

FACES OF LUTHERAN MISSIONS IN INDIA



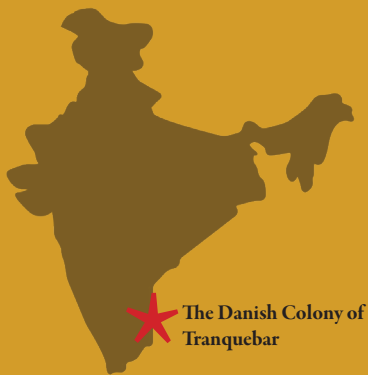
Barthol. Ziegenbalg

Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg

Born: July 10, 1682 (?)
Pulsnitz, Germany

Died: February 23, 1719
Tranquebar, India

Pioneer Lutheran Missionary, Linguist and Educator who established the first Protestant mission for the people of south India.



The Danish Colony of Tranquebar

CHRIST SHOWED GRACE TO HIS FAITHFUL SERVANT BARTHOLOMÄUS ZIEGENBALG IN THE FACE OF constant opposition and hardship. He not only struggled to master the unwritten Tamil language, but also faced threats from neighboring Hindus and Muslims. Additionally, unsympathetic leaders of the Danish East India Company and over-zealous pietists in Copenhagen and Halle opposed him because they condemned his involvement in “worldly matters” such as taking a wife, financing Christian publishing, and offering stipends to students.

Orphaned at age six, Ziegenbalg exhibited academic skills, but also fought disabling physical ailments. He wrote to church leaders at the University of Halle and eventually studied there until physical ailments forced him to withdraw from school after six months of instruction. At the same time Denmark’s Frederick IV desired to begin mission work in his colonies in the Americas, Africa and India. To his dismay, Frederick’s court chaplain could not find a suitable missionary candidate in Denmark, and was instructed to look for a candidate in Germany. A Lutheran church leader in Berlin forwarded the names of Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau. The two prayerfully accepted the call and travelled to Copenhagen to be examined, ordained and commissioned for mission work—supposedly in the Danish West Indies. However, they were placed on a ship heading for the Danish colony of Tranquebar in South India—a former Portugese territory. On the long voyage (November 1705–July 1706) they studied Portugese in order to better communicate the Gospel to Portugese-speaking inhabitants of the colony (many of whom were indentured slaves). During the journey the two missionaries voiced their disapproval of the unchristian behavior of the captain and crew, most notably with the crew’s corporal punishment of slaves.

Although they possessed a letter from Frederick IV authorizing them to conduct mission work among the inhabitants of the colony of Tranquebar, the colony’s leadership saw Ziegenbalg and Plütschau as unnessesary meddlers in their business enterprise. The missionaries were opposed at every turn in their effort to establish local Christian congregations and schools.

Ziegenbalg began his life-long study of regional culture and Hindu and Muslim religious belief among the Tamil-Speaking people. To best serve the area, Ziegenbalg and Plütschau divided their evangelistic labors; Plütschau learned the local dialect of Portugese whereas Ziegenbalg learned and created a written form for the unwritten Tamil language. In 1707 he translated Lutheran hymns and the Small Catechism into Tamil and preached his first sermon in Tamil on August 14 at the dedication of the “Jerusalem Church” outside the colony’s Danish fortress.

As a response to Ziegenbalg’s letters of appeal for help, two printing presses arrived from Europe (Britain in 1712 and Germany in 1713). The first arrived with English and Latin type, the second with handcrafted Tamil type cast in Halle according to Ziegenbalg’s written instructions. Gottlieb Alder, who directed the Tamil type castings in Halle arrived on the same ship. He had accepted a call to be a missionary at Tranquebar after his involvement with the Tamil type project at Halle. Ziegenbalg began plans to establish a local paper mill and to manufacture printing ink to supply needed material for the printing of catechisms and the Christian Scriptures. The first book to be printed on the press from Germany: Luther’s Small Catechism in Tamil.

Although raised among German pietists, Ziegenbalg consistently retained fixed Lutheran liturgical elements and hymnody, the Church Year and set Scripture readings—all presented in the local languages of Tamil and Portugese.

Remarkably Ziegenbalg found the time and energy to write detailed reports of his mission work to his supporters in Copenhagen and Halle. Unknown to him, these private letters were published in the original German as well as Danish and English. Initially these letters created great interest and financial support in Europe. However, as subsequent collections of Ziegenbalg’s letters were published, over-zealous pietists grew in their opposition to Ziegenbalg’s involvement in “worldly matters.”

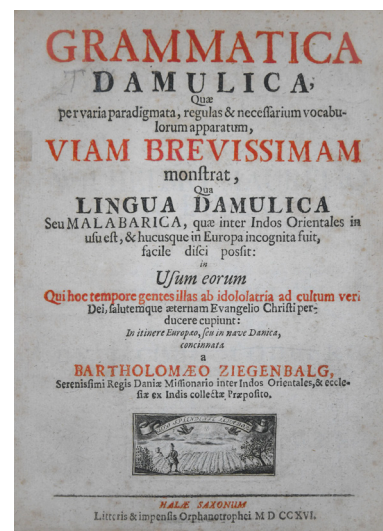
Ziegenbalg was plagued with increasing physical ailments and died before his 36th birthday in Tranquebar weeks after preaching his last sermon in the New Jerusalem Church. He was buried there on February 24, 1719. His God-given dedication to learning local culture and religious life as well as his skill in learning and documenting the Tamil language were honored in a week-long commemoration in Tranquebar in 2006.

A visionary who saw the critical importance of learning language and culture—as well as the importance of thorough training of local pastors.

FACES OF LUTHERAN MISSIONS IN INDIA

Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg

- **July 10, 1682** Born in Pulsnitz, Germany (outside of Dresden in Saxony) (June 24, 1683 according to the plaque at the New Jerusalem Church in Tranquebar; June 10, 1682 according to H. M. Zorn.)
- **1694** Orphaned, his mother dying when he was 10, his father when he was 12 years old. Raised by older sister Anna.
- **1698** Attends school in Görlitz. Begins correspondence with pietist professor A. H. Franke at Halle.
- **April 1702** Attends F. Werder High School in Berlin under Rev. Joachim Lange. Learned Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Returned to Pulsnitz in June 1702 with debilitating stomach ailment. Visits Leipzig, Wittenberg and Jena in 1703.
- **1704** Attends classes at the University of Halle under pietist August Herman Franke. Sent to tutor in Erfurt.
- **October 1705** Finishes interim pastoral work in Berlin. Through Lange and Royal Chaplain F. J. Lütkens friend Plütschau called to be Danish missionary. Ziegenbalg finally accepts missionary call after urging of friends.
- **October 15, 1705** Arrives in Copenhagen with Plütschau after 8 day trip. Examined (twice), ordained on November 11 and commissioned as royal missionaries to the Danish West Indies (Virgin Islands).
- **November 29, 1705** Sails from Copenhagen on the *Princess Sophia Hedwig* after destination changed from Danish West Indies to Danish colony at Tranquebar, India.
- **July 6, 1706** Arrives at Tranquebar. Disembarks 2-3 days later after being held by ship's captain over missionary criticisms of unchristian behavior of captain and crew.
- **July 9, 1706** Arrives on shore and receives cool reception by colony's governor J. S. Hassius after Hassius received secret instructions from the Danish East India Company to discourage the two missionaries as much as possible. Given no quarters or financial support by local Danish authorities. Began learning local dialect of Portugese.
- **September 2, 1706** Begins to learn Tamil by attending children's classes taught by local schoolteacher Watthiar.
- **October 16, 1706** Completes tract in Portugese and another in Tamil on main tenents of Christianity.
- **November 6, 1706** Begins catechizing locals in Portugese. Starts constructing a Tamil dictionary.
- **December 29, 1706** Allowed to preach in Zion Church every Wednesday for German-speaking soldiers of the Danish East India Company.
- **January 22, 1707** Begins catechizing locals in Tamil 2 hours each day. Translates Luther's Small Catechism into Tamil.
- **May 12, 1707** Baptizes first candidates (indentured servants of local Europeans) after instruction and examination.
- **June 14, 1707** Begins work to build Jerusalem Church.
- **August 14, 1707** Dedicates Jerusalem Church and first preaches in Tamil. Total number of baptized: 35.
- **September 5, 1707** First Tamil candidate baptized after instruction and examination. Total number of baptized: 63.
- **October 17, 1708** Begins translating New Testament into Tamil.
- **December 28, 1707** Opens school in home and begins instruction in Tamil.
- **November 19, 1708** Arrested and imprisoned by Governor Hassius until his release on March 26, 1709.
- **July 20, 1709** Missionaries J. G. Böving, P. Jordan and Johann Ernst Gründler (who would supervise the mission in Ziegenbalg's absence 1714-1716 and after his death) arrive along with annual monies from Germany and Denmark. (Böving becomes sympathetic to Hassius and chaplains at Zion. Returns to Germany in 1711.)
- **August 8, 1710** Builds house in neighboring village in effort to reach out to Brahmins. Locals soon destroy the house.
- **March 28, 1711** Completes his translation of the New Testament into Tamil. Begins to distribute copies of Matthew.
- **September 15, 1711** Plütschau sails for Europe. Pleads case for financial support of mission in England on his way back to Halle. Remains in Halle to teach Tamil and later becomes a parish pastor in Germany.
- **June 9, 1712** Arrival of printing press, with English and Latin type (a gift from the British East India Company and the SPCK). Ziegenbalg later employs a former German schoolteacher in the Tranquebar area, Jonas Fincke, to run the press and print Christian material. By the end of 1712, baptized members of the Jerusalem Church reached 117.
- **July 16, 1713** Arrival of second printing press, with large Tamil type (crafted in Halle from Ziegenbalg's instructions). Along with the press came three Lutheran missionaries from Halle including Gottlieb Adler, who could craft Tamil type. First book to be published: a catechism in Tamil in October 1713.
- **April 7, 1713** Reports that he has 237 local Tamil and Portugese books on religion (Hindu and Islam), medicine, poetry and philosophy in his library.
- **October 26, 1714** Boards ship to travel back to Europe in effort to gain greater support and end opposition from Danish authorities in Tranquebar. Begins translating Old Testament. Writes Tamil Grammar. Audience with Frederick IV and George I. Apointed Provost of the mission; given authority to ordain. Visits Halle on October 17. Marries Maria Dortha Salzmann, a relative of Philip Jacob Spener. Both leave for India on December 2. Visits England. Sets sail on February 26, 1716. Tries to learn English. Arrives in Madras on August 10, 1716.
- **October 23, 1716** Begins seminary instruction of eight Indian students.
- **February 9, 1718** Cornerstone laid for new church. Dedicates New Jerusalem Church on October 11, 1718.
- **January 1, 1719** Preaches his last sermon in New Jerusalem Church.
- **February 11, 1719** Receives the Lord's Supper; dies after several weeks of failed treatment for stomach illness. Total number of converts at the time of his death: approximately 250.



Ziegenbalg's *Grammatica Damulica* [Tamil Grammar], printed in Halle, Germany in 1719.
Concordia Historical Institute Rare Book Collection.

AFTER MORNING PRAYERS I BEGIN my work. From six to seven I explain Luther's Catechism to the people in Tamil. From seven to eight I review the Tamil words and phrases which I have learned. From eight to twelve I read nothing but Tamil books, new to me, under the guidance of a pandit who must explain things to me with a secretary present, who writes down all words and phrases which I have not had before. From twelve to one I eat, and have the Bible read to me while doing so. From one to two I rest, for the heat is very oppressive then. From two to three I conduct catechism class in my house. From three to five I again read Tamil books. From five to six we gather for prayer. From six to seven we [Ziegenbalg and Plütschau] confer together about the day's events. From seven to eight I have a Tamil writer read to me, as I dare not read much by lamp light. From eight to nine I eat, and while doing so I have the Bible read to me. After that I examine the children and converse with them. Constant practice in this way has given me great freedom and confidence in the use of the Tamil language.

—Letter dated August 22, 1708