

The impact on Nietzschean Christians in the light of *Fiducia supplicans*, by Pope Francis

O impacto sobre os cristãos nietzschianos à luz de Fiducia supplicans, de Papa Francisco

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Abstract

This paper has the objective of identifying how Nietzschean Christians behave when confronted with truth and acceptance. Based on a qualitative-interpretative approach, I analyze *The Whale*, by the American playwright Samuel D. Hunter, by focusing on the character Elder Thomas and his relationship with the main character – Charlie – and Liz, his nurse-friend. For relevant purposes, this study unites theological, philosophical and theatre studies by highlighting a theme which Church and society always debated: same-sex couple marriage acceptance. As a theoretical background, this paper takes into consideration the concept of “dissimulation” by Friedrich Nietzsche jointly with the main idea (welcoming) of declaration *Fiducia supplicans*, by Pope Francis, to design the concept of “Nietzschean Christian” used to analyze the character Elder Thomas. Comparing the reasons of said declaration, I consider it as a continuation of the decrees taken by The Second Vatican Council, as to update the Church to the contemporary world and to approximate people thereto. As a result, when faced by truth and acceptance, a Nietzschean Christian gets extremely frustrated and shows their intolerant nature, being incapable of accepting the differences between people, only their own idea of being right before God.

Keywords: Nietzschean Christian. The Whale. Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis. *Fiducia supplicans*.

Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo identificar como cristãos nietzschianos se comportam quando confrontados com a verdade e aceitação. Com base em uma abordagem qualitativa-interpretativa, analiso *The Whale*, do dramaturgo americano Samuel D. Hunter, focando no personagem Elder Thomas e sua relação com o personagem principal – Charlie – e Liz, sua enfermeira-amiga. Para fins de relevância, este estudo une estudos teológicos, filosóficos e teatrais ao destacar um tema o qual a Igreja e sociedade sempre debateram: aceitação de casamento de casais do mesmo sexo. Como

fundamentação teórica, este artigo leva em consideração o conceito de “dissimulação” de Friedrich Nietzsche em conjunto com a ideia principal (acolhimento) da declaração *Fiducia supplicans*, de Papa Francisco, para elaborar o conceito de “cristão nietzschiano”, utilizado para analisar o personagem Elder Thomas. Comparando as razões da referida declaração, a considero como uma continuação dos decretos tomados pelo Concílio Vaticano II, a fim de atualizar a Igreja ao mundo contemporâneo e aproximar as pessoas à mesma. Como resultado, quando confrontado com a verdade e aceitação, um cristão nietzschiano fica extremamente frustrado e mostra sua natureza intolerante, sendo incapaz de aceitar as diferenças entre as pessoas, apenas sua própria ideia de estar certo diante de Deus.

Palavras-chave: Cristão Nietzschiano. The Whale. Concílio Vaticano II. Papa Francisco. *Fiducia supplicans*.

Introduction

In view of different and severe problems faced by society in terms of politics, poverty, and technology, The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was convened to consider ways of re-structuring, updating and connecting Church to the modern world. Said council was summoned by Pope John XXIII and concluded by Pope Paul VI, where four main different documents were approved: (i) on the Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), (ii) on the Word of God (*Dei Verbum*); (ii) on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*); and (iv) on the relations of the Church with society (*Gaudium et Spes*)¹. Despite all those documents, the more conservative part of the critics (priests and cardinals) threatened to leave Church due to alleged inconsistencies on said documents.

Based on the need of approximating to people in contemporaneity, Pope Francis issued a declaration called *Fiducia supplicans*, in which the Church allows irregular and same-sex couples to receive pastoral blessings by priests², by inspiring “a more comprehensive understanding of blessings, one that is grounded in pastoral care and the unconditional love of God, while also respecting the Church’s teachings”³, since these pastoral blessings “do not require the same conditions as blessings in a liturgical or ritual context, flourish”⁴.

As occurred with The Second Vatican Council, different priests and religious people opposed to the declaration, for example, the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB), by alleging that the document could cause “uncertainty among the faithful”⁵. In addition, the professor of Theology, fr. Emmanuel Perrier, o.p., declared that the *Fiducia supplicans* makes him to see “Christ’s faithful lose confidence in the words of the universal shepherd, to see priests torn between their filial devotion and the

¹ COUTINHO, S. R., O que foi o Concílio Vaticano II?

² *Fiducia Supplicans*, 40.

³ ARMSTRONG, C., Pope Francis’ Legacy of Inclusivity, p. 17.

⁴ Press release concerning the reception of *Fiducia supplicans*, p. 2.

⁵ ARMSTRONG, C., Pope Francis’ Legacy of Inclusivity, p. 20.

practical consequences this text will force them to face, and to see bishops divided” and “by allowing the practice of these blessings [for same-sex couples] to get out of control, one accepts in advance all the abuses that may occur”⁶.

In 2022, Pope Francis acknowledged the importance of The Second Vatican Council for the Church and its relationship with society. Véronique Lecaros and Carlos Piccone⁷ confirm *Fiducia supplicans* is a way of embracing all Christians with no discrimination, and this includes homosexuals, as defended by Association de parents catholiques d’enfants homosexuels in a response to fr. Emmanuel Perrier, o.p. The parents of homosexual children state that the pressure on homosexual Christians “often leads to self-rejection and despair, which can result in depression or even suicidal tendencies”⁸. However, the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (NECC) “saw homosexuality as a corruption of human nature, which trivialised the importance of sex, family, and marriage, which are considered essentials”⁹.

Such reactionary position makes us to question what (or who) a Christian is. Pope Francis taught that a Christian “must be open to the proclamation of the Word, and to welcoming brothers and sisters”¹⁰ regardless their sexualities, economic statuses, and colors. For the Pontiff, “no one should be left out on the periphery of the church”¹¹, which I assume that he was a synodal person – someone who lives in communion with others, seeing life as a shared journey. By criticizing Christianity, Friederich Nietzsche defines Christians as people who “reject everything in the world and call it unholy, worldly, and sinful”¹². When comparing both definitions with the declarations made by ZCCB, NECC, and fr. Emmanuel Perrier, o.p., I assume that there is a sort of dissimulation performed by the Christians who speak their minds in a conservative point of view. *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1873), Nietzsche uses the concept of ‘dissimulation’ to relate to people who intentionally distort reality as a human tendency to conceal, reshape, or mask reality through language and social conventions, often as a means of preserving life or securing advantages.

In view of the critics set out by Nietzsche on Christianity, I propose herein a new classification for those people, which I call “Nietzschean Christians”, that is, people who use Christianity as a tool to dissimulate before others to preserve their conservative ideals and personal interests. This includes rejecting their brothers and sisters, once they do not meet their expectations. It is important to identify such type of Christian as to understand and differentiate them from the Christians defined by Pope Francis, thus avoiding erroneous and unfair comparisons with those who truly welcome others.

Whereas art can be a means for understanding life, theology, philosophy and theatre can be analyzed together as to understand human behavior. Then, I question: how do Nietzschean Christians deal with a homosexual suffering for being rejected by

⁶ PERRIER, E., *Fiducia supplicans* face au sens de la foi, translated by me.

⁷ LECAROS, V.; PICCONE, C. P., «Fiducia supplicans» y la homosexualidad, p. 146.

⁸ BÉVIERRE, C., BOIDIN, O.; THONNAT, E., La réponse de parents catholiques d’enfants homosexuels aux critiques de «Fiducia supplicans», n.p., translated by me.

⁹ ARMSTRONG, C., Pope Francis’ Legacy of Inclusivity, p. 24.

¹⁰ FRANCISCO, PP., General Audience of 13 December 2023 - Catechesis, p. 2.

¹¹ EMEFU, CSSP, C. C., The Reception of *Fiducia Supplicans* as Indicative of the Paths of Synodality, p. 113.

¹² EMEFU, CSSP, C. C., The Reception of *Fiducia Supplicans* as Indicative of the Paths of Synodality, p. 118.

society? To exemplify and ground the concept proposed in this paper, I analyze herein *The Whale*, by the American playwright Samuel D. Hunter, premiered at Denver Center for the Performing Arts (Colorado, USA) in 2012. Based on a qualitative-interpretative approach¹³, I focus on the secondary character Elder Thomas, a young Christian missionary, and his relationship with the main character, Charlie, a morbidly obese and lonely man, and Liz, his nurse-friend. On the one hand, for Elder Thomas, once Charlie accepts God, his soul will be saved, and all pain will disappear. On the other hand, during the play, Elder Thomas differently deals with Charlie's and Liz' speeches. Thus, this paper aims at identifying how a Nietzschean Christian behaves when confronted with truth and acceptance.

As theoretical grounding, the concepts of "dissimulation" and "Nietzschean Christian" are herein corroborated by Areeg Ibrahim¹⁴, Jon R. Snyder¹⁵, and Miriam Eliav-Feldon¹⁶. In addition, the ideals of being a Christian are mainly grounded on Pope Francis¹⁷ and Friederich Nietzsche¹⁸. I also emphasize the relevance of this paper for theological, philosophical and theatre studies, since *The Whale* unites those different fields of studies by highlighting a theme which Church and society has usually been discussing: same-sex couple marriage acceptance. Then, I have divided my analysis into three parts, namely: (1) identifying the characteristics of a Nietzschean Christian (Elder Thomas); (2) highlighting his masked intentions; and (3) registering the impact of the idea (welcoming) of *Fiducia supplicans* thereon.

1. A Nietzschean Christian

1.1. The introduction of Elder Thomas

Elder Thomas, a young missionary, is introduced in the play when entering in Charlie's apartment and sees he is having a heart attack. The young boy gets surprised when seeing what Charlie was watching (an adult gay film) but gets scared when Charlie is not feeling well. After reading Ellie's (Charlie's daughter) essay for him to keep Charlie calm, Elder Thomas introduces himself:

ELDER THOMAS

Okay. Um. I – (pause) I represent the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints? We're sharing a message for all faiths?

CHARLIE

Oh.

ELDER THOMAS

Yeah (pause) Would you – like to hear about the Church?

Pause

CHARLIE

Okay.¹⁹

¹³ DENZIN, N. K.; LINCOLN, Y. S. (Orgs.), O planejamento da pesquisa qualitativa.

¹⁴ IBRAHIM, A., Literature of the converts in early modern Spain, p. 210-217.

¹⁵ SNYDER, J. R., Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe.

¹⁶ ELIAV-FELDON, M., Introduction, p. 1-8.

¹⁷ FRANCISCO, PP., General Audience of 13 December 2023 – Catechesis, p. 1-3.

¹⁸ NIETZSCHE, F., Beyond Good and Evil, p. 43-57.

¹⁹ HUNTER, S. D., The Whale, p. 15.

Firstly, the young missionary was at Charlie's apartment because of two factors: (i) it was happening a devastating storm, and he needed a safe place to stay, and (ii) as a missionary, Elder Thomas was propagating his Church teachings. It is important to note that Elder Thomas introduces himself not with affirmative sentences but making questions. It seems that the young missionary is not sure about what he is doing there or even who he really is. Nietzsche explains that, for preserving themselves as weak individuals, this type of person – which I call herein as a “Nietzschean Christian” – dissimulates and pretends to be something or someone that they are not, something or someone they are not convinced to be.

The young missionary seems to wear a costume which he still is trying to fit in, metaphorically speaking. In view of that, I point out two different Nietzschean thinkings: first, the Prussian philosopher enumerates “[d]eception, flattering, lying, deluding, talking behind the back, putting up a false front, living in borrowed splendor, wearing a mask, hiding behind convention, playing a role for others and for oneself”²⁰ for those who are not able to be honest with others nor themselves. Secondly, in terms of being a Christian individual, the philosopher states that “Christian faith has been sacrifice: sacrifice of all freedom, of all pride, of all self-confidence of the spirit; it is simultaneously enslavement and self-derision, self-mutilation”²¹.

Assuming that Elder Thomas is dissimulating before Charlie and using his religion to get close to the obese man, the young missionary has sacrificed his self-confidence of the spirit and his self-esteem consequently. Making questions instead of affirmations when introducing himself to Charlie is a linguistic approach used by the playwright to demonstrate the character's dissimulation. Such language use appears to be related not specifically to the abrupt entrance of Elder Thomas into Charlie's apartment, but rather to something the young missionary is lying about or hiding. At first, the reader cannot identify his real intentions with Charlie, but the language approach makes us not trust him.

1.2. The origin of Elder Thomas

A few moments later, Liz (Charlie's best friend and nurse) arrives at Charlie's apartment and sees that her friend is not very well. After reading his blood pressure and checking his breathing, she realizes Elder Thomas is a Mormon and dismisses him by also thanking the young missionary for taking care of Charlie. When they say goodbye, Liz and Elder Thomas briefly talk:

LIZ	Thank you. For helping him. (<i>pause</i>) You on your mission?
ELDER THOMAS	What?
LIZ	Is this your mission? You're on your mission now?
ELDER THOMAS	Oh – yeah.
LIZ	Where are you from?

²⁰ NIETZSCHE, F., On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense, p. 115.

²¹ NIETZSCHE, F., Beyond Good and Evil, p. 44.

ELDER THOMAS

LIZ

ELDER THOMAS

Iowa.

You grew up in Iowa and they sent you to *Idaho* on your mission?

Yeah, I don't know. Some of my friends got to go to Los Angeles. A few went to Africa. It's – fine! (*pause*) Is he going to be – ?²²

Elder Thomas seems to dissimulate before Liz. The young missionary is not very assertive when he answers Liz' questions. As someone sent by a Church with specific and clear purposes, Elder Thomas does not appear to be like a Christian. Once Liz asks if Elder Thomas is in his mission and why he was sent to Idaho, the Mormon pretends a plausible and acceptable response just to Liz believes him. Upon saying he was sent to a place far from where he grew up, Elder Thomas immediately changes the subject as to avoid any more questions. Thus, the origin of Elder Thomas is nebulous. Again, the reader cannot truly believe him considering he pretends who he is and where he comes from.

Corroborating with the proposed concept of Nietzschean Christian, Eliav-Feldon defines religious dissimulation as “meaning inwardly or secretly adhering to one confession while outwardly practising another, was by far the most extensive form of identity forgery”²³, and John R. Snyder elaborates that “[t]he majority of those practicing religious dissimulation were, however, ordinary people who often belonged to socially marginal splinter groups and radical sects”²⁴. If Elder Thomas comes from a socially marginal group, this may explain why he appears to lie about the place he truly comes from. Being a marginalized individual would make the young missionary a “good” person, as Nietzsche affirms in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887) by examining the roots of morality:

Only those who suffer are good [within slave morality—namely], only the poor, the powerless, the lowly are good; the suffering, the deprived, the sick, the ugly, are the only pious people, the only ones saved, salvation is for them alone, whereas you rich, the noble and powerful, you are eternally wicked, cruel, lustful, insatiate, godless, you will also be eternally wretched, cursed and damned!²⁵

According to Samuel Tese Katianda²⁶, the understanding of “good” is originally rooted in nobility and aristocracy, and “bad” is defined as their opposites [the poor people]. However, this changes when thinking about these ideals in an enslavement reality proposed by Nietzsche, since “within the slave morality paradigm, values are considered important if they help alleviate suffering, thereby making moral utility central”²⁷. Bearing this in mind, Elder Thomas can be construed as a former good young man corrupted by values and morals in an attempt of changing his reality. The young

²² HUNTER, S. D., *The Whale*, p. 18.

²³ ELIAV-FELDON, M., *Introduction*, p. 2.

²⁴ SNYDER, J. R., *Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe*, p. 19.

²⁵ NIETZSCHE, F., *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 17.

²⁶ KATIANDA, S. T., “Why do You Submit to Regulations?”, p. 111-130.

²⁷ KATIANDA, S. T., “Why do You Submit to Regulations?”, p. 117.

missionary saw in Christianity a means of not being enslaved anymore by society and to be over the others, like a priest who preaches to a needy audience.

Based on how Elder Thomas is inaccurate in his answers, the young missionary depicts to forge his origin; he is not a reliable character. Considering Elder Thomas is completely unknown for both Charlie and Liz, the nurse is correct when she thanks the young missionary for being with Charlie and immediately dismisses him from Charlie's apartment. In other words, Elder Thomas could be a rebel having resentment in his heart and soul, as explained by the Prussian philosopher:

The beginning of the slaves' revolt in morality occurs when *ressentiment* itself turns creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of those beings who, denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge. Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying "yes" to itself, slave morality says "no" on principle to everything that is "outside," "other," "non-self": and *this* "no" is its creative deed. This reversal of the evaluating glance—this *essential* orientation to the outside instead of back onto itself—is a feature of *ressentiment*: in order to come about, slave morality first has to have an opposing, external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is basically a reaction.²⁸

Relating to Christianity, Nietzsche “refers to priests as historically significant critics of dominant value systems, attributing both strong opposition and notable intelligence to them”²⁹. In contrast to the priests defined by the Prussian philosopher, Elder Thomas appears to be devoid of that intelligence, when going to Idaho as a missionary and lying about himself at the same time he tends to preserve dominant value systems, such as morality over *mundanus* people. Apparently, Elder Thomas has some resentment for not having the opportunity of changing his reality before, and now as a Christian, he rejects it or hides from it by saying “no” to the external world. Dissimulation is used to react to the external stimuli that does not correspond to his values and morals. Elder Thomas’ revolt turns into the use of morality, but he knows that showing his true thoughts could turn people away from him and his religion at the first moment. In view of that, he dissimulates before Charlie and Liz.

1.3. The identity of Elder Thomas

In another conversation with Liz, Elder Thomas is confronted with the nurse. She realizes that the young missionary is trying to “save” Charlie from his state of mind and life – in other words, converting Charlie to Mormonism. Liz reveals to Elder Thomas that her deceased brother Alan was Charlie’s boyfriend, and he was impaired by Christians who distorted God’s teachings; Alan was also a Mormon and was rejected due to his sexuality. Upon taking a careful look at Elder Thomas, she asks:

LIZ What the fuck are you sorry about? (pause) Where is your companion?
ELDER THOMAS What?

²⁸ NIETZSCHE, F., *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 20.

²⁹ KATIANDA, S. T., "Why do You Submit to Regulations?", p. 118.

LIZ	You always have to be in pairs. I know that. It's sort of a big deal for you to be out here alone, isn't?
<i>Pause</i>	
ELDER THOMAS	Elder Johnson. He's – not feeling well.
LIZ	Not feeling well?
ELDER THOMAS	Why does it matter?
LIZ	It's a pretty big deal for you guys not to–
ELDER THOMAS	Well, to be honest, he's having some–problems and he's pretty useless right now, but I thought I could do some good. By myself. Help just <i>one</i> person.
LIZ	And that one person is Charlie.
ELDER THOMAS	Yes. ³⁰

Once again, Elder Thomas gets trembling when saying something about him, in this case, his profession. As a Mormon, he should always have a companion to visit people (as explained by Liz), but during all the play he is alone. When Liz asks the reason why for that, he gets confused (or pretends to be) and gives an inaccurate answer – as he always does. His statements are always incomplete and confusing, as though his thoughts keep getting interrupted, as if he were about to say something he wasn't supposed to. It clearly appears that he is hiding something from people, like a secret. To avoid any revelation from who he is and his life, the young missionary changes the subject (again). This time, Elder Thomas indirectly alleges that he must help Charlie by converting him to his religion.

Nietzsche states that “religion also gives some fraction of the ruled the instruction and opportunity they need to prepare for eventual rule and command”³¹. In this conversation between Elder Thomas and Liz, it is quite clear how the young missionary uses his religion to command and impose his presence in Charlie's life, even Liz confronting him. Whereas a profession is also a way of identifying someone in a society, “religious dissimulation figures prominently among the various presentations of false identities”³², as stated by Eliav-Feldon. For a Nietzschean Christian, like Elder Thomas, imposing their presence with the excuse of ‘saving’ someone is the perfect manner of masking their real intentions. Regular people would hardly suspect a religious person, like a priest or even a missionary.

Elder Thomas should have a companion – Elder Johnson – who we do not know if he even exists or the young missionary lied about this supposed religious partner, considering all the previous lies and uncertain answers given by Elder Thomas throughout the play. The young missionary is not reliable, then the reader cannot rely on anything he says or acts. Thus, Elder Thomas can be construed as a Nietzschean Christian looking for allegedly propagating his Church teachings but having unreliable and unclear motivations. He imposes his presence, believing that his religious life has somehow prepared him to lead, command, and take charge in situations that call for it—even when it isn't necessary, as in this case.

³⁰ HUNTER, S. D., *The Whale*, p. 45.

³¹ NIETZSCHE, F., *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 55.

³² ELIAV-FELDON, M., *Introduction*, p. 6.

2. Masked intentions

2.1. An alleged conversion

Based on the above, I have demonstrated how Elder Thomas depicts a Nietzschean Christian by highlighting the moments in which he is confronted by Charlie and Liz. To continue my analysis, I quote Pope Francis defining how a Christian should be:

“Be open”, Jesus says to every believer and to his Church: be open because the Gospel message needs you to witness it and proclaim it! And this makes us also think about the attitude of Christians: Christians must be open to the Word of God and service to others. Christians who are closed up always end up badly because they are not Christians. They are ideologists of closure. A Christian must be open to the proclamation of the Word, and to welcoming brothers and sisters.³³

As defined by Pope Francis, a Christian should ignore differences and welcome every single person who wants to be embraced by Jesus. Otherwise, such person would be a mere ideologist. For such, I highlight the following conversation between Liz and Elder Thomas (after Charlie’s heart attack recovery):

LIZ	Look—it was good of you to stay with him. But if you’re waiting around to convert him, or—
ELDER THOMAS	We don’t “convert people”. Our message is a message of hope for people—
LIZ	—people of all faiths, I know, you’re sweet. But he’s not interested in what you have to say. It’s the last thing he wants to hear. (<i>lights up a cigarette</i>) Listen, you can go if you want. I know Charlie appreciates what you did.
ELDER THOMAS	He said he wanted to hear about the church.
LIZ	Charlie said he wanted to hear about the church?
ELDER THOMAS	Yes.
LIZ	Pause.
ELDER THOMAS	Pause.
LIZ	No, he doesn’t.
ELDER THOMAS	Why not?
LIZ	I just know.
ELDER THOMAS	How?
LIZ	Because it’s caused him a lot of pain.
ELDER THOMAS	How?
LIZ	It killed his boyfriend. ³⁴

It is interesting to note that Elder Thomas now speaks assertive sentences, when Liz says he converts people to his religion. Elder Thomas seems to be defensive and a little bit offended by what Liz said. It is a totally different behavior from when he

³³ FRANCISCO, PP., General Audience of 13 December 2023 - Catechesis, p. 2.

³⁴ HUNTER, S. D., The Whale, p. 18-19.

introduced himself to Charlie or talked about his identity or origin, wherein Elder Thomas pretended not to listen to the questions and tried to change the subject. The young missionary knows that the word “conversion” carries a bad meaning due to how rude and violent a conversion from one religion to another can be. For example, remembering the conversion of Muslims into Christians in early modern Spain, Areeg Ibrahim explains that “[t]he status of the new Christians was problematic because the forced conversions created a sense of suspicion of their commitment to their new faith”³⁵.

Considering The United States of America has historically been a predominantly Protestant country, if Elder Thomas explicitly says he religiously converts people, they will cut him off or run away from him. And even if they were converted, people will not truly believe in Mormon Church due to such unwanted conversion. To avoid that, the young missionary dissimulates to make people believe he is not a converter and solely attends people in hard moments, when people are vulnerable and weak like Charlie is. Martin Luther states that “[a] Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all”³⁶. For Luther, a Christian is free and obligated to all. In a Nietzschean interpretation, we may assume that “being a ‘slave’ represents the voluntary choice by the Christian who becomes a ‘master’ and remains fully free—mirroring Jesus’ example in the (magisterial) Lutheran sense”³⁷.

Elder Thomas is totally the opposite of what Pope Francis defined as a Christian. A Christian does not look for converting people around, they only proclaim Jesus’ sayings to convey a message of peace and happiness for those who need it. For Luther, being a Christian means to be a voluntary Christian, searching for Jesus with no pressure or moral obligation, thus being a master of their own path to Jesus. A Christian does not segregate but embraces people and their differences that make them unique and the same before Jesus. In other words, Elder Thomas differs from all the definitions of a Christian elucidated by Pope Francis, Nietzsche and Luther. The young missionary is a Nietzschean Christian in terms of being a dissimulated individual who uses Christianity to achieve his interests. The young missionary knows the true reason why Charlie lives in that morbidly way: the obese man did not overcome the grief of losing Alan, his beloved partner. Now, Elder Thomas has an ace up his sleeve. Until now, it is possible to understand that the young missionary does not explicitly manipulate people around him but fiercely dissimulates until he gets what he wants.

2.2. Dissimulation as an escapism for prejudice

Elder Thomas talks to Charlie about the importance of Book of Mormon and Bible for connecting people to Jesus, but they disagree with each other. On the one hand, Charlie thinks the events cited in Bible are devastating. On the other hand, Elder Thomas says it depends on the point of view and defends Book of Mormon as an American way of making people to understand God, as cited below:

³⁵ IBRAHIM, A., *Literature of The Converts In Early Modern Spain*, p. 218.

³⁶ LUTHER, M., *On Christian Liberty*, p. 1.

³⁷ KATIANDA, S. T., “Why do You Submit to Regulations?”, p. 125.

ELDER THOMAS

No. No, it's – hopeful. It makes you feel like there's some meaning to being here, right now, in America. Do you see that? (*Pause*) You're so close in time and space to God's revelation, Charlie, that should make you feel proud. It should inspire you. It should keep you from doing this to yourself.

Pause.

CHARLIE

I'm not interested in converting, Elder Thomas. I don't find the Mormon Church hopeful. I don't find it amazing, and I don't find the proof convincing.

ELDER THOMAS

Wait so why did you want me to –? (*pause*) Um. I want to just make sure that –. I want to make sure you know that I'm just coming over here to talk about the church. That's it.

CHARLIE

Well, yeah. What?

ELDER THOMAS

I just... I don't know if– (*pause, then suddenly*) You're not attracted to me, right?

CHARLIE

Oh my God.

ELDER THOMAS

It's just, with the –. What you were watching, the first time I came in here –

CHARLIE

I am not attracted to you. Please, understand me when I say that, *I am not attracted to you. You are a fetus.* (*pause*) Is that what you really think of me? ³⁸

In the quotation above, Elder Thomas does not know how to revert the rejection of Charlie for the young missionary's religion. In the lack of arguments, Elder Thomas unveils his prejudice against Charlie's sexuality as a way of intimidating the morbidly obese man. As showed above, it is possible to infer that the young missionary believes Charlie is dying as a punishment from God, and the only way of repenting from that sin is being spiritually guided³⁹ by converting to Mormon Church and accepting Elder Thomas' idea of Jesus. As previously argued, Nietzsche "criticizes religion for fostering a sense of debt to God"⁴⁰. In this sense, for Elder Thomas, Charlie is suffering due to being a homosexual. Being a morbidly obese man is the debt to God that Charlie is paying for being who he is, and the young missionary is trying "to save" him.

In other words, Elder Thomas is contrary to the nature of a Christian defined by Pope Francis – which is to be welcoming. Charlie affirms he is not interested in conversion, and he knows how the Nietzschean Christians deal with people who do not meet their requirements, like Alan (his boyfriend) who was gay. When Elder Thomas is aware that Charlie is not interested in conversion, the young missionary immediately changes the topic of discussion to make his point of view the only acceptable truth, by insinuating Charlie was hitting on him.

For Nietzsche, truth is "a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage,

³⁸ HUNTER, S. D., *The Whale*, p. 40.

³⁹ HUNTER, S. D., *The Whale*, p. 44.

⁴⁰ KATIANDA, S. T., "Why do You Submit to Regulations?", p. 119.

seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding”⁴¹. Once Elder Thomas refutes Charlie’s truth as to make his own truth the only acceptable one, the young missionary clearly exposes himself – a conservative individual who does not accept other ways of viewing and accepting God.

On the contrary to what Nietzsche expounded, Elder Thomas does not want to bind to Charlie but rather impose his truth over Charlie’s. In other words, Elder Thomas depicts a Nietzschean Christian who only propagates empty ideologies – as explained by Pope Francis – instead of truly proclaim the Gospel message and welcome people around. Since Charlie is a homosexual and was allegedly “paying” for his sin (debt to God) with his health, Elder Thomas is religiously neurotic by converting Charlie to follow the “three dangerous dietary prescriptions: solitude, fasting, and sexual abstinence”⁴², in terms of religion for Nietzsche. Charlie was already solitary, but he should fast and be sexually abstinent. That is, it is an orthodox way of seeing religion and unsuccessful way of trying to save someone from pain.

Armstrong states that “the lack of legal recognition and support for same-sex relationships can lead to minority stress among LGBTQ+ individuals, impacting their mental health and well-being”⁴³. Neither Charlie nor Alan was supported by Nietzschean Christians, individually or together, as explained by Charlie:

CHARLIE

His name—my partner’s name, it was Alan. (*pause*) It sounds strange, but he was actually a student of mine. He was only a couple years younger than me, he had gone back to school after his mission. His parents were trying to get him to marry someone from the church. I think he barely knew her. But he was gonna go through with it—until he met me. It was ridiculous, he was the engaged son of a Mormon bishop, I had a wife and kid at home. But we just—couldn’t stand to be apart. (*pause*) You really want me to keep going?

ELDER THOMAS

Yes. Really, yes.

CHARLIE

I thought he’d be able to get over all this religious stuff, but—... It got worse and worse, to the point where every time we’d drive by that church he’d start to hyperventilate. His parents had abandoned him, refused to talk to him at all. But one night, about ten years ago, his father showed up here and he looked at Alan and he said, “I’ve written a sermon for you. You have to come tomorrow, because the sermon is for *you*.” I told Alan not to go, but... The next morning he came home after the service, and he was just—hollow. It took him over, and he just—stopped everything. He stopped bathing, he stopped eating, he stopped sleeping. And a few months later, he was gone.⁴⁴

⁴¹ NIETZSCHE, F., On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense, p. 117.

⁴² NIETZSCHE, F., Beyond Good and Evil, p. 45.

⁴³ ARMSTRONG, C., Pope Francis’ Legacy of Inclusivity, p. 27.

⁴⁴ HUNTER, S. D., The Whale, p. 41-42.

The same intolerant behavior is reproduced by Elder Thomas in an attempt of convincing Charlie to convert him into his religion. The young missionary indirectly expounds his prejudice against Charlie instead of welcoming him. For Elder Thomas, religion is an escapism for his prejudice against people. Elder Thomas has his human nature blinded by his conservative morals, and he is not even able to see how Charlie suffers and carries so much pain in his soul. Such pain was caused by Nietzschean Christians, like Elder Thomas.

3. The impact of *Fiducia supplicans*

Up to now, I have discussed on how Elder Thomas is a Nietzschean Christian. He uses religion to hide his real name, origin, objectives and prejudice against people. Contrary to what Pope Francis taught, Elder Thomas is not welcoming with differences nor peaceful with people who do not accept his beliefs as the only truth. Nietzschean Christians, like Elder Thomas, are not open to comprehend society and its harmful system over people who suffer from it. He can be compared to those who got offended by The Second Vatican Council.

In 2023, Pope Francis issued the *Fiducia supplicans*, which is a declaration that “encourages, among other articles of its teaching, the blessing of same-sex couples at spontaneous circumstances”⁴⁵. However, different catholic bodies, like ZCCB and NECC, were contrary to the Declaration. In 2024, Card. Víctor Manuel Fernández (Prefect of Dicastery For The Doctrine of The Faith) and Mons. Armando Matteo issued a press release to clarify the *Fiducia supplicans* due to the negative acceptance of the Declaration.

During the magistry of Pope Francis, the Pontiff issued documents such as *Evangelii Gaudium* (which prioritizes mercy over a merely prescriptive approach), *Amoris laetitia* (which proposes pastoral discernment of specific family situations, avoiding exclusively general or abstract responses), and *Fratelli tutti* (which reinforces a culture of encounter and universal fraternity). Due to such pastoral nature, Pope Francis always wanted to walk side by side with people, by making Church a democratic place for every single individual who desires to connect to God, with no judgement. *Fiducia supplicans* should be construed in view of Pope Francis’ ideals and teachings, like the documents mentioned above.

No canonic teaching is being changed, nor any liturgical statement is being questioned by the *Fiducia supplicans*. Indeed, the Declaration brings novelty to the way blessings are given. The Declaration is an “invitation to distinguish between two different forms of blessings: ‘liturgical or ritualized’ and ‘spontaneous or pastoral’”⁴⁶. On the one hand, liturgical blessings demand a ritualized moment having a book and a more serious environment, like the classical marriages in churches. On the other hand, pastoral blessings last “a few seconds, without an approved ritual and without a book of blessings”⁴⁷, something around ten or fifteen seconds, with no formality. This type

⁴⁵ EMEFU, CSSP, C. C., The Reception of *Fiducia Supplicans* as Indicative of the Paths of Synodality, p. 110.

⁴⁶ Press release concerning the reception of *Fiducia supplicans*, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Press release concerning the reception of *Fiducia supplicans*, p. 3.

of blessing is defended by Pope Francis for those aimed at the Declaration, *i.e.*, irregular and same-sex couples. The press release vividly states that this blessing “must not take place in a prominent place within a sacred building, or in front of an altar, as this also would create confusion”⁴⁸.

In view of the negative acceptance of *Fiducia supplicans* and the need of Vatican issuing a press release thereon, I consider it as a contemporary extension of the decrees of The Second Vatican Council. The Declaration represents a form of Church welcoming people who have been harmed by society. It is an attempt of renovating Church to the contemporary world, likewise The Second Vatican Council did to the modern world. Cardinal Víctor Fernández carefully highlights in the Presentation of said Declaration that this is “(...) the possibility of blessing couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church’s perennial teaching on marriage”⁴⁹. That is, the traditional marriage in catholic churches and liturgical rituals will be kept by social accepted couples (*i.e.*, other-sex couples and non-extra-matrimonial couples), but all couples now can be blessed – which is a way of Church connecting to people in contemporaneity.

3.1. Elder Thomas and his real thinking

Elder Thomas and Charlie discuss for the last time the topic of salvation/conversion, but they get nervous about how the conversion is taking place when the young missionary tells the sermon about Jonah and the whale, namely:

CHARLIE
ELDER THOMAS
CHARLIE
ELDER THOMAS
(pause)

What was the sermon about?
Jonah.
Jonah?
Yeah. Jonah and the whale.

Don’t you see? That essay you had me read to you—the one you like so much, the one about *Moby Dick*... This isn’t just a coincidence, this is *God’s intervention in your life*. Charlie, I’ve been on this mission for months now, after the last few weeks—I wasn’t even sure if I believed in it anymore. But when I read that e-mail—it was like I was helping you talk with God. It re-affirmed my faith.

(pause)

Jonah. It’s a story of redemption, you know? Jonah refuses the call of God, tries to escape from God’s will—and just when you think he’s going to die, God sends a whale to swallow him for three days until Jonah prays for salvation, and God commands the whale to spit him out onto shore.

Pause.
CHARLIE
ELDER THOMAS

You’re lying to me.
No, I’m not.

⁴⁸ Press release concerning the reception of *Fiducia supplicans*, p. 3.

⁴⁹ *Fiducia supplicans*, Introduction.

CHARLIE
ELDER THOMAS
CHARLIE laughs a little bit, the laughter causing pain in his chest.
CHARLIE
ELDER THOMAS
Pause.
CHARLIE
ELDER THOMAS

You're making this up.
I swear, Charlie, I'm not. This isn't a coincidence, this is God. God is speaking to you, to both of us.
Is this what it fucking comes down to? I always thought, whatever was in that sermon must be so terrifying, so moving... A fucking whale? A guy being swallowed by a fucking whale, this is what killed him?!
It's about someone refusing the call of God, don't you understand? Your boyfriend, he turned his back on the church. He chose his lifestyle with you over God. And when his dad made him come back to church, made him *really listen* this story, to God's word—he knew. He knew God wasn't in his life anymore. And without God, he couldn't do anything, he couldn't go on living. But it's not too late for you. You can still know God. You can still ask God to make the whale spit you out.
You think Alan died – because he chose to be with me? You think God turned his back on him because he and I were in love?
Yes.⁵⁰

For the first time, Elder Thomas shows what he really thinks about Charlie's life and justifies his insistence on talking to the morbidly obese man about his church and beliefs: Elder Thomas always wanted to convert Charlie to his church, but the reason is now clearly expressed – intolerance. Association de parents catholiques d'enfants homosexuels concludes that the conservative ideology expounded by fr. Emmanuel Perrier, o.p., (and depicted by Elder Thomas) incentives "discrimination against gay Christians, and there is a life-or-death risk for those involved" and "division within families: parents who reject their children, brothers and sisters who refuse to acknowledge their gay brother or sister's partner during family gatherings"⁵¹.

In other words, "the Declaration was meant to help priests and ecclesiastical ministers in the discernment of the pastoral response they could give when certain members of the community in irregular situations request for blessings"⁵². Contrarily to what a Christian should be, Elder Thomas spreads intolerance over Charlie even knowing how he feels on Alan's death and religion. Instead of welcoming Charlie and understanding his pain, the young missionary behaves like a conservative individual. This is totally different from the idea of rejecting the world's things, since intolerance and prejudice are world's things, and people (whoever they are) belong to God's herd.

For understanding the behavior of Elder Thomas as a Nietzschean Christian, Snyder exemplifies it by mentioning a lost portrait attributed to Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio,

⁵⁰ HUNTER, S. D., *The Whale*, p. 69-70.

⁵¹ BÉVIERRE, C., BODIN, O.; THONNAT, E. La réponse de parents catholiques d'enfants homosexuels aux critiques de «Fiducia supplicans», n.p., translated by me.

⁵² EMEFU, C.S.S.P., C. C., *The Reception of Fiducia Supplicans as Indicative of the Paths of Synodality*, p. 110.

in which there is a mask on it. A possible exegesis for such mask is “each of us has a mask (or *persona*) that can be worn whenever needed, in order to hide or disguise some truth about us”⁵³. Taking that into account, Elder Thomas masks his real thoughts behind religion; a missionary is his persona in society that masks his intolerance and prejudice against people who live far from what Elder Thomas considers to be morally and religiously correct based on his own understanding of God’s teachings.

Contrarily to what Pope Francis sets out in *Fiducia supplicans*, Elder Thomas does not seem to connect to the contemporary world and its social issues. He expresses how righteous he feels upon Charlie and wants to convert the morbidly obese man to his idea of rightness before God. In said Declaration, Pope Francis asserts that “the grace of God works in the lives of those who do not claim to be righteous, but who acknowledge themselves humbly as sinners, like everyone else”⁵⁴. That is, Charlie is as a sinner as Elder Thomas, not because of his sexuality, rather the core of human being is being a sinner. In addition, when a Nietzschean Christian claims to be righteous over someone because of their religion or ideals, this makes that one only a mere ideologist, as explained by Pope Francis.

Fiducia supplicans is “the possibility of the people of God, Christ’s faithful, to make their voices heard is no longer to be seen as a privilege, but as a duty”⁵⁵. Rejecting Charlie leads Elder Thomas to reject Pope Francis’ teachings: every person should be heard and welcomed regardless of who they are. The young missionary dissimulates his behavior and misinterprets the biblical story of Jonah and the whale to ground his conservative point of view over Charlie’s life. He believes homosexuality is a turning away from God, and that Alan paid for it with his own life. According to Elder Thomas, Charlie follows Alan’s path but can be saved once he accepts conversion. This demonstrates a severe manipulation of religion to mask the young missionary’s real intentions and ideology.

3.2. The *ultimatum*

Upon Elder Thomas clearly saying he believes Charlie’s boyfriend, Alan, died because Charlie and him were in love and decided to be together, the young missionary refuses to leave Charlie’s apartment, even the morbidly obese man asking gently. To make Elder Thomas leave the apartment, Charlie starts to remember how sweet and truthful the relationship between Charlie and Alan was, thus an *ultimatum* happens:

CHARLIE	You know, I wasn’t always this big.
Pause.	
ELDER THOMAS	Yeah, I know—
CHARLIE	I mean, I was never the best looking guy in the room, but—Alan still loved me. He still thought I was beautiful. And sexy.
ELDER THOMAS	Okay—

⁵³ SNYDER, J. R., Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe, p. 6.

⁵⁴ *Fiducia supplicans*, 32.

⁵⁵ EMEFU, C. S., The Reception of *Fiducia Supplicans* as Indicative of the Paths of Synodality, p. 128.

CHARLIE Halfway through the semester, he started meeting me during my office hours—we were both crazy about one another, but we waited until the course was done before we...

ELDER THOMAS This isn't important—

CHARLIE It was just after classes had ended for the year, it was a perfect temperature, and we went for a walk in the arboretum. And we kissed.

ELDER THOMAS Charlie, stop.

CHARLIE Listen to me. We used to spend entire nights lying next to one another, naked—

ELDER THOMAS Stop.

CHARLIE We would make love—

ELDER THOMAS I don't want to hear about—

CHARLIE WE WOULD MAKE LOVE. And I hope that there isn't any God, because I hate thinking that there's an afterlife, that Alan can see what I've done to myself, that he can see my swollen feet, the sores on my skin, the patches of mold in between the flaps —

ELDER THOMAS Okay, stop —

CHARLIE — the infected ulcers on my ass, the underwear that Liz made for me out of old bed sheets covered in shit and piss, the sack of fat on my back that I can't reach anymore that turned brown last year —

ELDER THOMAS STOP!

CHARLIE This is disgusting?

ELDER THOMAS YES!

CHARLIE I'm disgusting?

ELDER THOMAS YES, YOU'RE DISGUSTING! YOU'RE —...

*Long silence. CHARLIE stares at ELDER THOMAS.*⁵⁶

This conversation shows who Elder Thomas really is: an intolerant individual. He demonstrates how uncomfortable he is while Charlie remembers lovely moments with Alan. Being confronted with truth and acceptance appearing in the words spoken by Charlie makes the young missionary extremely mad and furious, always asking for Charlie to stop talking. This represents that the words spoken by Charlie go against his religion and ideals. But the obese man keeps talking, since he is pressuring Elder Thomas so that the young missionary takes his mask off and reveals himself before Charlie. When yelling “YES, YOU'RE DISGUSTING! YOU'RE”⁵⁷, Elder Thomas finally unveils his prejudice against Charlie and speaks what he always thought about him since the first time Elder Thomas saw him, but does not keep talking, since he is aware that he revealed himself before Charlie for a moment and has to put his mask back on.

In the beginning of the play, language was used to demonstrate how Elder Thomas was uncertain and apprehensive about the words he should use when he was introducing himself to Charlie and Liz, now language is used to show the intensity of Elder Thomas'

⁵⁶ HUNTER, S. D., *The Whale*, p. 70-71.

⁵⁷ HUNTER, S. D., *The Whale*, p. 71.

anger. The young missionary uses an imperative sentence to interrupt Charlie. He imposes himself by commenting on Charlie's current situation: physical condition and sexuality. It is a short sentence, but it bears a strong meaning, with prejudice and non-acceptance. Again, such behavior allows us to identify Elder Thomas as Nietzschean Christian, since he used his religion as a tool to dissimulate before Charlie and Liz to preserve his prejudice against homosexuals, conservative ideals and personal interests.

After this revelation of full anger, Elder Thomas finally leaves the apartment and never comes back to see Charlie again. In *Fiducia supplicans*, Pope Francis states that "God never turns away anyone who approaches him! Ultimately, a blessing offers people a means to increase their trust in God"⁵⁸, thus resulting in binding to people in general. Charlie says how much he loved Alan, but Elder Thomas does not want to listen to, because he does not accept a different type of love – but love is the language of God. Once Elder Thomas does not speak the language of God, he turns away Charlie like Nietzschean Christians do. Turning away a brother or a sister means turning away God.

As Emefu, CSSp, states, "the differences in opinion (informed, substantial etc.) should never constitute a point of division, but rather lead to a better realization of the universality of the church as the Sacrament of God in the world" and "accepting or rejecting *FS* [*Fiducia supplicans*] does not become the central focal point, but rather a ground to understand that it is truly the same Spirit who imparts varied gifts differently"⁵⁹. Elder Thomas should be able to welcome Charlie regardless of his sexuality. If Elder Thomas had welcomed Charlie, the obese man would have felt embraced and would have felt that he belonged to Church for the first time, considering the past of Alan with religion.

It is important to note that "[a]cceptance or rejection of same-gender unions in a society is influenced by factors like political determination, prevailing public sentiment, and the existing legal structure"⁶⁰. In view of such worldwide reality, Pope Francis issued the Declaration as a way of emphasizing that Church is a place for (re)uniting and welcoming people rather than converting them or propagating hatred toward those who are different. In other words, *Fiducia supplicans* "brought a sense of belonging, and many Catholics around the world felt as being consulted 'for the first time' on how they expect the church to be governed"⁶¹.

As pointed out by the press release issued by Vatican, Pope Francis:

asked us to grow in a broader understanding of pastoral blessings, he proposed that we think of a way of blessing that does not require the placing of so many conditions to carry out this simple gesture of pastoral closeness, which is a means of promoting openness to God in the midst of the most diverse circumstances.⁶²

In view of the above, same-sex couples are subjected to pastoral blessings like anyone else as an example of making society and Church to acknowledge and respect

⁵⁸ *Fiducia supplicans*, 33.

⁵⁹ EMEFU, CSSP, C. C., The Reception of *Fiducia Supplicans* as Indicative of the Paths of Synodality, p. 123.

⁶⁰ ARMSTRONG, C., Pope Francis' Legacy of Inclusivity, p. 24.

⁶¹ EMEFU, CSSP, C. C., The Reception of *Fiducia Supplicans* as Indicative of the Paths of Synodality, p. 123.

⁶² Press release concerning the reception of *Fiducia supplicans*, p. 3.

them, but Elder Thomas refuses to welcome Charlie's individuality. The young missionary is chained to his beliefs and ideals which make the morbidly obese man distrust him. Elder Thomas finally speaks his mind when he says Charlie is disgusting and simply abandons him, because he is not prepared to deal with people like Charlie – similar to those priests and cardinals who threatened to leave Church after the decrees of The Second Vatican Council.

Conclusion

In view of the above, this paper aims at identifying how a Nietzschean Christian behaves when confronted with truth and acceptance. For such, I have analyzed the character Elder Thomas and his relationship with Charlie and Liz during the play *The Whale*.

This study concludes that Nietzschean Christians introduce themselves as pacific individuals but get extremely frustrated when confronted with truth and acceptance, thus showing their intolerance. This occurs because they are not genuinely capable of accepting the differences between people, only their own idea of being righteous before God. This specific type of Christian depicted by Elder Thomas is a mere ideologist who uses religion to achieve their objectives, namely: converting people and rejecting their individualities. Nietzschean Christians, such as Elder Thomas, create an imagery of Christians which goes against what Pope Francis taught during his magistery, mainly in the *Fiducia supplicans*.

Similar to those Christians who threatened to leave Church due to decrees of The Second Vatican Council, Nietzschean Christians turn away same-sex couples because of their prejudice against them. In *Fiducia supplicans*, Pope Francis clearly conveyed a welcoming message to contemporary world – Jesus never segregated people during his time, and Pope Francis did not wish to segregate them either. This exhibits the same nature of the decrees of The Second Vatican Council – acceptance and a possibility of Church approximating to people. By allowing irregular and same-sex couples to receive pastoral blessings, Pope Francis showed how a Christian should be welcoming. As depicted by *The Whale*, Nietzschean Christians who are blind by their idealism and conservatism run away from truth, instead of connecting with their brothers and sisters.

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