

Anne Lastman and Victims of Abortion

Brian Baxter

Anne Lastman runs an organisation in Melbourne called *Victims of Abortion Trauma Counselling and Information Services* (VOA). [This organisation's aim](#) is to offer:

... post-abortive men and women a safe place and a sacred space where it would be possible for them to speak about their abortion experience and their sadness/feelings following this procedure.

Anne was born in Calabria, southern Italy [[Pro-Life Congress Lourdes 2008](#) , VT7, 4:00] around 1951. Her family later moved to Perth, WA and Anne probably entered her first marriage around 1970, soon giving birth to two sons. However, this marriage broke up and Anne had two abortions [[Pro-Life Congress Lourdes 2008](#) , VT7, 1:30], around 1973 and 1978.

Anne was raised as a Catholic but adopted a pro-choice position. As she [explained to a journalist](#) in 2008, “Her moral dilemma [at the time of the abortions] was overtaken by the personal crisis she was going through. Both abortions happened because of failing relationships.” Anne then spent several years as a single parent, putting her two boys into [daycare](#) [9:15] from the time they were two or three years old. After some time she married again, her new husband being Andrew Lastman. In 1982, Anne gave birth to a third son, and in 1985 to a fourth.

Anne says that her abortions traumatised her and gave her nightmares. She [stopped attending church](#) for many years (from about the mid-1970s until 1995) because:

... I could not stand being before God with the knowledge of what I had done, and the worse knowledge that [my aborted] infants (I was told) could never enter heaven. [p.1]

During the mid-1990s, at the instigation of a Catholic priest, Anne returned to active participation in the Church but seems to have been attracted to some of its more mystical and/or rigorous expressions. She herself dates [this phase of her life](#) to some time she spent at the Holy Spirit of Freedom Community (HSOF) in Pemberton WA:

It was here in this beautiful sprawling farm setting that the Lord began to draw me towards the work that I am doing now. It was here that the Lord began the healing of my abortion wounds ... [p.5]

The [HSOF](#) is a charitable organisation that describes itself as ‘a Catholic charismatic community’, the term ‘charismatic’ in this context denoting a strong interest in the ‘spiritual outpourings’ characteristic of Protestant Pentecostalism i.e. ‘miracle’ healings, ‘speaking in tongues’ etc. Around this time, Anne also [seems to have become involved](#) [p.3] with the very strict form of Roman Catholicism known as the [Neocatechumenate](#).

Around 1995 the Lastman family moved from Perth to Melbourne, Vic. There she became [involved in 'pro-life activities'](#) [p.1], including [demonstrating outside abortion clinics](#) [p.1]. In 1996 she also began ‘counselling’ other women who had had abortions [Anne R. Lastman (2007), *Redeeming Grief: Abortion and Its Pain* (Victims of Abortion) (hereafter *RG*), v].

In 1999, Lastman set up an entity called ‘[Victims of Abortion](#) Trauma Counselling and Information Services’ (‘VOA’ for short). This appears to be a one-person charity which [offers](#):

... post-abortive men and women a safe place and a sacred space where it would be possible for them to speak about their abortion experience and their sadness/feelings following this procedure.

Lastman is entirely frank about the [explicitly religious nature](#) of her counselling:

Our [i.e. 'My'] mission at Victims of Abortion is to help women and men who are deeply suffering because of the sorrow and regret over the loss of their child, whom through a moment of weakness, they chose to abort. To help them to reconnect with their child, re-humanise that child, seek forgiveness [from] God and from that child and receive mercy from God. This done, there is the hope of changing the type of grief from its complicated nature to the type of grief over the loss of a loved one, and a return to a relationship between God, mother and child.

[VOA was founded](#) by Anne who is herself an abortive [sic] woman who has travelled into the depths of despair, trauma, and experienced grief and slowly, with help from some special people, experienced a complete healing from God. Today Anne is joyful in her life and following further studies is now a qualified counsellor, and counsels from a Catholic/Christian perspective.

Lastman's qualifications

A [recent statement](#) [p.8] of Lastman's academic and professional qualifications reads as follows:

BA (Psy.), BA Rel. Stds., Dip. Ed., M. Theol., M. Rel. Ed., MACA, FCV

She claims to have studied at a minimum of three different universities ('a [university in WA](#)' [p.2], the [Australian Catholic University](#) and the [University of Queensland](#) [p.1]), but as far as I know has never publicly identified the source of her various degrees and diplomas, e.g we do not know which university awarded her the BA (Psy.). Lastman is also rather careless with her nomenclature e.g. she sometimes refers to the two bachelor's degrees ('BA [Psy.], BA Rel.Stds.') as a *single* BA with a double major. In 2001, she [explained the situation](#) as follows:

... I have a Bachelor of Psychology [N.B. not the same as a 'BA (Psy.)' which she claims elsewhere] with a second Major in Religious Studies. I have a Diploma of secondary education (I can teach psychology and religious education to yr 12 level). I have a Masters Degree in Religious Education. I have done a 12-week course in grief and loss studies. I have done 5 units of a Pastoral care diploma. And at present I am half way through to a second Masters degree in Theological Studies. I have also attended ongoing seminars relating to grief and loss and two seminars related to Post Abortion Grief. [p.4]

At least once, Lastman has added '[Cert. Pastoral Care](#)' to her list of qualifications, again without identifying the provider. [p.10]

Regarding her two professional qualifications, in mid-2007 she was accepted into membership of the [Australian Counsellors' Association](#) and added the letters MACA (or sometimes 'MACA [qualified]') to the list [p.8]. In 2008, she followed up by joining the [Federation of Victorian Counsellors](#), hence the 'FCV' at the end of the above line of qualifications [p.8]. (The correct acronym is 'FVC', which Lastman herself occasionally uses.)

The absence of pertinent information makes it very difficult to assess Lastman's claim to be a qualified abortion grief counsellor. The theological and religious education degrees do not seem relevant in this context; the provenance of the psychology degree is unknown and is in any case inadequate by itself as a grief counselling qualification; and a reading of the MACA and FVC membership requirements do not settle the issue. Lastman could quickly solve this mystery by revealing the sources of each qualification and allowing interested parties to check the records.

Lastman's mystical approach to counselling

Lastman commenced her counselling activities in 1996 [RG, v]. She regards abortion as a terrible scourge and fully accepts several doubtful and discredited ideas about its effects, e.g. that [abortion may cause breast cancer](#). However, she is primarily concerned with girls and women who have experienced abortions and now regret them, or at least have doubts about whether they should have undergone them. The condition of these females is variously described by Lastman as post-abortion 'grief' or 'syndrome' (PAS) or 'trauma', and according to her this is [a very widespread phenomenon](#):

Post Abortion Syndrome profoundly affects all who decide to abort and whilst studies appear to show that up to 87% of those who experience an abortion are in some degree affected, it is my contention that 100% will be affected.

Lastman claims that PAS grows more, rather than less acute over time. She is dismissive of people – no matter what their qualifications - who do not accept that PAS is a major social problem or claim that it does not exist, charging that such [critics are simply 'in denial'](#):

*Possibly one of the biggest "jokes" coming out of the research on after-effects of abortion must be the conclusion reached by a Dr Major following her study. She concluded that "72% were satisfied with their decision to abort and 69% said that they would make the same decision if they had to do it over again. In addition 72% said **THE ABORTION WAS OF MORE BENEFIT THAN HARM AND 80% REPORT NO DEPRESSION. IN ADDITION SELF-ESTEEM MEASURES ROSE FOR MANY WOMEN POST ABORTION** ---.* [Lastman's italics]

Indeed, to even suggest an increase in self-esteem measures post abortion appears hollow and laughable. [p.3]

Lastman rejects the feminist viewpoint that women have (or should have) independent agency when it comes to making decisions about abortion. On the contrary, she insists that pregnant women are constitutionally incapable of making judgments of this kind owing to 'their [psychological state](#) during that crisis time'. The notion of 'informed consent' in these circumstances seems a nonsense to Lastman. [RG, 125] (It seems to follow from this that all abortions may expose anyone assisting in the procedure – doctors, pharmacists etc. – to legal action in the conclusively-presumed absence of 'valid consent'!)

From the outset, Lastman has described herself as a 'Catholic counsellor' and emphasised the [critical role that God plays](#) in her work. To quote from an early issue of her newsletter *Broken Branches*, such women:

... through their pain come to understand that what they did was wrong, very wrong ... In their pain they seek help and where help is available and God-centred they are able to be slowly and at times painfully reset or re-grafted back on to the healthy life-giving vine. Back into the life and arms of Jesus. [pp.1-2]

Women attending Lastman's counselling sessions will invariably hear that the aborted foetus was in fact a baby and that they are therefore responsible for the death of a human being. Lastman will attempt to convince them (if they need convincing) that they have committed a most dreadful sin against the infant and against God, one which they will deeply regret for the rest of their lives. Their only real hope of redemption is to throw themselves on God's mercy via a church (preferably the Catholic Church, Lastman being a Catholic counsellor and the vast majority of her 'clientele' being Catholic). The 'baby' concerned should be recognised as such, given a name and preferably a plaque in a purpose-built memorial garden and formally farewelled at a special Mass. The woman's foul and unconscionable deed will never leave her memory, but her regret will become easier to bear knowing

that she has squared herself with God, the Church and the 'child', who has not only forgiven her but will recognise her in the after-life. As Lastman explains in her book, *Redeeming Grief*:

*... **Post-abortion counselling** does not lessen the seriousness of abortion nor does it negate the sinfulness of abortion. Its **aim** is to help return 'Eve' (the woman) ... to return to a place of peace, from where with help, she may turn her face to God repentant, and seeking forgiveness and re-admittance into the heavenly family, whilst re-experiencing the divine solace which comes from genuine forgiveness. Her desire is to come back into the arms of the Lord ... It will never bring the woman back to the same youthful innocence that she enjoyed prior to the abortion, but it will allow her to live with herself in a good and harmonious life in which God is the centre of her space and her knowledge that her infant/s rest in His eternal care. [RG, viii-ix]*

She makes it plain on several occasions that one of her major ambitions is to see her 'ladies' return to or convert to Catholicism as a result of their abortion experience:

*The Christian is promised eternal life if his/her faith grows to that of Jesus Christ crucified, because through the crucifixion (abortion) and the pain of such it could be said that it becomes a moment for **conversion**. [RG, xi]*

Lastman claims to have [counselled over 1,400 women](#) [Part 3 of program] (and a small number of men concerned about their partners' abortions) since 1996. She says that she [does not engage in paid advertising](#) and most women hear of her activities via word of mouth [p.8]. She also asserts that she has [not charged for her services](#) since the very early days [p.6] but it seems likely that she accepts 'donations' from her 'ladies'. She continually beseeches readers of *Broken Branches* for funds and often hints that without this help she will have to cease operations.

A small number of Lastman's 'girls' do not come from Christian backgrounds but telephone her in the [erroneous belief](#) that she will help them obtain an abortion:

Have worked with some girls who mistakenly rang for an abortion and I managed to get them into the office and please God they didn't continue with the abortion. [p.1]

Lastman now adopts a more transparent approach and informs these mistaken callers of the true nature of her work, although she still makes some attempt to [change their minds](#):

*... As I speak to them and engage them in dialogue as to why the need for an abortion, the feeling is that they do not know what an abortion is, what happens and what developmental stage their child is at. **They are calling because they are made to** [my emphasis] and are requesting a procedure. During the crisis it must remain a "procedure" rather than a "baby" because procedures are acceptable surgery. By this stage the person usually hangs up on me, which means that they do not want to know what stage their child is at ... [p.3]*

Lastman thinks she has a very clear idea of the [ultimate fate of aborted foetuses](#):

... Where human mothers take their children to be aborted ... the heavenly visitor, Queen and Mother [i.e. the Virgin Mary] comes and gathers the unwanted children and gives birth to them in Her heavenly realm. Our heavenly Mother is always on hand as intermediary so that whatever the spirit of evil might occasion on earth, the Spirit of Holiness can still counter things from above. Hence Mary gathers her 'aborted nations' year in and year out, and mothers these children in her maternal bosom. And as she gathers and holds the broken bodies of her aborted infants ..., she remembers holding her own beautiful son with his body broken in her arms. Indeed, both images mirror one another: 50 million times per year a broken infant is held in her arms and 50 million she remembers.

In other words, what Lastman offers to those who seek her counsel is an idiosyncratic brand of Catholic mysticism. Some grounding in Catholic theology seems to be a virtual prerequisite to understanding and responding positively to [Lastman's 'therapy'](#). As she puts it:

I am a Catholic counsellor and want to remain so. I believe completely that unless Jesus is brought into this counselling, all else is bandaid material. [p.1]

From Lastman's point of view, there is no valid reason for any abortion, including rape, incest and major foetal abnormality. To reiterate, her counselling is designed to persuade the woman who has had an abortion that she has deliberately killed her defenceless child and that her only real option is to throw herself on God's mercy.

During the past few years, Lastman has presented a number of 'workshops', mainly to Catholic audiences but occasionally to [conferences of professional counsellors](#). [p.7] She is eager to spread her message as widely as possible and also to build a reputation as an expert in the 'PAS' counselling field. [Acceptance by secular conference organisers](#) is thus of great value to her. [p.7]

Related issues

Lastman's attitudes towards abortion-related issues such as [contraception](#), [sex education](#) and movements such as feminism are predictable:

What [the contraceptive pill] has done and continues to do is to remove constraints and permit rampant sexuality, promiscuity by both males and females and conceptions leading to indiscriminate abortions ... At the more spiritual level, the contraceptive pill (apart from being abortifacient) immediately says NO to God. [pp.3-4]

Since when has teaching children about sex and encouraging them to participate in what they have learnt been part of schooling? Since when did it become necessary to teach children about sex? Since when did parents forfeit their right to educate their children in matters of [a] sexual nature? Since when were 12 year olds meant to be prepared for their sexual experiences by being given condoms? Since when did a 12 year old know what sex and sexuality means? Since when? Perhaps the answer to these questions could begin "when we rejected [the Catholic encyclical] 'Humanae Vitae'". This contraceptive mentality which is now considered the norm and a demand could only have developed when we said No to God. These are the fruits of society's rejection of 'Humanae Vitae'. The culture of death mentality, which begins during these formative years and is prophetically fulfilled with each new **no** to God. [p.6]

[What sickness has overtaken our society](#) when [the] Family Planning Association can openly call for sex education of children as young as 4 years of age? What monstrosity is in this thought? Children of 4 years of age to teenage years should be allowed to be children, and should be allowed to live and retain their innocence and not be engaged in learning about their bodies and their sexuality ... [T]his learning should not, I repeat not, happen before they are cognitively ready for such learning and this does not happen before the latency period is well and truly over ...

This push to sexualise children from very young years under the guise of a "good" to "avoid pregnancy, sexual disease, and body image problems later" is nothing but a subtle method of ensuring that children engage in premature sexual activity without knowledge of harm done to them. To ensure that the sacred is totally removed and lost from sexuality and a return to the instinctual and bestial assured. Four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, etc. year olds are not interested in sexual issues or sexual diseases, or pregnancy, they are interested in being children and no one should enter that sacred space of childhood with alien information. Indeed I would even hazard a guess that

*children introduced to sexual matters are being abused. They are being violated. They are having their innocence stolen, and further I would suggest that they are being visually “raped.” Is this why we have such early childhood experimentation with sex? Is this why children as young as 11 years of age have abortions? Is this why children of 13 years of age are having abortions instead of having lots of friends of both sexes and learning to make, develop and trust those friendships? ... What lunacy has beset the modern mind? **Or does [the] Family Planning Association need more candidates for abortion clinics? Is this the way to ensure a neverending stream of candidates for the abortion providers and their clinics?** [pp.2-3; my emphasis]*

I have quoted from this article at some length as it is highly characteristic of Lastman’s extravagant style of argument. Note also that, somewhat against expectations, her grasp of psychology is heavily influenced by Freudian concepts such as the ‘latency period’.

Regarding the [feminist movement](#), just a few snatches of Lastman’s monologue:

... the heartland of the feministocracy – Victoria, which has now the unenviable reputation of being the home of the godless feminist left-leaning horde ... feminazis ... femocrat ... etc. [pp.1-2]

When discussing the development of memorial gardens for miscarriages and aborted fetuses, Lastman advises against identifying the latter as such, as this is to invite desecration by ‘vandals and feminists’ [[Pro-Life Congress Lourdes 2008](#) , VT19, 37:30].

Overall, Lastman’s political outlook is fully consistent with the conspiratorial attitudes of the modern Christian Right:

... The newfound ideology of the social engineers, of the feminist brigade, together with media compliance, has found its disenchanted and therefore willing servants to implement and carry out [recent social] changes in a most subtle and nefarious way. The changes have not wrought a new, higher and more equitable moral order but the insecurity of a moral sterility [or] moral jungle without set standards. [RG, 22]

The outcome of this ‘nefarious social engineering’ may well have apocalyptic results for all concerned:

Will the ungodly dyad of abortion and euthanasia joined by the third malefic act, cloning, be the catalyst for God’s judgment upon humanity? [RG, 121]

Lastman’s relationship with the Catholic Church

As mentioned above, Lastman was raised as a Catholic but ceased to attend Mass for around 20 years as she was unable to accept Catholic teaching that her two aborted fetuses would spend eternity in ‘limbo’ rather than ‘heaven’ i.e. her reasons were essentially mystical in nature. However, a priest finally allayed her fears somewhat and she began attending church again during the mid-1990s.

In 1996, she began her counselling work, first [at her home](#) in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs and then in an office provided by [Pauline Stoll](#) of Right to Life Australia’s Pregnancy Counselling centre. [p.3] However, the Melbourne Catholic hierarchy looked favourably on her work and early in 2000 set her up in consulting rooms in a building opposite St Patrick’s Cathedral in East Melbourne. Lastman lists Archbishop (now Cardinal) George Pell, Fr. (now Bishop) Anthony Fisher and Dr Michael Casey as the [people mainly responsible](#) for this. [pp.1-2] The Church charged her a [nominal rent](#) for these three rooms [p.4], a practice which continued for a time under Pell’s successor, [Archbishop Denis Hart](#) [p.5].

But Hart was never more than lukewarm in his support for Lastman's work. Towards the end of 2003, she complained in a [letter](#) to the National Civic Council's *AD2000* magazine that:

... while I still enjoy the support of Archbishop Denis Hart (as far as my rooms are concerned), those that I knew closer [such as Pell and Anthony Fisher] have gone. This makes me sad. [My emphasis]

Lastman was sufficiently well-regarded in Rome to have been granted audiences by [Vatican officials](#) [p.4] But she was finding it difficult to increase the number of her financial supporters and several readers took her to task for being too 'heavy' and/or too 'political'. Lastman had never abandoned her distaste for the Catholic Church's 'limbo' doctrine and flared up in mid-2005, charging that some of her ideological supporters in the 'pro-life' movement had [let her down badly](#) over this and other issues. [p.5] She is adamant that all aborted foetuses go to heaven rather than 'limbo' (formerly regarded by the Church as a 'pleasant' place located somewhere near heaven itself) and argued this point very strongly in her newsletter *Broken Branches* and elsewhere. Archbishop Hart evidently took a dim view of her openly-stated deviation from the party line and asked her to vacate her offices (Lastman reported this decision under the heading '[No Room at the Inn](#)') [p.8]. However, she quickly found an office in Bourke St., Melbourne and operates there to this day. She occasionally baits Hart, reminding him, for example, that a 'good and strong' Church leader would [publicly excommunicate Catholic politicians](#) who vote for liberalised abortion laws [pp.1-2].

While Lastman's style may not appeal to all unquestioningly loyal Catholics, she still finds plenty of support among politically outspoken ones in the mould of Cardinal Pell. In 2007 she visited the Vatican and held talks with members of the [Pontifical Council for the Family](#) [p.1]; and counts several priests among her strongest supporters. She also has many friends among Catholic-dominated anti-choice groups such as Family Life International and Helpers of God's Precious Infants. She welcomed the Church's 2007 decision to '[abolish the 'limbo' teaching](#)' [p.1] but later expressed concern that it had not gone far enough [[Pro-Life Congress Lourdes 2008](#) , VT18, 55:30]. It seems that nothing less than a categorical assurance by the Vatican that all aborted and miscarried 'infants' are inside heaven's gates will satisfy her.

Lastman's involvement with other organisations

Given Lastman's conservative Catholic views on abortion and many related issues, it is not surprising that she quickly became involved in the activities of Australia's Christian right, and specifically with its Catholic wing. Here are the names of some like-minded organisations with which she has been involved over the past 15 years:

Apostles for Life; Australian Family Association; Catholic Pro-Life Forum; Catholic Women's League; Endeavour Forum; Family Council of Victoria; Family Life International; Gianna Centre (Bendigo, Vic.); Guild of St Luke; Helpers of God's Precious Infants; Knights of the Southern Cross; National Civic Council; Pregnancy Counselling Australia; Project Rachel; Pro-Life Victoria; Right to Life Australia; Southern Cross Bioethics Institute; and the Thomas More Centre.

With a couple of exceptions, these groups are run by Catholics and indeed the Australian Family Association and the Thomas More Centre are part of the overarching National Civic Council. Lastman has addressed meetings arranged by several of these groups e.g. Babette Francis's Endeavour Forum [EF] (see, e.g., EF newsletters, Oct. 2004, 1 and 16; and May 2007, 1) and Right to Life Australia [RTLA] (see, e.g., *RTLA News*, Apr.-June 1997). However, the two groups with which she has been most closely involved have been Family Life International (formerly Human Life

International) and Helpers of God's Precious Infants. These are both long-established associations of ultra-conservative Catholics whose interests are similar and complementary to Lastman's.

But Lastman is very independently-minded and this regularly leads her into conflict with people who might be expected to support her. For example, she regards her field of post-abortion counselling as:

'... a rather poor second, third, [or] fourth cousin of the pro-life movement. Essentially, the right-to-life movement struggles to extend itself to understand and promote the necessity for the healing of [women] and work for post-abortion counselling ... [T]here is a disequilibrium within their thought. [RG, x-xi]

Conclusion

Apart from her difference of opinion with the Church over the 'limbo' issue, Lastman qualifies as an outspokenly loyal defender of her Catholic faith, especially in some of its more mystical aspects. She strongly supports the official Church position on issues such as [priestly sexual abuse](#) [p.1] and was notably unsympathetic when a Melbourne security guard was [murdered by an anti-abortion fanatic](#) [pp.2-3] in 2001. She describes herself as being '[rabidly pro-life](#)' [p.2] and looks forward to the day when the very word 'abortion' is [removed from dictionaries](#) [p.4].

Lastman has little time for scientific research which contradicts or fails to support her own ideas about abortion. She writes of 'the animosity of the scientific mind which cannot accept the symbolic as a higher form of truth' [RG, 174-5] and which takes no account of the battles against innocent children in the womb 'which are being [planned in hell](#) at this very moment' [p.6]. If the strictures of the Catholic Church remain unheeded, rivers will continue to flow with the [blood of infants](#) [p.3] and a woman seeking an abortion will [continue along the path](#) towards:

... her dark tomb, her death and her loss of innocence. The abortion is her own journey into darkness. Her own journey along the road leading to Calvary and death.' [p.1]