

# Christians being martyred by words in ideological war, says Australian bishop

SYDNEY, Australia - Christians in the Western world are being martyred by words in a war of ideology, said the president of the Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania.

"People of faith were once upon a time fed to the lions, decapitated, crucified and the like," said Bishop Peter Ingham of Wollongong, Australia, in his homily during the May 10 Mass in Sydney to open the conference for bishops from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and other Pacific nations.

"We instead find ourselves today subjected to what you could call 'death by 1,000 cuts,' with the new mode of martyrdom coming in the form of ridicule, derision and character assassination, as opposed to being silenced through physical death," he said.

"The torture of believers is to be found in the constant attempts to have them relegated to the sidelines, unable to contribute to the morals, laws and structures that make up the fabric of society without significant criticism. The new mode of martyrdom is not as bloody as forms of old, but its aim is ultimately the same and its methods no less cruel.

The bishop said it had become fashionable to dismiss all religions, particularly Christianity.

"This dismissiveness could be quite aptly described as the new modern method of martyrdom," he said.

Attempts to redefine marriage and to change traditional understandings about the sacredness of human life, he said, are assaults by "powerful secular forces in our society on truths that cannot be abandoned or compromised without seriously weakening our social framework."

“Rather than calling for people of faith to remain silent or remove themselves from the realm of public policy and debate, our opinions and contribution should be eagerly sought. The weight of evidence would suggest that from our long and rich tradition of Catholic faith and culture, we might just have more than a little bit of wisdom to contribute to public debate,” he said.

“It is for this reason as much as any other that upholding and securing religious freedom is so vital for society as a whole, not just for believers,” he added.