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## World News

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### Stem cell debate causes furore in Australia

(Reuters)  
6 June 2007

CANBERRA - The conservative head of the Catholic Church in Australia faced a backlash from politicians on Wednesday after warning them of "consequences" if they supported laws extending stem cell research.

Archbishop George Pell has told Catholic lawmakers in New South Wales state that a vote in support of therapeutic cloning could see them denied Communion.

"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," Pell said in the lead up to a conscience vote in the NSW parliament.

The bill would mirror national laws allowing somatic cell nuclear transfer, in which an egg cell nucleus is removed and replaced with a donor nucleus, eventually forming an early embryo with DNA almost identical to the donor organism.

Morris Iemma, the centre-left Labour Party premier of NSW and a practising Catholic, said he and his deputy John Watkins would defy Pell's warning.

"I've already thought seriously about this legislation and it passes all the ethical and moral issues that I need passed, and gives people hope," Iemma said.

Watkins said he was upset by Pell's admonition. "I have to say I'm a bit mystified by the authoritarian view that's been put," he told local radio.

Pell supported the conservative national government when it passed laws banning same-sex marriage and overturned efforts to legalise euthanasia.

He also refused the sacraments to homosexuals, arguing that anybody "sinning seriously should not go to communion". Gay activists protested by wearing rainbow-coloured sashes to Sydney's St Mary's Cathedral and demanding Communion.

State Labour MP Tony Stewart said he was prepared to go against Pell's order to promote stem cell research, which could help people with life-threatening diseases.

"Maybe I'll go to hell but if I go to hell I'm going to do so by saving a lot of lives, because that's what this bill is about," he said.

National Party opponent Adrian Piccoli, whose rival conservative party

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Nasim Zehra  
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P.V. Ramanathan  
Barkha Dutt

represents farmers, said he would also support the bill and urged the church to stay out of politics.

Science Minister Verity Firth said no one had a "monopoly on morality" and said everyone was entitled to a view on the laws.

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