

# WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

## DIVISION OF ECUMENICAL ACTION

Chairman :  
Dr. Kathleen Bliss  
Director :  
Fr. Paul Verghese  
Associate General Secretary

THE ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE  
DEPARTMENT ON THE LAITY  
DEPARTMENT ON COOPERATION OF MEN AND  
WOMEN IN CHURCH, FAMILY AND SOCIETY  
YOUTH DEPARTMENT

150, Route de Ferney  
1211 Geneva 20  
Switzerland  
Cable : Oikoumene  
Tel. 33 34 00



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ARTHUR M. BYERS, JR.

Dear friends

Geneva is a place of meeting and parting. My time to leave this beautiful and pleasant city is fast approaching. The paschal season is a good one also to convey my greetings and gratitude to you my friends, and to keep you in touch with my plans for the future.

I will leave my present post in Geneva at the end of August 1967, after having served a few months beyond my five-year term. The World Council of Churches was gracious enough to invite me to serve for another period of five years, but I feel that I should now apply myself to a period of serving my own Church.

The Synod of my Church has appointed me to be Principal of our Church's only institution for the training of the clergy, and my address from October 1st, 1967 will be

Principal  
Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary  
Kottayam, Kerala  
India

I will be in residence at the Seminary itself where all the students and faculty usually reside.

I am glad to go back to a job where I will have more opportunities for teaching, where I can work in a sustained manner with the same group, and where I will not have to face the theological and cultural tensions under which I have been living the last five years.

It is some 20 years ago that I left India on a pilgrimage that has given me the opportunity to live, study and work in four continents. I keep hoping that my new assignment will last for the rest of my active life. Ever since I began a vocational career at the age of 15, some thirty years ago, I have never had the privilege of continuing in the same place

or profession for more than three to five years. So I will be glad to settle down, though for me life will always remain a pilgrimage where the tent-pins can never be driven too deeply into the ground.

In five years as a professional 'ecumeniac', one cannot fail to learn a few things. The vision of the unity of mankind in justice and destiny remains the beckoning horizon. The unity of the Church, when taken out of that context, loses significance and fails to inspire.

The coming of the Roman Catholic Church into the ecumenical mainstream is the great event of Church history in these latter decades of our century. But that mainstream still needs to find two banks between which it can flow without being dissipated. Will the World Council of Churches rise to the occasion to provide that structured orientation? Or will it continue as an Orthodox-Protestant front without any real inner cohesion or deep rootage in the life of so many churches? That is the question of our decade for the ecumenical movement.

The second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church is in some ways analogous to the French Revolution. It was the heavy pressure of previous authoritarianism that makes the present release of freedom so ominous and fraught with peril. Peril there certainly is. Schism may be in the offing. Let us pray it may not break out. Reaction is for the moment reluctant to show its strength in public. But it is there, massive, stubborn, threatened. The price of freedom has to be paid, partly at least in the currency of chaos. But chaos can often be the matrix for an order of creativity.

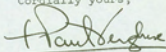
What about humanity itself? Who can awaken its moribund conscience? Appeals to compassion for the suffering and for charity beyond the dimension of petty alms can only saturate the heart of the affluent and render it callous. Will justice on an international plane come without violence and hatred? That would be a miracle if it did. But if the size of the temporary sacrifice demanded daunts us now, the price in violence to be paid later may be greater than we dare imagine.

To return to share the poverty of my people is an inspiring prospect for me. I have no cure in mind for the ills of my country or continent. But I want to be part of its suffering and yearning. I do not, however, want to isolate myself from the world of which I have tried to teach myself to be a citizen. Your sustained friendship and continuing communication with you are necessary to keep the horizon aglow. I hope you will keep writing and occasionally pray for me.

Many thanks for your greetings at the Christmas and Easter seasons. I was travelling in Asia, Africa and Europe all of December, January and February. My warmest greetings to you at this season of new life and the joy of the risen Christ.

God bless you.

Cordially yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Paul Verghese". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a long horizontal stroke at the end. A thin horizontal line is drawn underneath the signature.

Father Paul Verghese