

CityFest 2018 - The Theology

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In mid-September 2018, over 400 churches in the West Michigan area worked together to bring Luis & Andrew Palau and their message to Grand Rapids. Driving around West Michigan in the weeks leading up to the event, you would think that a good portion of the \$1,700,000 budget was spent on signage alone. The last editorial detailed the extraneous activity of CityFest 2018: the BMX competitions, face painting, climbing walls, and music. All of this was leading up to the main event—Luis and Andrew Palau and their gospel message. In this editorial, I intend to focus on their theology and examine it in the light of scripture and the Canons of Dordt. This is what Reformed believers do.

Luis Palau is no Jim Bakker.

Jim Bakker was a televangelist who spent the better part of the 1900s fashioning his life according to Romans 2. He was a “guide of the blind,” an “instructor of the foolish,” and a phony who preached against theft while he stole millions. Convicted of theft, an adulterer and accused rapist, he was a man who could read Romans 2:24 as being directly addressed to him; “For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.”

From all outward appearances, Luis Palau lives a moral life. Perform an internet search for “Luis Palau scandal” and you will come up empty. Many popular evangelists are exposed by their own wicked life as false prophets and bring on themselves “swift destruction” (2 Pet. 2:2). Luis Palau does not belong to that camp.

It is difficult to know what exactly Luis Palau believes because he shies away from doctrinal pronouncements. In his book *Say Yes! How to Renew Your Spiritual Passion*, Palau writes that he used to “preach certain minor points of doctrine with conviction.” This memory left him embarrassed because he subsequently changed his mind about those truths. His focus now is on areas of unity. If you find the thought welling up in you that perhaps differences matter, he has a word for you: “Crucify it” (165).

For Luis Palau, all gospels are the same. The wide variety of churches that brought CityFest 2018 to Grand Rapids supports this view: Wesleyan, Assembly of God, Orthodox Presbyterian, Christian Reformed, Nitrogen Movement (wait, what?), Roman Catholic, and most everything in between. Rare is the church or denomination not found on the list. I asked the Festival Director of the Luis Palau Association, Andrew Park how they can have all of these different churches working together when Amos teaches that two cannot walk together “except they be agreed” (Amos 3:3). He responded that they do not focus on the doctrine, but focus on “Christ and Christ crucified.” They leave the follow-up details to the local congregation.

Luis Palau may believe there is only one gospel message, but that was not the teaching of the apostle Paul. For the apostle, there were two gospels. One gospel was the gospel he preached; “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8–9). A gospel message that taught anything other than

this is “another,” and if anyone, man or angel, were to preach another gospel he is to be “accursed.”

In this year in which we commemorate the Synod of Dordt, let’s hear the Canon’s gospel message.

All men are “under the curse, and . . . deserving of eternal death” (Head 1, Art. 1) and “equally involved in ruin” (Art. 6). Salvation needs to come from outside ourselves, because “we are unable to make that satisfaction in our own persons” (Head 2, Art 2). In fact, natural man “is neither able nor willing to return to God.” Why? They are “dead in sin” (Head 3/4, Art. 3). From the mass of fallen humanity, God chose an “elect number . . . to give to Christ, to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit (Head 1, Art. 7). Although the death of Christ was “abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world (Art. 3), it was God’s will that the “saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect” (Art. 8) and that Christ “should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given Him by the Father.” “Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure . . . but because He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also” (Head 3/4, Art. 14).

How does Palau’s gospel line up?

In his brief exposition of the life of Peter, titled, *Walk on Water, Pete!* Palau writes, “And all He (Christ) wants from us is that we be available to Him. All He asks is to take over. Just let Him take over and see what He can do through you” (86). In the book *Where is God When Bad Things Happen*, he writes, “We can depend upon His Spirit for the strength to do what is best. But it all starts with our choice to align ourselves with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ” (136). Palau believes the power to choose “is one of the greatest gifts God ever bestowed upon the human race” (135).

This explains why Palau and others like him frenetically crisscross the globe spreading their message of choice. “What drives me is the conviction that if only people would see the point and get the message, they would be changed. Maybe that’s why I—along with many other evangelists—spend so much time literally pleading the case for salvation through Jesus Christ” (*The Luis Palau Story*, pg 23).

As part of his revival address to Londoners in 1984, Palau exhorts the audience that Jesus “loves you so much that He died for you. He gave His blood for you and your family. He wants to reign in your life. He wants to be your King.” “You can receive Christ the same way—by opening your heart to Him and saying, “Thank You, God” (*Spirit Aflame*, Holton and Jones, 225). “If you give your life to Jesus Christ, old things will pass away and all things will become new. But you must make the decision. You must intelligently come to Christ” (220). This was the message Andrew Palau brought to CityFest 2018: “It’s a beautiful offer, and I extend it to you now.”

For Luis & Andrew Palau, and Jacob Arminius before him, Jesus gave his life for all men, including those who will one day perish everlastingly in hell. Some atonement.

It is only in the way of exercising your will and making that choice for God that you will enjoy salvation. It depends on man, and man's choice.

Palau's gospel message runs shipwreck on the scripture and the Reformed confessions.

Palau's gospel message is not that of Romans 9:16, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" or Philippians 2:13, "For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." A choice is certainly made, but not the one that the Palaus glory in: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16).

According to the Canons, Palau's teaching "is nothing less than the denial of all the efficiency of God's grace in our conversion, and the subjecting of the working of the Almighty God to the will of man, which is contrary to the apostles" (Head 3/4, Rejection of Error 8). As you read through Palau's writings or listen to his teaching, you get the distinct impression Jesus is this helpless creature who is standing out in the street (probably in the rain, bedraggled and cold) running from door to door, hoping someone will finally let him in. This impression is only confirmed when Andrew Palau, at the end of his speech on Saturday night at Cityfest 2018, as he is about to offer salvation to all, (mis)quotes Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Palau's teachings bear an uncanny resemblance to the those of the Remonstrants (Arminians): conditional election, universal atonement, partial depravity, resistible grace, and conditional perseverance.

This makes it all the more bewildering that Reformed churches that stand in the line of Dordt should have this man come and preach to their people. To work side by side with the Roman Catholic Church and any number of Arminian churches and bring in an exemplar of Arminian theology and yet retain the name Reformed is, to use a euphemism, puzzling.¹

There is every reason to celebrate the Synod of Dordt this year. We should take part in that celebration. Rather than simply pay lip service to it, we should confess the truths found in the Canons of Dordt. Not because we are Reformed and if we did not believe the doctrine of the Canons to be biblical, our consciences would require us to strip the name Reformed off our churches. We love the truth found in the Canons because they accurately summarize the truth found in the Bible about who God is and what salvation in Jesus Christ means. Conversely, we reject the teaching of a free will of man to choose for Christ, or against him, because "these adjudge too contemptuously of the death of Christ, do in no wise acknowledge the most

¹ It is not puzzling that the Christian Reformed Church should invite Luis Palau. This can be traced back to the CRC Synod of 1924. "The substantial error committed by the 1924 synod was its acceptance of the Arminian definition of the sincere call—a doctrine that is clearly rejected by Canons III/IV.8" (Blacketer, *The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed: A Reexamination of the So-called Well-meant Offer of Salvation*, Calvin Theological Journal 35, no. 1 (2000)

important fruit or benefit thereby gained, and bring again out of hell the Pelagian error” (Canons, Head 2, Error 3).

After Jesus had borne the wrath of God against sin for all of his children, he said, simply, “It is finished.”

For Jacob Arminius, Luis & Andrew Palau, and everyone else who teaches that the will of God in salvation is subject to that of man, Jesus hangs on that cross yet today. It isn’t finished.

It will be finished when man says it is finished.

Originally published in:

Vol. 77 No. 12 December 2018