

PREFACE

In his *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha notes: “The sign of history does not consist in an essence of the event itself, nor exclusively in the *immediate consciousness* of its agents and actors, but in its form as a *spectacle*, spectacle that signifies *because of* the distanciation and displacement between the event and those who are its spectators.” [(London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 243.] While this book is a collection of essays, most of which, in an earlier form, have been published elsewhere, there is, nevertheless, a thread running through them all, namely, my conviction that in the present situation one needs to look back in order to move forward. This was a hermeneutical principle that I developed and used in the course of my doctoral work which has been published as “... *baptisma unum in sancta ecclesia...*”: *A Theological Appraisal of the Baptismal Controversy in the Work and Writings of Cyprian of Carthage* [(Ammbesbek bei Hamburg: Verlag an der Lottbek (Peter Jensen), 1997 and Delhi: ISPCK, 1997)]. During the succeeding years, I have tried to apply this principle to both my teaching vocation at the United Theological College, Bangalore, India, and to my preaching assignments and pastoral responsibilities in various churches in Bangalore and elsewhere.

The essays look at several aspects of the life and witness, as well as the realities and the challenges facing the early church, interposed with the actuality of life facing those of us who live, work and worship in the Asian, in this case, Indian, context. One of the major challenges facing those who live in “minority” situations is the question relating to mission and conversion. The early church had to face this issue with an immediacy and urgency that is often not apparent to those who live in situations where Christian identity is either just a matter of debate or of total indifference. However, for those of us faced with the reality of accounting for who we are and why we are who we are, this subject is accompanied by urgent questions regarding mission, pluralism, rights and responsi-

bilities, in a framework of both deliberate misunderstanding and sincere efforts at dialogue.

The opportunity of being a member at the Center of Theological Inquiry at Princeton, NJ, provided the space, time, opportunities for interaction with fellow members, as well as access to the wonderful facilities and libraries of the Princeton Theological Seminary (Speer Library) and the Princeton University (Firestone Library), which made the process of working on and putting together some of these writings enjoyable and exhilarating. I heartily thank Wallace M. Alston, Jr., the then Director of the Center of Theological Inquiry, for his encouragement and enthusiasm, and the staff of the Center, especially the then Administrator, Kathi Morley, for helping in many different ways. Being a faculty member of the United Theological College, Bangalore, starting as a Junior Lecturer and going through the stages to becoming a 'full' Professor has been an interesting, at times, intriguing, and always enriching experience. I want to thank my colleagues and students who provided the seedbed on which many of the ideas in the essays were sown and tested.

At present, located as I am in the United States, I see the need even more for these essays to resonate with a wider audience, and I want to thank the community at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, especially President Philip Krey and Dean Paul Rajashekar, for welcoming me and for their willingness to open themselves to another world, another place, but recognizing that the 'otherness' is part of our shared quest to understand the meaning of faithfulness to the rich and varied Christian legacy that belongs to our common inheritance.

J. Jayakiran Sebastian