

The Aquila Report

PGA Minister Jean Jacob Paul: One of the 21st Century's Newest Martyrs

Jean Jacob Paul was Presbyterian Church in America pastor and member of Northwest Georgia Presbytery.

Written by Martin Hawley | Thursday, August 6, 2020

Pastor Paul moved to Haiti, at the urging of God through the means of recurrent dreams, early in this century and began a ministry to orphaned children and the planting of churches across the nation. Beginning in 2013, Jean established a Reformed Bible college in Haiti, training young pastors and theological students in God's Word. Jean believed he had a very pressing mission from God – to transform Haiti with the Gospel and see Jesus exalted from Jacmel in the south to Cap Haitien in the north.

On Tuesday, August 4, 2020, those of us who are involved with mission on the island of Hispaniola were presented with the true face of 21st Century Martyrdom in all its glaring and ugly glory in the fatal shooting of Rev. Jean Jacob Paul, the director of Souls Winning Ministries, based in La Plaine, Haiti. At some point that sunny afternoon another Christian martyr entered their rest. Jean heard our Lord Jesus declare, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” (Matthew 25:21).

Dr. Todd M. Johnson, of Gordon Conwell, observed ‘that one million Christians were killed between 2001 and 2010 and about 900,000 were killed from 2011 to 2020.’[1] And while it must be admitted that a high percentage of those who died were caught up in the conflict taking place within the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the continuing persecution and martyrdom of so many of our brothers and sisters every day around the globe should probably trouble us far more than it presently does. Perhaps it is the sheer scale of the numbers involved, or the statistical aspect, or perhaps our romanticized take on Christian martyrdom as something resembling the stalwart stand of professing believers in 1st or 2nd century Rome or in 16th century England.

Pastor Paul moved to Haiti, at the urging of God through the means of recurrent dreams, early in this century and began a ministry to orphaned children and the planting of churches across the nation. Beginning in 2013, Jean established a Reformed Bible college in Haiti, training young pastors and theological students in God's Word. Jean believed he had a very pressing mission from God – to transform Haiti with the Gospel and see Jesus exalted from Jacmel in the south to Cap Haitien in the north. He declared that it would be the next generation of Haitians, equipped with biblical truth, who would be the instruments of this transformation.

Like the Apostle Paul of another era, Jean Paul was a citizen of a great nation with far-reaching influence, often working in remote or dangerous areas. And like his predecessor often endured the sufferings of our faith like one of the locals he served. With the Apostle at other times he instead chose to reveal his citizenship, most often when it opened doors for him to proclaim Jesus in police stations, courtrooms, and border crossings. Jean was proud to be a citizen of the United States, but he was far prouder to be a child of the living God through faith in Jesus.

Pastor Paul survived the devastating January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, while burying some 200 of his church members in an endless cycle of funerals and burials. He planted or nurtured scores of churches, large and small, tending to their needs like their father in the faith. Jean endured the hurricanes, floods, and cholera which swept across the island nation during the past 10 years. He brought kingdom hope and comfort to thousands of poor Haitians who had none. The Souls Winning compound became a place of help, of hope, and of refuge.

In more recent years, Jean's mission field became even more of a violent killing field, with rampant civil unrest, street protests, gang violence, and internal instability. Despite frequent threats and numerous close brushes with kidnapping, robbery, or death, he persevered, even as one of his favorite nieces was senselessly gunned down with her husband outside a bank in a suburb of Port-au-Prince. Through it all, for some 17 committed years, Pastor Paul fathered hundreds of orphans, shepherded dozens of churches, mentored hundreds of pastors.

One of the many remarkable things Jean did was to stand up to a group of Voodoo priests who came and confronted him early in his ministry. The chief among these Voodoo practitioners challenged Pastor Paul, saying, “This place is not big enough for both of us. It is time for you to leave or die.” As the crowd looked on and feared for their pastor's life, Jean replied, “You are right this place is not big enough for both of us, King Jesus is taking over Haiti. It is time for you to repent and come to Jesus or leave.” Not long afterward, the Voodoo priests who had come to threaten Pastor Paul had either moved out of Haiti, professed faith in Jesus, or had died.

With a history of boldness in Jesus Christ, and a dependence upon the truth of God's Word and the power of the Holy Spirit, is it any wonder that those of us who worked directly with Jean are now in shock. It seems utterly unfathomable that this 21st century Apostolic messenger to Haiti was cut down in what appears to be a targeted shooting along a narrow side street in Haiti. As unbelievable and as gut-wrenching as Rev. Paul's martyrdom is for us this week, perhaps at least we now more fully realize the significant cost, the terrible suffering, and the utterly unromantic tragedy of the martyrdom of 100,000 of our brothers and sisters each year in this our 21st century.

At least as we continue to grieve for Rev. Jean Paul and for thousands of other brothers and sisters martyred this year, we can also rejoice in their ultimate victory in Jesus, that in fact they have endured tribulation and have overcome.

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

"Therefore they are before the throne of God,

and serve him day and night in his temple;

and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;

the sun shall not strike them,

nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,

and he will guide them to springs of living water,

and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."^[2] Revelation 7:14b-17

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[1] Dr. Todd M. Johnson, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/blog/christian-martyrdom-who-why-how/>

[2] The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.