*As I read through Francis Maier's article on Christopher Lasch, I could not stop bolding the insights.*

*People speak to me often of the 400 elites in Rome carefully chosen by church elites and appointed by Pope Francis, with a majority uneducated in theology but filled with worldly ideologies, along with some bishops who have rejected the Catholic deposit of faith. People are disgusted, frustrated, and frightened for the church which should guide them to Christ, led by Jesus and not bow to the money and demands of Bill Gates, George Soros, Claus Schwab Xi Jinping big pharma, munitions manufacturers, or to others in our church who seek worldly approval and money.*

*I am tired of the elites, those with power and money in the world, the church, education trying to direct MY LIFE according to their ideologies. I prefer to move forward and make my own progress, mistakes, and live in hope for a better material and spiritual life.*

*The elites rob me with inflation, open borders, new theology away from Jesus, lockdowns, lack of faith, closing churches, pushing untested vax and medicines, dividing me from others by race, degrading the family with new sexual language and categories, climate scares, cashless world where they can control what I spend, false ideas of equity giving to all the same outcome regardless of effort or talent, corrupt justice systems, cancel culture, especially of faithful clergy. Add your own.*

*So Light in the Darkness speaks of hope and draws the reader to the God who provides it, even though the subject of the essay was atheistic.*

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## **Light in the Darkness**

*Francis X. Maier*

Exactly 30 years ago this fall, Christopher Lasch delivered the manuscript for his book, *[The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy](#)* <sup>[1]</sup>, to W.W. Norton his publisher. He'd written it with the help of his daughter Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, herself a distinguished scholar, while dealing with terminal

cancer. He refused chemotherapy to keep his mind clear in completing his final text. And he died just a few months later, in February 1994.

So why would a dead historian and social critic with no religious faith warrant remembering by Christians, especially in a week marked by Thanksgiving? Two reasons. First, he had an outsized influence on the thinking of a whole generation of scholars, many of them Catholic. And second, the substance of his work was, and remains, genuinely prophetic. In some ways, it's more relevant today than when he wrote it.

Lasch was always a man of the Left. He grounded his early career in Marx and Freud. But he was never a predictable zealot. He was admired by some of the leading cultural conservatives of his day and despised by some of his own intellectual tribe. He came from a militantly atheist background and was never personally religious. **But over time he became more and more sympathetic toward religious belief and believers.**

**He was repelled by the destructive effects of late-stage capitalism and the wealth inequality it bred. He was against easy divorce, a critic of the sexual revolution, distrustful of social-science elitism, and a strong supporter of intact, traditional marriages and families. He preferred the small scale and the communitarian to globalist thinking; a life ruled by obligations as well as rights; and hope instead of optimism.**

Lasch had a keen sense of social justice and **the need for mature, engaged adults capable of unselfish action in sustaining the democratic process.** As a result, he had little use for progressive ideology because of its refusal to accept the tragic elements of life. He wrote that:

The idea of progress alone. . .weakens the spirit of sacrifice, nor does it give us an effective antidote to despair. . . .**[H]ope does not demand a belief in progress. It demands a**

**belief in justice: a conviction that the wicked will suffer, that wrongs will be made right, that the underlying order of things will not be flouted with impunity. Hope implies a deep-seated trust in life that appears absurd to those who lack it. It rests on a confidence not so much in the future as in the past. . Why would the past matter? It mattered for Lasch because real history honestly remembered is a master class in reality. And its main lessons are two: First, humans are inescapably fallible and weak. But, second, humans also have the capacity for nobility, generosity, genius, and the creation of new life.**

**“The worst is always what the hopeful are prepared for,”** Lasch wrote, because:

their trust in life would not be worth much if it had not survived disappointments in the past, while [their] knowledge that the future holds further disappointments demonstrates the continuing need for hope. Believers in progress on the other hand, though they like to think of themselves as the party of hope, actually have little need of hope since they [assume] they have history on their side. But their lack of it incapacitates them for intelligent action.

He added: **“Progressive ideology weakens the spirit of sacrifice. . . .Nor does it give us an effective antidote to despair” – *precisely* because it derides and ignores the experience of the past and the wisdom it can teach.**

He understood that real progress involves more than an abundance of material goods, or technological wizardry, or scientific breakthroughs. Each of those things can be good when properly understood and used. But real progress is always *and essentially* a matter of the human spirit.

**What Lasch resented most about postwar American culture was its rejection of any sane limits to human achievement and desire, and its transforming of productive, self-confident adults into dependent, appetite-driven consumers. What he most detested about our modern elites was their treatment of common, everyday Americans not as thinking, responsible citizens but as ignorant (and potentially dangerous) plebeians unable to stumble through life without expert help.**

**His quarrel with social science was its reduction of the human person from a subject with inherent dignity requiring due respect, to an object in need of re-engineering and careful control.**

Much of his thought, in fact, tracks surprisingly well with Christian social teaching. In his college years, Lasch had a strong interest in Augustine, and toward his career's end he drew on the Protestant thinkers Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr in his work. He channeled both in suggesting that hope – **real hope** – **springs from “contrition and gratitude” – “gratitude for Creation and contrition before Judgment.”**

And in his final book, **Lasch criticized the modern world's unwillingness to grasp the real nature of religion. Real faith, seriously lived, he noted, is never a crutch but a challenge.** And “the deepest variety of religious faith. . .arises, in every age, out of a background of despair. **Religious faith asserts the *goodness of being* in the face of suffering and evil.**” [emphasis added]

Earlier this fall, I spoke with both Eric Miller, the Protestant scholar who wrote Lasch's biography, *Hope in a Scattering Time* [2], and Chris Shannon, a Catholic and former student of Lasch, and now a professor of history at Christendom College. Both stressed one particular and outstanding quality in Lasch's character: He was an honest man. He saw the world clearly, he wrote about it honestly, and **he never allowed himself to**

**squeeze reality and its awkward facts into an ideological straitjacket.**

I suppose the point is this. Light really *does* still shine in the darkness. In an age of malignant duplicity, there are still honest men. Christopher Lasch was one of them. But there are more. And it's another reason for gratitude this Thanksgiving.

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URLs in this post:

[1] *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*: **<https://amzn.to/3R4Rqkn>**

[2] Hope in a Scattering Time: **<https://amzn.to/3MQ3nb4>**