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## Investigation like Stalinism, claims Pell

Sherrill Nixon  
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THE Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, George Pell, says there is a "whiff of Stalinism" about an investigation into whether his comments on stem cell research amount to contempt of Parliament.

Cardinal Pell described the privileges committee investigation, announced on Friday after a request from the Greens MP Lee Rhiannon, as a clumsy attempt to curb religious freedom and freedom of speech.

"There is a whiff of Stalinism or perhaps only of Henry VIII in her attempt to use this referral as a warning to me," he said.

Cardinal Pell ignited a debate about religious intervention in politics this month when he said Catholic MPs who supported a bill to overturn a ban on therapeutic cloning "must realise that their voting has consequences for their place in the life of the church".

After the bill was passed with the support of several Catholic MPs, including the Premier, Morris Iemma, Cardinal Pell said politicians who had voted for the bill should examine their conscience before next receiving Holy Communion. But in an interview on ABC radio's *Sunday Profile* last night, Cardinal Pell said his comments - widely interpreted as a threat to refuse Communion to those MPs - had been misrepresented.

"I never outlined that [the refusal of Communion] except as a hypothetical possibility," he said. "I never threatened anybody with a public excommunication and I've stated quite publicly that that's a very blunt instrument and it's hardly ever been used here in Australia."

However, when asked if he would have given Communion to Mr Iemma after the vote, Cardinal Pell was non-committal, saying, "we'd cross that bridge when we come to it".

The archbishop said the use of embryonic stem cells in research was a "marker event" and the high public support for it in Australia showed how much work the Catholic Church had to do in explaining the issues.

There had been no cures that had arisen from embryonic stem cell research, compared with the many cures from adult stem cells, and very little cost-benefit analysis, he said.

"The experimentation with the creation and the destruction of human embryos is unnecessary and I think it sets a very bad precedent for the future because undoubtedly [scientists] will be back again and again and again to try to broaden the permissions to play with human life," Cardinal Pell said.

The upper house of the NSW Parliament is expected to debate the bill this week, after the conscience vote in the lower house was passed by 65 to 26. Cardinal Pell has said he hopes the upper house will be "better informed".

### WHAT HE SAID

**'... it is a serious moral matter and Catholic politicians who vote for this legislation must**

**realise that their voting has consequences for their place in the life of the church.'**

**June 5**

**'Certainly, every Catholic politician who voted for this bill should think twice and examine his or her conscience before next receiving Communion.'**

**June 10**

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