



CONTENDER

“contending earnestly for the faith...” Jude:3

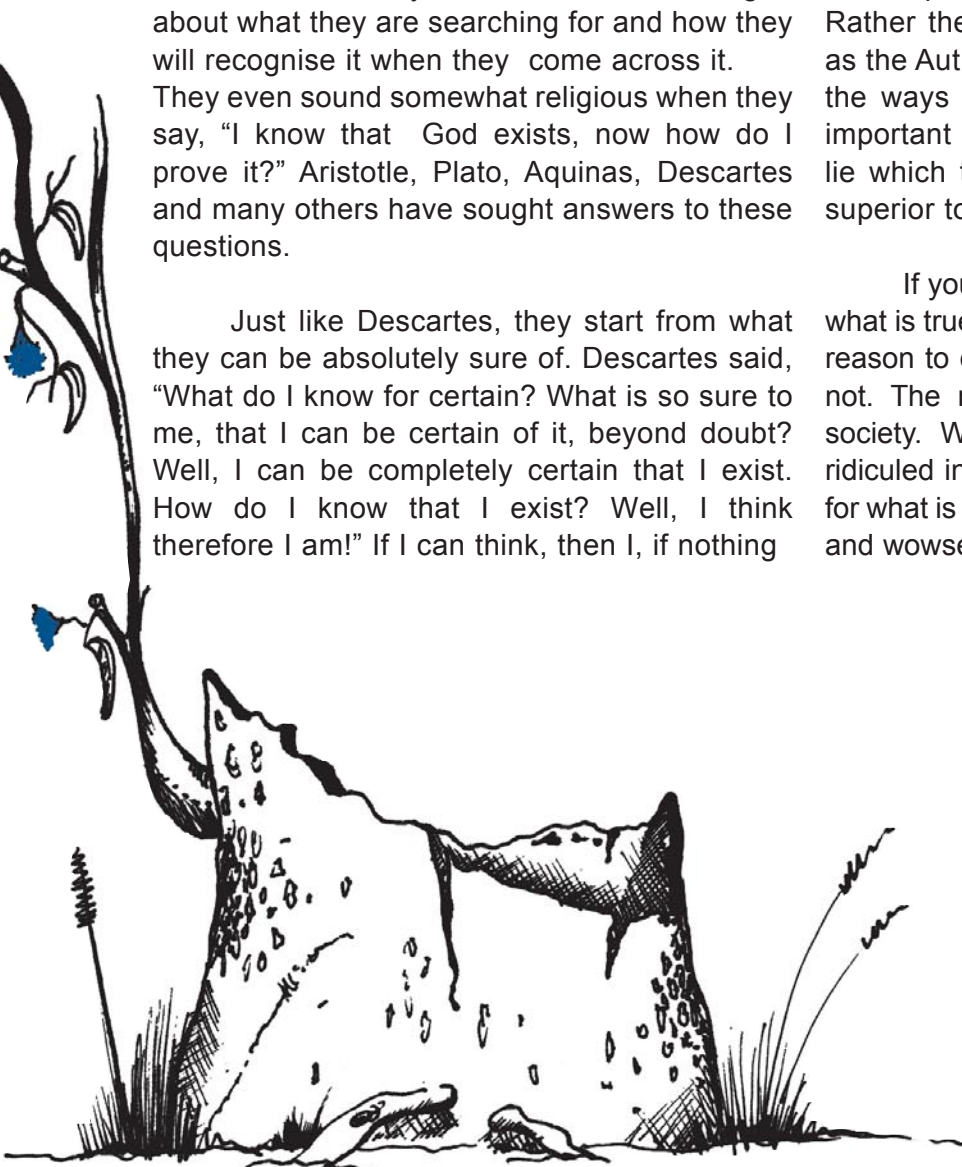
The philosophers, the lovers of wisdom, seek the answers to the ‘deep’ questions of life. What really exists? How do we know what is really real? They spend hours and hours searching for answers. Their attempts though, start with a lie. They chase their tails and argue about what they are searching for and how they will recognise it when they come across it. They even sound somewhat religious when they say, “I know that God exists, now how do I prove it?” Aristotle, Plato, Aquinas, Descartes and many others have sought answers to these questions.

Just like Descartes, they start from what they can be absolutely sure of. Descartes said, “What do I know for certain? What is so sure to me, that I can be certain of it, beyond doubt? Well, I can be completely certain that I exist. How do I know that I exist? Well, I think therefore I am!” If I can think, then I, if nothing

else, must exist.

It all sounds so logical, but the starting point is not in what God reveals to us, but how do I know that God exists? They begin with their own supremacy and not that of the True God. Rather than start from what God has revealed as the Author of life, they reject God’s word and the ways of the fathers. Reason takes the all important place and not Revelation. This is the lie which they start with. Reason, for them, is superior to Revelation.

If you place man’s reason as the decider of what is true and what is not, then you allow man’s reason to dictate what is acceptable and what is not. The result can be seen all around us in society. What is right in the eyes of God, is ridiculed in man’s eyes. Christians who stand up for what is right in God’s eyes are labelled fascists and wowsers, fundamentalists and lunatics.



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**MAGAZINE FOR THE YOUTH OF THE
FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA**

Yet, in all this change and revolution, there is one constant, one unchangeable, the Lord, who will not change. Almighty God who will hold all men to account. The Lord will testify “against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an

alien- because they do not fear me.” (Malachi 3:5) What better starting point in seeking answers to our questions, the God who was and is and is to come, who does not change.

■ **Mick ten-Haaf**

Farewell

The time has come to bid a fond farewell. Hans vander Jagt is leaving us to take up studies in Holland for the ministry. Hans, thank you for the work which you have done as a Contender editor in the past years, we look forward to continued contact and wish you the blessings of the Almighty God. We know that it is He who guides our feet and is a light to all our paths.

MEET YOUR LOCAL FEDERAL MEMBER

Mr Don Randall MP has agreed to come and talk to the Free Reformed youth at a meeting hosted by SPYSC later this month. As federal member of Canning, he will be able to give a direct insight into the life of a parliamentary member, and what influences them in their decision making. It will also provide us with a forum to raise our opinions on current issues from a Christian perspective and have our voices heard.

We also hope to submit a petition to Mr Randall regarding Embryonic Stem Cell research. There will be an opportunity to sign on the night.

When: 7.30 pm (sharp) Monday 29th July 2002

Where: Room 9, John Calvin Christian College

Refreshments will be provided after the meeting. Everyone is very welcome to attend what should be an interesting night.

For more information please contact one of the SPYSC committee.

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Developing a Christian Mindset

How do you live in this world as a Christian? Do you show yourself to be the image of your Saviour? Are you like a light shining on the hill for the whole world to see?

What does it mean to develop a Christian mindset? Well it is not something that comes overnight. It is not like an instant change, turning over a new leaf. Instead it is something that we have to work with constantly, not by ourselves, but with an eye on Christ and also with guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Many of us have been brought up in a Christian family and from the moment we could speak we were taught to pray before and after our meals. Then there was 'Time has Come' before we sleep, along with the Bible stories that we loved to hear from parents. All these basic steps were the start of our development as Christians.

As we grew older, we attended Christian schools, the Bible being the basis. And we are prone to take for granted the Christian environment that we were put in, the fact that we had the opportunity to nurture our growing faith with fellow believers. How richly God provides for his children!

There is no doubt that our Christian upbringing is a blessing. What a wonderful thing it is, that at our baptism, without any idea what was happening to us, we were given the sign of the covenant on our foreheads. God promised us that He would be our Father forever. And He has been true to His Word, and forever will be.

But we have an obligation, and that is to love God with all our heart, soul and mind. And not just outwardly.

Consider where we are today, as young adults of God's congregation we are able to profess our faith, to swear our lives to God and His service. To do that in front of many witnesses is a blessing. It is a very special day,

when a covenant child of God responds to his /her baptism and says 'I do.' In fact they are saying; 'I believe God's covenant promises, I declare that it is my hearts desire to love and serve the Lord, I promise that I shall submit myself.'

**'faith by itself,
if it does not have
works, is dead.'**

James 2:17

But this whole development, from 'Time has Come' to our public profession of faith, can be viewed from two completely different angles.

One with the thought in mind that 'my gracious heavenly Father has kept me in His care, guided me by His Word and Spirit, and brought me to this point in my life.'

But the other angle being that, 'It's what I've known all my life, I don't want to cause any trouble, it's what everyone else is doing.'

And it's that second point that we have to fight against, and by developing a proper Christian mindset we can avoid this type of

thinking.

A Christian way of life is not only on the outside. We have to show it from our heart. Christ accused the Pharisees in His time of being whitewashed tombs. They appeared outwardly to be beautiful but what they hid inside was nothing other than death. He never kept from speaking the truth about these hypocrites. In Matthew 15:7, He quoted from Isaiah concerning them, 'These people draw near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, and in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' How important it is then, that we do not become as they were.

What do we say then to people not of the faith, who live their lives as they please? They are sure that we have been brainwashed, what we confess has been drummed into us since we were little children. They are certainly right when they say that it's what we've learnt from our parents, but their drastic accusation of brainwashing we can automatically deny.

To the world, a Bible is just something that you might see once or twice in your life, you swear by it in court, but not as if that means much to you either. But to those who open their Bibles and find the riches that pour forth, a life conformed to God's Word is the only way. Open up the book of John and read chap 3:16. 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life'. And Matthew 5:14 'you are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.' There is no denying that the Bible holds the true and infallible Word of God, with the promises of eternal life, along with the obligation to live according to His command. There is no brainwashing involved at all, only the realisation that because God loved us first we are to love God in everything we do.

As Christians in this world we face temptations, that is why we need to constantly

call upon His Name in prayer and read the Scriptures. There is no exception to that way of living. For without that communion with God, for us to try and live with a Christian mind, is an impossibility. We cannot just confess His name with our lips but in our daily walk of life we must prove we are different. For as it says in James 2, a well known text to us all, 'faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.'

Also in our communion with one another, we are to reflect our Saviour's love. The communion of saints is a very precious gift from Him. We are able to help and encourage, but also to admonish and guide our brothers and sisters in the faith. Through this communion with one another we can strengthen our own faith, and others also. To have the thought in mind, 'keep out of my business and I'll keep out of yours', is not a healthy practicing of the communion of saints. For we are all one body with Christ and should show that in the way we live as members of his church.

To change our walk of life, to walk with a Christian mindset, is not an impossibility, for as I said at the beginning, we can do it with an eye on Christ, and also with guidance from the Spirit. Romans 8: 13 -14 states this beautifully when it says 'for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God these are sons of God.'

■ **Emma Plug**

CLONING

Since the first successful cloning of a sheep, Dolly, in February 1997, scientists have been caught up in the race to successfully clone a human being.¹ In the past, ethical consideration for human cloning (the replication of a person by asexual means) was hardly given by society because of the impossibility of this process. As the code has now been broken for cloning, what was once scientific fiction is fast becoming fact and society is forced to consider the full ethical and practical consequences of human cloning. Examination of the issues surrounding human cloning is testament to the fact that some scientific discoveries today are being reached primarily for the sake of science and at the expense of ethics, morals and human wellbeing.

The quest by scientists to achieve successful cloning of a human when it is not legal to do so is in itself a revelation that scientific research is moving too fast for ethics to be considered sufficiently. Like Shelley's Frankenstein during the Enlightenment, man today is involved primarily in scientific progress, leaving morals, values and consequences to be examined only after the breakthrough has occurred. By accepting the Christian premise that God is the Creator of life it is also seen that man should not be attempting to play God and "assume control of the universe."² Gregory Pence argues against this, "if God has allowed humans to progress why won't he allow them to progress more?"³ This argument does not recognise the true definition of progress. While God issued man with the mandate to develop the earth, this mandate is to be fulfilled to God's glory and not to the glory of men. Human cloning can be defined as man trying to take God's place and exert his own control over life and destiny.

The inconsistencies that show up in the arguments of those promoting cloning, reveal that ethical considerations have not been examined sufficiently.

Gregory Pence (1998) argues that cloning is not an example of "science for the sake of science" in the following statement: "the average life of the average scientist is hardly a 'quest for mastery over nature for the sake of knowledge, power and money.'" However, Frank Miele suggests that if cloning is "banned in the US...it would only go to countries eager to attract capital and technology."⁴ Miele's statement undermines Pence's statement. Richard Seed, a Chicago biophysicist on the other hand announced on National Public Radio that he planned to clone himself several times "for fun."⁵ The very argument Pence uses to show that cloning is not just for the sake of knowledge, power and money, is disproved by Miele and Seed who are trying to promote the same cause. Inconsistencies in the arguments on what is acceptable and what is not, highlight the fact that this branch of scientific research is occurring at the expense of ethics and morals.

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Those promoting human cloning believe that "positive reasons" such as providing matching organ donors or filling the vacancy of a loved one who died, ultimately override the negative ethical considerations.

Careful analysis of these reasons reveals that cloning would still occur at the expense of human well being. Consider the psychological impact on the clone: factors such as the lack of individuality, the "burden of being so different, of facing unusual parental expectations, (and) of likely social discrimination"⁶. It is clear that human cloning fulfils the wants of an adult, and does not take into consideration the feelings of the cloned child. Gregory Pence argues that individuality would not be threatened. He comments "a person cloned from Michael Jordan's genes could be a television

weatherman who couldn't care less about basketball." Such a statement does not take into account the expectations that people around the clone will

inevitably have. Numerous statements from the public such as, "I want to clone my dad and have him as a baby"⁷ and other desires to replicate a child who has died in an accident, or to raise a wife as a child,⁸ all show the superficiality of Pence's statement. A clone would inevitably be expected to live up to the reputation of the original. Such pressure on the clone is unfair and unethical.

Medical reasons such as creating a child with matching bone marrow for someone dying of leukaemia is said to be "probably the strongest possible case for cloning a human being."⁹ The question remains though: should ethics be sacrificed for the sake of recovery. To create a child by cloning for the sake of a medical cure is utilisation of a child as an instrument. Imagine growing up knowing that your only value comes in being able to save your sibling.

Robert Wachbroit's statement epitomises the selfishness of mankind and the reality that science is occurring at the expense of ethics and human wellbeing: "even if we were convinced that the clones are likely to suffer particular burdens, that would not be enough to show that it is wrong to create them...no-one's life is entirely free of some difficulties or burdens." Such a statement denies the difference between knowingly creating psychological distress and inevitable psychological burden. Indeed, life is accompanied by unavoidable burdens however that is no justification for creating unnatural situations in which the psychological burdens are obvious before we create the situation.

The low success rate and the high risk factor involved with human cloning further proves scientists are prepared to act at the expense of ethics, morals and human well-being. As Charles Hurtaugh points out, "Wilmut himself (the man who made the cloning breakthrough with Dolly) acknowledged that cloning was inefficient and fraught with grotesque failure, and he strongly advised against trying to clone humans."¹⁰ In addition to this, complications in the gene processes have been discovered, such as Dolly's genetic material being six years old at her birth because of her shortened chromosomes. Wachbroit admits in his article that 'scientists cannot rule out the possibility of mutation or other biological damage.' With such knowledge of probable errors it is evident that those who wish to devalue human life and do not acknowledge the sanctity of human life. They are willing to sacrifice countless embryos for the sake of experimentation, and are willing to risk abnormalities in children for the sake of scientific breakthrough. Nigel Cameron, a professor of theology and culture,

comments that "it may take some clonings and some scare stories coming out of the experience to make us look at this again..."¹¹ To enter a situation such as cloning where the probabilities of "scare stories" are recognised by scientists, is a declaration in itself that man is abandoning ethics, morals and human wellbeing to try and take over God's position as the controller of life.

Human cloning as a process designed at replicating an individual can be viewed as a promotion of life, yet at the same time a destroyer of life. It can be seen as promoting life as it may provide cures for possible terminal diseases such as cancer, yet in so doing it destroys the life of millions of embryos and has the capability to destroy the wellbeing of any cloned

children who may result from it. With a process such as this which is clearly under researched and in which man disregards the sanctity of life for his own aim for perfection, further experimentation should be ceased. While the curing of terminal diseases, particularly in children, is important and should be regarded with high value, medical research should be advanced in other areas that promote the saving of human life without requiring the sacrifice of other human lives.

■ **Elyne Terpstra**

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This article is a revision of an essay prepared for an ethics class at Notre Dame

EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH

Embryonic Stem Cell Research has been a hot topic in 2002. But what exactly is it? And what's the big deal? Why is it of particular concern to Christians and religious groups? And why would 100 or so Free Reformed Youth get together to learn more about it?

On a Friday evening in April youth from all six metro churches got together to hear Derek Swarts, a PhD student in the area of Biology, explain embryonic stem cell research and its connotations, and to discuss issues surrounding stem cell research.

On arrival at the meeting I knew very little about stem cell research and had a number of questions I wanted answers for, and I believe many others shared my lack of knowledge. This article provides very brief answers in everyday language to some of the questions I had, based on Derek's speech and the following discussions.

What is Stem Cell Research?

Stem cells are cells in the human body which are non-specific and have the potential to develop into specific cells of any sort, whether muscle, blood, nerve or other cells. It is because of their dynamic nature and flexibility that scientists are so excited about them.

Stem cell research involves doing things with stem cells in labs to find out about lots of different things, like cures for diseases, getting a better understanding of how cells and human bodies work and other things.

How are Embryonic and Adult stem cells different?

Embryonic stem cells are taken from embryos, and adult stem cells are taken from adults. (No brownie points for guessing those two.) So why use embryos, if it causes so much debate and you could use adult cells instead? Well, adult stem cells are scarcer and more difficult and costly to extract. Without taking ethics into consideration, embryos are readily available, contain a much higher ratio of stem cells to specific cells, are easier to use and more cost-effective.

Is it relevant to me?

Derek got the relevance of stem cell research through to us using fantastic mental imagery of all of us in Fairhaven in 50 years time. We are all going to get older and we're all likely to have a health problem or two along the way to Fairhaven. Of course we would have few questions about saying "No"

to treatment requiring stem cells from embryos. But other

benefits from stem cell research will be more generic medical understanding and possibly breakthroughs in medical procedures in a variety of areas, which may enhance our treatment when we receive it. We won't know if stem cell research was partly responsible for our recovery or not. The point was that embryonic stem cell research would indirectly benefit us as well as those who support the research, even if we refused surgery directly involving embryonic stem cells.

Apart from the fact that we might unknowingly benefit from stem cell research, it is our duty to be aware of what's going on around us and to be "lights set high on a hill top, and salting salts". We read in the papers that Christians are objecting to embryonic stem cell research, so we need to try to find out if it really is in disagreement with God's law, and if it is, we **MUST** oppose it. To sit by and ignore something which opposes God's will is essentially to condone it.

What's the problem?

There are no ethical objections to adult stem cell research, as lives are not being lost, and adults choose to allow their cells to be used. However, from what I understand, when embryos are used, their lives are being lost, and of course they have no choice. In essence, using embryos for research is like playing God. God is the supreme creator of human life. He has made us in His image from the womb, and therefore human life is sacred from the very beginning. Only God may decide when to give and take life. He certainly did not design humans in His own image to be sacrificed for the sake of science, even if many other humans might benefit from the sacrifice.

What are the issues?



**The Contender
can be viewed on
the web**

<http://www.frsa.asn.au/contender/>

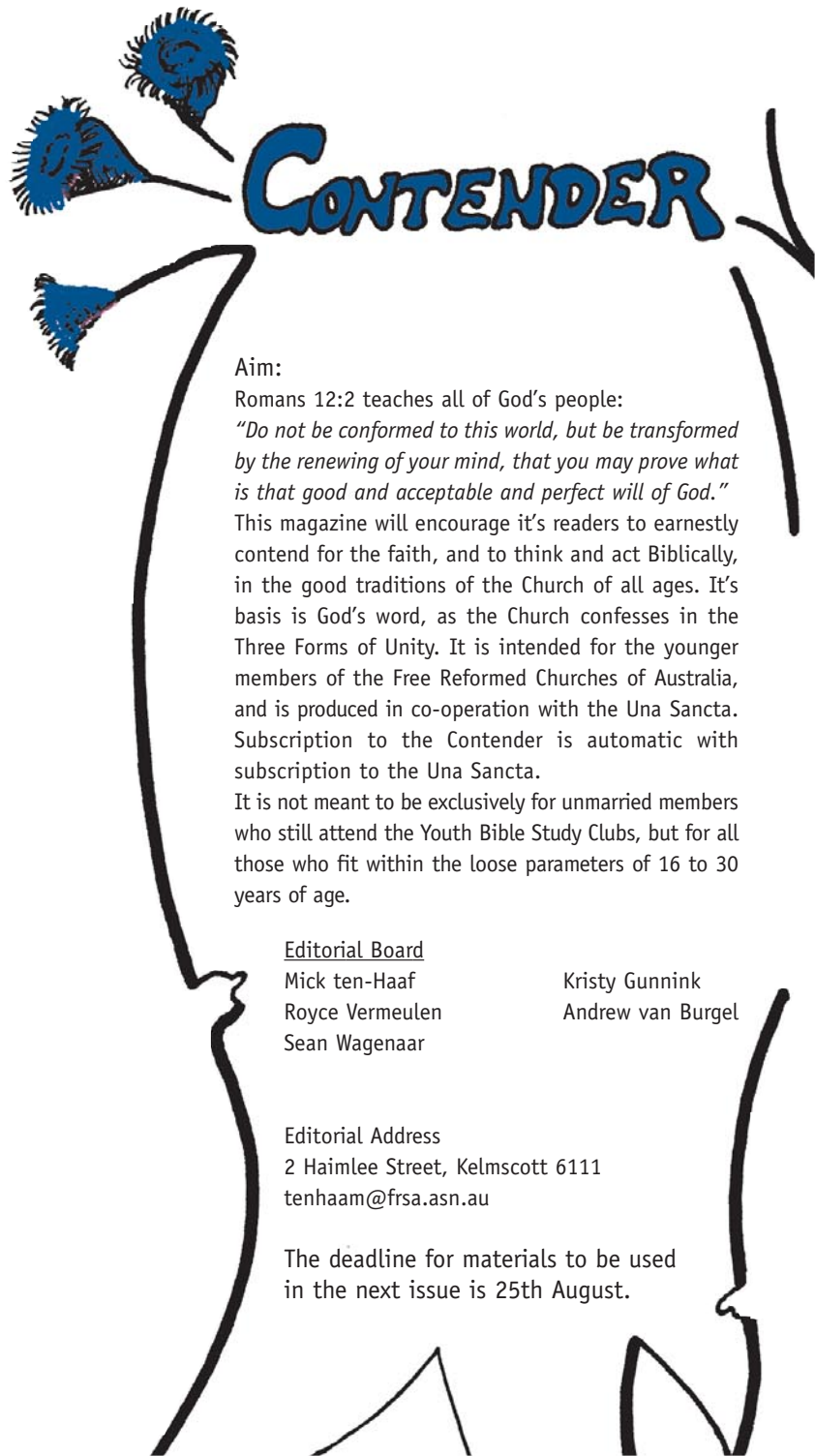
While embryonic stem cell research is tinkering with human life, the issue is not as clear-cut as it seems at first. In debate surrounding the research the following aspects have complicated matters further:

- ◆ There are as yet no properly documented cases of people who have benefited from stem cell research. The benefits are theoretical so far, not scientifically proven.
- ◆ People disagree on when human life begins, and on its definition.
- ◆ Often the embryos which are used are by-products of IVF, and would otherwise be discarded or unused.
- ◆ Many lives are likely to be saved from the research, while many of the embryos would never have had a chance to develop anyway.
- ◆ If research goes ahead, the question arises of whether we are duty bound to refuse to benefit from research which used stem cells, and how we will tell.

While these issues complicate matters and provided points for thought, most participants in the evening agreed that it would be against God's will to use embryos for research purposes and that as Christians we should oppose embryonic stem cell research. Derek's speech and the evening filled gaps in my understanding of the issue and probably did for most other participants.

Through exposure to issues, access to knowledgeable speakers and critical Bible-centered discussion, in forums such as the Social Political Youth Study Club, we as Christian youth can develop sound stances on important contemporary issues such as this one and become prepared to defend God's Will and make a difference!

■ **Hester Bax**



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 it's readers to earnestly contend for the faith, and to think and act Biblically, in the good traditions of the Church of all ages. It's 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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The deadline for materials to be used in the next issue is 25th August.