



*Monument in Tranquebar, Tamil Nadu, South India*

November 7

Commemoration: Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, 1719, missionary

Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg was born in Saxony in 1682. He studied at the University of Halle, then the center for the Pietistic movement in the Lutheran Church. He responded to an appeal from the King of Denmark for missionaries, and in September 1706 he and Heinrich Pluetshau arrived in Tranquebar on the southeast coast of India, the first Protestant missionaries in that country. They began preaching, and baptized their first converts about ten months later. Their work was opposed both by Hindus and by the local Danish authorities, and in 1707-8 Ziegenbalg spent four months in prison on a charge that by converting the natives he was encouraging rebellion. The Copenhagen Missionary Society wanted to encourage an indigenous Christian Church, not one which simply imitated European cultural patterns, and accordingly instructed its missionaries simply to preach the Gospel, and not concern themselves with other matters.

Ziegenbalg replied that a concern for the physical welfare of others is implicit in the gospel.

He set up a printing press, and published studies of the Tamil language and of Indian religion and culture. His translation of the New Testament into Tamil in 1715, and the church building that he and his associates constructed in 1718, are still in use today. His close cooperation with the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (an Anglican group) was an early exercise of harmony between Christian communities in the mission field. He married in 1716, and about that time a new and friendly governor arrived, and he was able to establish a seminary for the training of native clergy. When he died on 23 February 1719, he left a Tamil translation of the New Testament and of Genesis through Ruth, many brief writings in Tamil, two church buildings, the seminary, and 250 baptized Christians. Today the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church carries on his work.