

In this paper, my argument is that the majority of ideas put forth in the decree of *Perfectae Caritatis*, were said by Aboon Mar Ivanios in his book “A Guide to the Malankara Sanyasa”.

Perfectae Caritatis, the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, is the document issued by the Second Vatican Council which deals specifically with institutes of consecrated life in the Catholic Church. This is one of the shorter documents of the Council. This decree was approved by a vote of 2,321 to 4 of the assembled bishops, and promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 28 October 1965. As is customary for Church documents, the title is taken from the first words (incipit) of the decree: "Of Perfect Charity" in Latin. The Second Vatican Council had already given an exposition of the nature of religious life in chapter 6 of the Constitution “*Lumen Gentium*”. This chapter described the essential form of religious life as a life "consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels".

The Decree “*Perfectae Caritatis*” was published in order to, "treat of the life and discipline of those institutes whose members make profession of chastity, poverty and obedience and to provide for their needs in our time".¹ Containing 25 numbered paragraphs, the Decree established five general principles to guide the renewal of these institutes. Because of the broad variety of religious communities with their different histories, characteristics, customs, and missions, the Vatican Council did not give specific indications, and left to each individual community the authority to determine what needed to be changed in accord with the spirit of their founders, the needs of modern life, and the situations where they lived and worked.

The Council not only urged an “adaption and renewal of religious life,” it also offered practical principles and criteria appropriate for this renewal. There are three main principles or renewal criteria outlined by the document: “The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time” (PC 2). These three criteria are indispensable to every authentic renewal of

¹ *Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 1

religious life and we can say that, to greater or lesser degrees of success, they have marked the renewal efforts of the orders and congregations since the time of Council. However, it must also be said that we are still looking for a renewal that is more authentic, radical, and evangelical. Nevertheless, the Second Vatican Council opened a new era for the whole Church and especially for religious life. It brought a new awareness to the Church of its own self understanding:

- The universal call to holiness and discipleship for every Christian has led religious life itself to be understood not as *the only way* of perfection but as one vocation in the Church side-by-side with others that also offer a path to holiness. At the same time it challenges religious to truly embrace a radical way of following Jesus “more closely” as a constitutive element of the consecrated life.
- *Gaudium et Spes* highlighted the change in the way religious are to relate both to the world and to the laity. It challenges religious to live a state of life that is separate from the world while at the same as those sent to the world.
- The Council emphasized that sacrificial offering and charity are the supreme criteria for all regular observance and compliance in religious life.
- Religious life fulfills the mandate of Vatican II to return to the sources of its life and is raised to a new way of being present in this world when it more clearly discovers its origins and original charisms and creatively puts them into practice – that is, as it responds to the signs of the times with a “creative fidelity,” as Pope John Paul II puts it.
- During these past 50 years religious life has been intimately involved in the world as it shares its “joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor” (GS 1). Many have given up religious privileges and honors and have gone “into the wilderness, to the periphery and to the border.”
- The numerical decline of religious in Europe and the United States presents us with new possibilities of encountering God in the small, poor, and weak in the world.
- Religious life has not remained untouched or indifferent to the rediscovery of the importance of the local Church to understand the essence of the universal Church. It is slowly realizing that a better understanding, mutual respect and esteem between different

members of the Church - especially between bishops and religious – is beneficial for everyone.

The very first article of the decree and first chapter of the first book of “A Guide to Malankara Sanyasa ’has a lot of similarities. *Perfectae Caritatis* speaks perfect charity as a sign of the heavenly kingdom, which can be attained through the following of the evangelical counsels. While Mar Ivanios speaks that: “The ultimate end of man is God, the embodiment of love. This final end is attained when one becomes perfect in his love for God and his fellow beings for God’s sake. God calls man to attain that perfection. God gives the grace to attain this holy final end to those who listen to his call and approach him prepared for a life of complete dedication.”

The Servant of God says that “The Lord Jesus, the Messiah, has given the state of religious life (*sanyasashramapath*), so that the human being may attain the ultimate and acquiring perfect love of God and perfection in virtues”. On the other hand *Perfectae Caritatis* states that: “Despite such a great variety of gifts, all those called by God to the practice of the evangelical counsels and who, faithfully responding to the call, undertake to observe the same, bind themselves to the Lord in a special way, following Christ, who chaste and poor (cf. Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58) redeemed and sanctified men through obedience even to the death of the Cross (cf. Phil. 2:8)”. In another context decree holds the opinion that, “Let those who make profession of the evangelical counsels seek and love above all else God who has first loved us (cf. 1 John 4:10) and let them strive to foster in all circumstances a life hidden with Christ in God (cf. Col. 3:3). This love of God both excites and energizes that love of one's neighbor which contributes to the salvation of the world and the building up of the Church. This love, in addition, quickens and directs the actual practice of the evangelical counsels”.

Both *Perfectae Caritatis* and “A Guide to the Malankara Sanyasa” admits the fact that the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels should be the highest rule of the religious community. *Perfectae Caritatis* states as follows, “Since the ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels; let this be held by all

institutes as the highest rule. Mar Ivanios in a similar way shares the same idea, “To glorify God, acquiring perfection of virtue by imitating Jesus, the Messiah and by observing the afore- said three vows, is the Christian Sanyasa. Religious community is necessary to lead a perfect virtuous life. The example of our Lord teaches us that community life is a better means of religious life than solitary life for achieving perfection... In a religious community filled with the Holy Spirit, there will be perfect observance of the above mentioned vows and thereby the name of God will be immensely glorified”.

The fifth article of Perfectae Caritatis says that by professing the evangelical counsels members of an institute responds to a divine call, so that by being not only dead to sin but also renouncing the world that they may live for God alone. Mar Ivanios also had a similar vision which can be found in the 2nd article of first chapter of first book. He states that, “Besides renouncing the things afore mentioned and renouncing even the right to possess them and promise to make it one’s perpetual experience by making one’s life subject to such rule, one achieves the state of religious life (sanyasapath). In religious life (sanyasa), love of God is the sole aim”.

While the 5th article of the decree says that the service of God ought to inspire and foster exercise of the virtues of humility, obedience, fortitude and charity, Mar Ivanios put forth the virtues of each evangelical counsels in relation to the vows one takes the time of profession. The 4th part of the first book has the detailed reference of the three vows and the virtues related to each counsels. Thus one not only should follow the counsels for its sake, but should follow the virtues connected with each evangelical counsel. Both the decree and the book admit the fact that the imitation or following of Christ will have its fullness or perfection in the following of vows as well as the virtues related to it.

The very quotation of Jesus about the one thing necessary can be seen to be given proper importance in the religious life pictured in the decree as well as in the book “A Guide to the Malankara Sanyasa”. The one thing which is necessary (Luke 10:42), that is

listening to the words of Jesus, is of great importance in the life of a religious. The decree states that, "Faithful to their profession then, and leaving all things for the sake of Christ (cf. Mark 10: 28), religious are to follow Him (cf. Matt. 19:21) as the one thing necessary (cf. Luke 10:42) listening to His words (cf. Luke 10:39) and solicitous for the things that are His (cf. 1 Cor.7:32)".

The 12th, 13th and the 14th articles of the decree particularly identify and defines the importance and relevance of each evangelical counsels. In the 12th article, regarding the vow of chastity says that, "The chastity "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:12) which religious profess should be counted an outstanding gift of grace. It frees the heart of man in a unique fashion (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-35) so that it may be more inflamed with love for God and for all men. Thus it not only symbolizes in a singular way the heavenly goods but also the most suitable means by which religious dedicate themselves with undivided heart to the service of God and the works of the apostolate".

In the 13th article the vow of poverty is observed as a proper way of following of Jesus Christ. "Religious should diligently practice and if need be express also in new forms that voluntary poverty which is recognized and highly esteemed especially today as an expression of the following of Christ. By it they share in the poverty of Christ who for our sakes became poor, even though He was rich, so that by His poverty we might become rich (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9; Matt. 8:20)". It continues to say that, "Religious should diligently practice and if need be express also in new forms that voluntary poverty which is recognized and highly esteemed especially today as an expression of the following of Christ. By it they share in the poverty of Christ who for our sakes became poor, even though He was rich, so that by His poverty we might become rich (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9; Matt. 8:20)".

The 14th article of the decree deals in details regarding the vow of obedience. It states that, "After the example of Jesus Christ who came to do the will of the Father (cf. John 4:34; 5:30; Heb. 10:7; Ps. 39:9) and "assuming the nature of a slave" (Phil. 2:7) learned obedience in the school of suffering (cf. Heb. 5:8), religious under the motion of the Holy Spirit, subject themselves in faith to their superiors who hold the place of God".

On the other hand Mar Ivanios in a detailed way discusses the three vows in the fourth part of the first book. Regarding Holy poverty he says that, “A member of Bethany Ashram should observe the vow of poverty, sacrificing himself as a burnt-offering to God through Jesus, the Messiah”. He continues to say that, “The wealth of this world is a burden. It is also to acquire, possess and to spend it. The soul that is free from the embarrassments of the wealth of this world has happiness. Hence the Sanyasi should not possess any wealth as his own”.

Regarding the vow of Chastity, Mar Ivanios says that, “The sanyasi should sanctify his body by trampling down the worldly fascinations and seeing heavenly peace in Jesus; sanctify the affections. He should also transfer the powers of the body and mind dedicating and spending them for the glory of God”.

Regarding the vow of obedience Mar Ivanios says that, “The sanyasi is dead to self. After the death, the burial takes place, the life of obedience is the burial of the sanyasi. He lives as one buried in the tomb of obedience. The tomb in which the sanyasi is buried is the Ashram”.

The period that followed the promulgation *Perfectae Caritatis* was marked by a huge amount of experimentation in religious life. Many institutes replaced their traditional habits with more modern attire, experimented with different forms of prayer and community life, and adapted obedience to a superior to a form of consultation and discussion. A great number of religious left religious life entirely, and in subsequent decades there was a large drop the number of religious vocations in the Western World. It is not clear how much of this change was due to the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

In short as coming to the concluding part of this paper I think that it is clear to have the vision that the ideas proposed in the decree of *Perfectae Caritatis* can be seen to be linked with the thoughts of Aboon Mar Ivanios, who lived years before the promulgation of the decree. As the sons of this great father we all should be proud of him in our ecclesiastical life. As we are celebrating the 60th death anniversary of the father of reunion movement let us have these thoughts in our minds.