

THE SIGN OF THE TIMES

*"I hear Thy steps approaching
And at their sound I quake.
Lips quiver, bones are trembling;
I totter and I shake.
In quiet expectation
I will await the day
When those who would invade us
shall all be swept away"
(Hymn 10 : 8).*

The world has been shocked once again by a terrorist attack. This time England was struck. This comes after the bombings in Madrid, Bali and also the attack in New York on September 11, 2001. The work of al-Qaida was once again blamed. Many people said it was because of England's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. But could it be the fight between God and Satan? Are these the footsteps of Christ that we are hearing? Could this be an awakening to us to get our life in order so that when Christ returns we will not be shocked?

Why are all these questions asked when something like this happens? When the tsunami hit, all we heard was that this was a warning to us to remain vigilant and to continue to go out into the world and spread the Word. And yet now, the tsunami is in the back of our minds, soon the England bombing will be at the back and probably the other event in England, the Ashes tour, will be at the forefront. What do we, as Christians, do with a warning like this?

We can hear the steps of Christ approaching, so we must make sure of our faith, that we are indeed saved, but we must also endeavour to make sure that our neighbour cannot say to God "I didn't know, nobody told me." We must go out and preach to the world the Living Word. At times like these many people are having questions. We should go out and try to answer them. So let's, with the strength of Christ and His church, go out and proclaim His Word.

With all that said and done, I continue to have a problem with the notion that this is a definite awakening. Why is it only when something like this happens that we all of a sudden 'jump to it'?

We should not need something like this to wake us up! We have the Bible open in our lives, we can see what God did to the Israelites when they forsook Him. Let us be prepared at all times, even when there are no 'ground moving' events to shock us into action.

This concludes my last editorial for the Contender, as I am retiring from the role as editor. It has been with great delight that we could produce, for the youth of the Free Reformed Churches, a magazine in which they could read articles, poems and the like freely in a country that does not hinder our Christianity. In some parts of the world the ability to be able to produce a Christian magazine so freely would be a huge thing. Youth, do not let a tool like this go to waste. I urge all of you to continue to read, respond, write, and discuss the Contender, so that through this magazine we may all contend for the faith.

Frank Janssen

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Us – The True Church

I guess living in a protected Christian environment means it's easy to listen to what we are told and assume that we are the true Church. We are not such bad people. Look at our regular commitments and gifts! Yes, undoubtedly we are the true Church. But are we really so good? Why us? So are we the only true Church? Are there more true Churches? Perhaps we are just 'a' true Church. Are we better than other Churches? In order to answer these kinds of questions one must go back to basics.

How do we recognise the true Church? As we all know and confess in Art 29 BC, there are three marks that distinguish the true Church from any other sects. That is, it practices pure preaching of the gospel, it maintains pure administration of the sacraments, and exercises discipline for correction and punishing sins. Okay, so our Church has the three marks. What then? The confession goes on to become personal. The true Church is made up of true Christian believers. Those who 'flee from sin and pursue righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor without turning to the right or left, and crucify their flesh and its works.' So is that us? And we confess yes! Not from ourselves but through the work of Christ we can be His children.

It is important to note that we confess to be part of THE true Church. This is singular. It is a universal (catholic) Church consisting of children of the covenant. What does this say for other churches that differ from the three marks? They may be attractive and could have valuable points. Perhaps a little bit true? No. Any Church that does not practice the three marks is false. 'Half' true is not good enough.

Conversely, not all God's elect are part of the true Church. There are also sheep outside of the fold. On this point we must be careful as it becomes easy for us to judge. We must leave this to God. What we can note is BC Art 28 - God's elect will be part of the true Church as it is their duty to unite with it.

God chose us over many others. Are we better? No. We are all inclined to all evil as we have the same sinful nature. The difference? We are special! 1 Peter 2:9 says: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own *special* people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light..." Note in particular here the mandate that comes with being chosen. This mandate is a way of life and comes from the heart. "Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the house tops" (Matt 10:27). This verse speaks of enthusiasm and shows an attitude that should be the base of all our worship.

For some, socializing outside of normal boundaries is a big temptation, particularly when socializing with members from false Churches. When you get to know and like someone's character, one is led to think that this may be okay as these people are 'not so bad'. This is a very dangerous zone, as then you will lose sight of concepts such as who is actually the true Church. Arguments are not made on principle but rather on what you want to happen based on your attraction to that person. The answer? Know your weaknesses and steer clear from temptation! Keep focused on what is important, "...lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also..." (Matt 6: 20,21).

At the same time, we can but marvel at our privileges. God has chosen us as His people! Sitting in Church must give us deep spiritual joy knowing we are fully aware of belonging to the true Church – among members of Christ's flock.

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Fred Ballast

Pastors Refuse to Apologise for Criticising Islam

Being a Christian in Australia is hardly likely to land you in jail. Or is it? The possibility grew closer with a landmark decision in Melbourne last month, where two evangelical pastors were found guilty of vilifying Muslims. If they don't apologise by August 31, and are unsuccessful in their appeal to the Victorian Supreme Court, they face three months jail and/or a fine of up to \$7000.

Vilification laws are a sensitive topic in Australia. Religious vilification describes the act of inciting others to hate, ridicule or hold another person in contempt because of their religious beliefs. As a response to the increased multiculturalism of Australian society, vilification laws are an effort to find a balance between the right to freedom of speech on the one

hand, and the right to freedom from abuse and discrimination on the other. Vilification laws have been passed in Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland but have been rejected in South Australia and Western Australia. Though a religious vilification bill will shortly be debated in the New South Wales parliament, premier Bob Carr (prior to his resignation) said his government will not support the bill.

Both Christians and secular free-speech advocates are alarmed by vilification laws, and the recent decision in Victoria has added fuel to their fire. Details of the case were given widespread, though sketchy, press coverage. In 2002, two pastors from the Melbourne evangelical group Catch The Fire Ministries held a seminar on Islam. The purpose of the

seminar was to discuss the relationship between Islam and the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001. Christian attendees were urged to reach out in love to, and pray for, Melbourne's growing Muslim community.

The seminar certainly resulted in interaction between Christians and Muslims, but – ironically – it's been in the form of legal action. Three Muslim converts attended the seminar, and took offence at its contents. They were also offended by information about Islam printed in a Catch The Fire Ministries newsletter and website. The Islamic Council of Victoria, on behalf of the three Muslims, complained first to Victoria's Equal Opportunity Commission and then, following a failed 'mediation' process with the pastors, to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Appeals Tribunal. Hearings for the case began in October 2003, resulting in a lengthy process of submissions, statements and cross-examination. On December 17 2004 the judge presiding over the case announced that he found pastors Danny Nalliah and Daniel Scot guilty of vilifying Muslims. His sentence was handed down last month: by August 31 both pastors must promise not to repeat their comments, and publish written apologies in the church's newsletter and website as well as in Melbourne newspapers *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Nalliah and Scot have refused, and are appealing to the Victorian Supreme Court. Nalliah says he will "go to prison for standing for the truth and not be hushed into a politically correct code of silence."

So what did the pastors say that has caused them to run foul of the law? Essentially, they said that Islam is a violent religion and that Allah is an unmerciful god. Citing texts from the Koran and examples from Islamic scholarship, they claim that the Koran promotes violence and endorses the killing of non-Muslims. They also assert that Islam poses a threat to western democracies (including Australia) because Muslims have a higher birth rate than their 'host' nations. Though their claims are extreme, the pastors have significant experience with the sinister side of Islam. Nalliah, an Australian born in Sri Lanka, has worked with and smuggled Bibles for underground churches in Saudi Arabia, where it is illegal to preach Christianity. Scot, who has studied the Koran and was the seminar's presenter, fled to Australia from Pakistan to escape blasphemy charges for speaking out against Islam.

However, it was not on the basis of factual accuracy that the pastors were prosecuted and found guilty. Though the judge found some inaccuracy in birth statistics used in the pastors' argument, the majority of what he found offensive consisted of quotes from the Koran. The Judge found that the statements were offensive because they preached a literal translation of the Koran that did not represent the beliefs of all Muslims. Indeed, the legal action was not taken over issues of truth and accuracy, but on the basis of what *effect* the statements had. Waleed Aly, spokesman for the Islamic Council of Victoria, said the converts "felt genuinely scared" at the seminar. In his report, the judge said that seminar was "essentially hostile, demeaning and derogatory" since the audience laughed on a number of occasions when the Koran was read. Non-Muslim attendees, however, deny any hostility and point to the fact that Christians were instructed to reach out to Muslims.

Though the Muslim attendees may have been offended by the seminar's contents, there was no reason why they had to be there. After all, the seminar wasn't even aimed at Muslims but it was designed to provide *Christians* with information. This question has received little attention in the mainstream media, but an investigation by Andrew Bolt, published in the *Herald-Sun* newspaper, reveals some interesting facts and an alarming (though complicated) conflict of interest. The three Muslims who attended the seminar were requested to attend and monitor it by members of the Islamic Council of Victoria. One of the members of the Islamic Council of Victoria who asked the converts to attend, May Helou, was at the same time a member of Victoria's Equal Opportunity Commission. Staff at the Equal Opportunity Commission had taught almost 10 000 mostly Muslim and Arab Victorians about their rights under the vilification laws and how to lodge appeals. The commission had hired Helou to provide this education.

What is alarming is that the Equal Opportunity Commission was also the organization that had to 'neutrally' arbitrate in the initial stages of the appeal against Catch The Fire Ministries by the Islamic Council Of Victoria. But it was one of the Commission's own members – Helou – who contacted at least two of the three Muslims and asked them to attend the seminar. Thus, there were three attendees ready to feel vilified. At the end of Pastor Scot's speech, one of them stood up and asked how Christians should respond to Muslims, to which Scot replied that Christians should pray for and show love to them. Later, the three Muslims met Helou at the Equal Opportunity Commission and decided to lodge a complaint. Helou did not arbitrate in the case herself, and no longer works for the commission. But if it weren't for her request, as a member of the same Equal Opportunity Commission that had to arbitrate in the initial stages of the case, the three Muslim converts wouldn't even have been at the seminar in the first place.

At a press conference following the handing down of the sentence, an indignant Nalliah refused to apologise for his statements. "We have a choice, nation of Australia" he said. "We either can follow the Koran and follow Islamic Sharia law and be slaves in this nation, or follow the Bible and be a free and democratic society." Though our legal system has little chance of being overthrown in the near future, the case sets a dangerous precedent for future religious debate and free-speech cases. As Jim Wallace, executive chairman of the Australian Christian Lobby observed, "it seems it was unreasonable to quote from the Koran in a seminar whose purpose was to discuss it." Numerous secular analysts are also alarmed by the ruling, though for different reasons. After the initial findings were released last year, an editorial in *The West Australian* argued that anyone who holds a religious belief must be able to have their belief questioned and debated.

Though the fate of the pastors is still uncertain, it is clear that religious vilification legislation does little to promote religious 'harmony'. Rather, it seems to be a vehicle for religious minorities who are unwilling to face up to some of the harsher realities of their religion and the place it holds (or doesn't hold) in Australian society. On the one hand these developments, symptomatic of our changing society, are cause for concern

and serve as reminders not to take our religious freedom and civil peace for granted. On the other hand, trees are known by their fruits and resorting to legal action may well turn public sentiment against Islam. In a similar manner, recent reports about anti Semetic and anti Christian literature for sale in Islamic bookshops in Sydney and Brunswick will hardly engender the respect desired by Australian Muslims. Let us continue to serve God in everything, so that by our Godly walk of life we may win also our Muslim neighbours for Christ. And

should conditions change such that worshiping God becomes more difficult, let us remember Christ's encouragement to His disciples recorded in John 16:33b - *"In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*

Laurence Van der Plas

Making Choices ...

In everyday life, we are forced to make hundreds of choices. Most of these choices we make unthinkingly and ultimately are not really important. However, there are decisions in life which we are faced with that do carry a little more weight and have a higher consequence. Throughout our Christian walk of life, it is important that we don't want to do wrong, and in so doing cause others to do wrong. So how can we make such decisions?

Think about issues such as watching television, going to the movies, listening to rock music, drinking excessively, going night clubbing or females wearing pants to church. We always hear the question, "What's wrong with it?" But why not ask "What's *right* with it?" By asking what's right in doing certain things, you force yourself to consider whether this action enhances your relationship with God.

The most obvious question that we should ask ourselves is whether it is against a specific command in Scripture. The Bible is the inspired Word of God, our guideline for life. It contains the will of God for our lives, and therefore when making decisions we should always look to the Bible. But it is true that not everything is always detailed in black and white, so we should also ask ourselves other questions. Does it help me to witness for Christ? Will it cause others to sin? Does it glorify God?

It is extremely important when considering a certain course of action or position to determine whether we are witnessing to others about Christ. Do we put on the outward appearance of being a child of God, and in that way try to win others for Christ? Paul outlines the constant need for us to look for opportunities to tell others about Christ, just as he also taught the Jews, Gentiles and the weak to do so (1 Cor 9:19-22).

It is also important that our actions don't become a stumbling block to others, and therefore cause others to sin. However, some may ask, why should we be limited by another person's conscience? The answer is simply because we are to do all things for God's glory, even our eating and drinking. Nothing we do should cause another believer to stumble. We do what is best for others, so that we aren't a hindrance on their path of salvation.

We have been created and placed on this earth to serve and glorify God. We do this out of thankfulness and love for God, for He first loved us by sending His only begotten Son to die for our sins. Therefore, in all that we do, we must be sure that our actions glorify God and are to His honour. And if they don't ...

Jessica Korthuis

Employers - Employees

Throughout this paper I would like to discuss some of the aspects of employer – employee relationships. These will be the relationship between you and the employer, how that affects your religious beliefs and how to make the employer understand your belief so that he or she does not offend God. Ownership, authority and leadership will also be discussed, as well as the best possible way in which to use these. Then there is the issue of reliability, which is a key factor in getting a job and sticking to it. Job satisfaction, so that you and your boss are satisfied in the work you do, which will result in a good working atmosphere. Unemployment is the result of not having a good working environment or are not committed to getting a job. Therefore we may continue to work in a happy environment.

Relationship

Relations between the employer and employee vary a great deal depending on whether or not the employer believes in God, is worldly or has another religious affiliation. This also has a huge implications for the work environment, and what the employee talks about with his/her boss. But to make the environment easier to breathe in, the employer or employee has to understand what the other believes. This goes for many different religions, but in our case it's Christianity. In order for your employer to understand what you believe, you must be prepared to discuss your religion. As your beliefs should impact on all portions of your life, you have the responsibility of telling your boss why you cannot work on Sundays, why you cannot join unions, etc. Good work ethics and being prepared

to stand up for your beliefs will reap respect with even the most hardened unbelievers, therefore making it easier to work for a non-Christian boss, because of this understanding.

Ownership

Ownership of something, whether it be tools or things for our own personal every day use e.g. car, carries with it a huge responsibility. Many of us don't have this opportunity just yet, because of education requirements or starting a new job. However, ownership also ties in with wealth and stewardship, but I will not delve in too deep here. The one thing I would like to mention though, is that Job was the greatest of all the people in the East (Job 1:3). God blessed Job very much, because he was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. This is not to say that Job did nothing to receive his wealth. No, Job worked hard and served God. Job is an example to all of us today. We may work hard and receive many material blessings, but if we don't live for God and obey Him, we won't have anything to look forward to in the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Authority

Authority and obedience seem to have snuck their way out of today's society. In this day and age the labour unions have stepped in and dictate their rules, and the company owner simply has to obey, otherwise his company will be closed down or be driven to bankruptcy. But as Christians we don't join up to the unions in Australia. This is because of their opinions on Sunday trading, and their methods of protesting about wages, safety issues and working conditions. We believe that God provides for us and therefore we comply with those who make the decisions.

Then there is authority between the employer and employee, or, as the Bible calls it, master and servants. There are many examples in the Bible that talk of servants being obedient. We think, for example, of 1 Peter 2:18: "Servants be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing." But the Bible tells us that masters also have to have respect for the employee. In Colossians 4:1 we read " Master, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in Heaven." The government also enforces this by laws and regulations in the work place agreements.

Leadership

Leadership is in a sense accepting responsibility for others as well as for yourself. This is one of the conditions that an employer would take on when he starts a business. But as a leader we have to be kind and caring and look to Christ as an example. If we happen to be a leader in the work place we also have to work very hard at being honest, because others are looking at what we do. If we are disobedient in these things, and the worldly people that work with us see this (and they will) they may blaspheme God in manner or also in being dishonest.

Reliability

The dictionary explains reliability to be consistently good in quality or performance. So turning up for work 5 minutes late isn't being a good steward of time, particularly when your boss gets angry because you weren't punctual. The easiest way to fix this problem is switch your alarm clock 5 minutes earlier than what you normally get out of bed. I know this doesn't affect the way you work, but it's much nicer starting a day in high spirits than with a telling off. Consistency and performance in a job is what every employer wants in their employee, so that they can be assured that the work that has been given will be done to their standard. Therefore reliability, time and quality are key factors in a happy working environment.

Job satisfaction

Satisfaction in a job really depends on your state of mind. Our job satisfaction comes from serving God in the right manner. We have to start our day with the Lord in prayer. If we don't, job dissatisfaction will creep in, because only God can help us to keep our mind focussed on our job. We will also acknowledge daily that He is in control of our lives and the employer will notice contentment in our work. Therefore job satisfaction is maintained if the employer is kind and fair to the employee, the wages are worthy, the job is challenging and the work is good.

Unemployment

Most of us are either fully employed or working on a casual basis while we study. We all understand what goes into getting and keeping a job. But we don't do this ourselves. God commands us to work and not to be lazy. It says in Proverbs 15:19 "The way of the lazy man is like a hedge of thorns, but the way of the upright is a highway." God does not want us to be lazy. He blesses us in our work, and in the cultural mandate He commands us to work. We are to develop the earth. However, the world views work as a necessity to keep living, not a command from God. Also the world believes in wealth and personal and/or material gain. For example, many advertisements revolve around thinking of yourself or what I want. It is for this reason that unemployment becomes something of a problem in countries around the world, because this thinking makes people unwilling to work.

Conclusion

Thus for us as Christians the Lord has given us a mandate in the world, to work to His glory, and to use our gifts to the honour of His Name. We still have the opportunity to work and to take part in the work force. We may not always do it perfectly but we must strive to do His will, so that His name is glorified. But there will come a time when all Christians are excluded from society (according to Revelation 13) and so we will no longer have to deal with labour movements. Therefore, let us be aware of our task as a Christian, that we should not take part in revolutionary development but work as citizens of the kingdom of Heaven.

Food for Thought: To the Consistory ...

The following letter is fictional. Greg Smith didn't really write this letter, but the question that I want the readers to answer is: could he have?

Dear Chairman, or Bishop or Pope or whoever is the head of the Free Reformed Church.

My name is Greg Smith, I'm 18 and I have been church shopping for a little while now. I have decided that I am interested in applying for a membership in your church, the Free Reformed. I don't really know how to go about this so I'll tell you why I want to be a member.

Basically, my reason is that I have heard a little bit about Heaven and I think that whenever I die I would like to get there instead of Hell. But to get to heaven I think I will need to go to church. I didn't really want to go to the Catholic Church because there seems to be so many rules and I didn't really want to go to the Baptist church because everything they talk about throughout the day is God and Jesus and that's a bit embarrassing.

After cancelling these two out I kept a bit of an eye on some of the youth in your church. I then decided that I'd really like to go to your church. It's going to be pretty cool because it seems that at least then I'll be able to keep my \$1,000 car stereo. It has got some loud subwoofers that would have been wasted just playing church music otherwise. Your youth probably think Eminem sounds pretty good on their stereos but they haven't

heard anything yet. Just wait till it's my turn to drive to the Pub; they will have to bring earplugs I think.

Another thing I like about your church is that you don't really have to tell anyone that you're a 'Christian'. I don't know much about being a 'Christian', and studying the Bible to find out more would take a fair bit of my time so it would just be a lot easier not telling anyone. Oh, and by the way I will come to Church every Sunday and even go to Bible study clubs on Friday (we can probably go from there to the Pub). It seems that one thing everyone does do in the Free Reformed Church is attend church and if this is the only way to get me to heaven, well, then I will have to do that. One query though: I haven't got around to seeing what the youth do after church. I have guessed that in summer they go to the beach because some youth don't wear half as neat clothes to church as they do in the office during the week. That suits me fine though because I have heard that ties are pretty expensive.

Anyway, given that I like your church and I'm pretty similar to some of your youth I hope that you will let me become a member.

*Sincerely,
Greg Smith.*

I want to strongly encourage the youth to be visible Christians. Speak up for your faith and make sure that no-one can have any doubts that you are different to the 'youth of the world'. What I am really trying to say is similar to a simple command that God has given us in 1 Corinthians 10:31:

"Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Jamie van Burgel

Embryonic Stem Cell Research: *Murder of the Innocent*

Last month scientists announced that they are on the brink of creating sperm and eggs from human stem cells. They will finally be able to clone humans from a ready supply of unripe eggs. The medical world is elated, as this advancement means infertile women may soon be giving birth to their own babies!

As the news makes headlines and people itch with excitement, how should we, as Christians, react? Can we be thankful that people are using their talents to treat

infertility, or should we shudder at the attempt scientists are making at "playing God"? Perhaps we should just remain apathetic about the whole situation – after all, it's not close enough to home to worry about such things, right?

Wrong! As Christians, it is our duty to be well informed on such topics so that we know where God would have us stand on the issue. Only when we have a basic understanding of what's going on can we make a stance to defend God's honour and His creation. If we remain

apathetic, the scientists will continue their work unhindered, and God's creation will continue to be destroyed. To understand a bit more about all this, I'd like to give you a brief overview of what stem cell research means and what is involved in the process.

Stem cells are cells that have the ability to divide into more than one type of cell. For example, a skin cell can only ever divide to produce new skin cells and brain cells can only make new brain cells, but a human stem cell can divide to form skin cells as well as brain cells and every other cell type in the body. The most abundant source of stem cells is found in the embryo – a baby a few days after conception. Because life begins with one tiny cell, this cell, and a few that follow, are unique in their ability to differentiate into every single cell that we have in our bodies today.

Why the significance? Scientists who study these cells have realised that this unique ability may be used to their advantage. From these cells they believe tissues can be made to replace those irreparably damaged in certain diseases such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, diabetes, spinal cord injuries, and heart disease. Achieving this would mean relief for countless sufferers and possibly even cures for the diseases.

Sounds good so far doesn't it? But this is where the trouble begins. As I mentioned before, the source of these beneficial stem cells are tiny embryos. And where do they get these? The two most practical ways of getting these cells are from abortions, or from embryos left over from *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF) treatments. In IVF, conception occurs outside the body, in a petri dish. Multiple sperm are donated, either by the husband or by an anonymous donor, and the best embryos are chosen for insertion into the mother's womb. The leftovers are either frozen for research or future use, or destroyed.

Think for a moment about what I've just said. We believe that life begins at conception, for God has revealed this in His Word (Psalm 139). Therefore these little embryos that are being researched or destroyed are tiny human beings, like we all were at one stage! Scientists are joining egg and sperm to make a new life only to murder it! If the embryos are used for research, these tiny life forms are ripped apart and cultured in dishes to create new cells. While trying to improve the quality of life for a few people, they are murdering countless humans, even though they are but a few cells large!

On the Other Hand

May we ridicule other religions/churches? Elijah did in 1 Kings 18.

Send responses to eric.dekker@frsa.asn.au

While that sinks in, consider the other source of stem cells – from aborted fetuses. Now, we believe that abortion is outright murder of an unborn child. Some people might argue that since the act of abortion has already occurred, we should make the most of the dead baby's organs and donate them to research. That way at least some good might come from the whole situation. We believe there's nothing wrong with donating our own organs, so why not donate those of the foetus? However, in saying that, the same people who do not class the baby as a life form and thus happily abort it, then turn around and claim that it is extremely important to science. That which had no value during life suddenly has great significance after death! Sounds a bit backwards!

Also, how can we as Christians condone the use of aborted tissue for research with a clear conscience? Some Christian scientists claim that 'the end justifies the means', but consider this analogy from a member of a sister church: A banker who is opposed to drug trading happily accepts drug money at his bank in order to finance low income housing in his community. Though not actively involved in the drug trade, this man is involved in *conspiracy with* the drug trade, and is thus sinning like the drug traffickers. Likewise, those who happily accept aborted fetuses for research are participating in the sin of abortion, or murder!

Consider the slippery slope argument too. If a woman is considering having an abortion, she might easily be persuaded by the thought that she will be benefiting science by donating her foetus. This may take the guilt out of the situation, causing her to go ahead with the abortion with a clearer conscience. And what if science soon discovers that those fetuses would be more valuable at 15 weeks old instead of 5 or 10? Would those considering abortions be asked to keep their babies for a few more weeks before the murder is performed? I could go on, but the point is clear.

There is one important fact about stem cells that is often ignored by scientists and the media. That is that there are other acceptable alternatives to embryonic stem cells in research. Stem cells can also be taken from the umbilical cord after birth, or from adult bone marrow, blood or neurons. Though these cells are limited slightly in their ability to differentiate, they are already being used successfully in the treatment of various diseases. Cord blood has proved the most successful, particularly in treating cancer or leukemia. Unfortunately, scientists 'til now have favoured experiments on embryonic stem cells, as these have greater potential and provide quicker results. These cells also have an undeveloped immune system, and thus the chance of rejection by the recipient is greatly reduced.

I have just provided you with a very brief overview of the current situation on stem cell research. There is plenty more information out there for anyone interested. My point,

however, is not that we need to be experts on the situation, but I do believe that every one of us has the duty to be informed on what is going on around us. We need to know what we believe in regards to the situation so that we can defend God's Word and His creation when confronted with the issue by work-mates or neighbours. As Christians, we must be aware that there is no group so weak and defenseless as the unborn humans who quietly lose their lives every day in the name of science and research.

Vivian Bax

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Aim:

Romans 12:2 teaches all of God's people:

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

This magazine will encourage its readers to earnestly contend for the faith, and to think and act biblically, in the good traditions of the Church of all ages. Its basis is God's word, as the Church confesses in the Three Forms of Unity. It is intended for the younger members of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and is produced in co-operation with the Una Sancta. Subscription to the Contender is automatic with subscription to the Una Sancta.

It is not meant to be exclusively for unmarried members who still attend the Youth Bible Study Clubs, but for all those who fit within the loose parameters of 16 to 30 years of age.

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