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# Book Review: "Genealogy of the South Indian Deities"

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## BOOK REVIEWS

***Genealogy of the South Indian Deities: An English Translation of Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg's Original German Manuscript with a Textual Analysis and Glossary.*** Daniel Jeyaraj. London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005, xii + 368 pp.

**BARTHOLOMAEUS** Ziegenbalg (1682-1719) arrived in Tranquebar, Tamil Nadu in 1706 and worked there only for 13 years (including a visit back to Europe) before his untimely death at age 37. He was the first Protestant missionary with an intellectual legacy of lasting importance in the Indian context and, despite the brevity of his life and his missionary service, he stands among the foremost of missionary scholars. He composed a Tamil grammar, translated the New Testament into Tamil, and wrote major works such as the *Ausföhrliche Beschreibung des Malabarischen Heidentum* (1711) and the *Thirty Four Conferences between the Danish Missionaries and the Malabarian Bramans* (1719). In 1713 he finished his *Genealogia der Malabarischen Götter*, under review here in Daniel Jeyaraj's fine new edition and translation as the *Genealogy of the South Indian Deities* (first published in German in 2003).

The *Genealogy* is a thorough survey of religion in south India, with a mass of detail organized simply and neatly (though not unproblematically) with reference to a highest and most simple source and the subsequent complexities of multiple religious beliefs: Part I, Paraparavastu, "the highest divine being and the source of all deities" (c. 1. immaterial, formless, incomparable; c. 2. the visible form [lingam], c. 3. Siva and Sakti); Part II, the three supreme deities Isvara, Visnu, and Brahma, "known as the Mummurtis, and their families;" Part III, the Gramadevatas, "who are the male and female protective deities who keep away devils from the land, the cities, the villages and the houses" (c. 1. devas, c. 2. peykal); Part IV, the Devas,

"who are 330,000,000 minor gods and located in the world Devaloka, to whom 48,000 sages, many servants of gods and the guardians of the eight cardinal corners of the world belong" (c. 1. devas, c. 2. rsis, c. 3. kinnaras, c. 4. astadikpalas). It is a striking feature of the work that throughout Ziegenbalg draws on reports from south Indian Hindus who gave him detailed information.

In his *Genealogy*, Ziegenbalg appears a creative thinker and also a missionary apologist. His genealogical explication — from the one transcendent God, an increasing diversity of lower deities — must surely be one of the first Western systematic renderings of "Hinduism" (though he never uses this word). He envisions the multiplicity of Hindu deities as increasingly diverse and complex derivatives from an original simple deity possessed of perfections recognizable to the Christian as well. His explication of this simple origin is richly spelled out, in Part I in particular, with ample references to and citations from Tamil, particularly Saiva sources. (He, like his Jesuit counterparts, seems to know little in detail of the Vaisnava literature.) While his schema appears too simple, nonetheless it is indicative of his determination to take seriously the Hindu pantheon, to make sense of it, and to find a sufficiently high level on which the best of Hindu religiosity could be brought into conversation with the Christian faith. But his apologetics, too, are quite articulate and pointed. In his dedication to Charles, Prince of Denmark, he announces that his work explores (to use Jeyaraj's guarded translation) "the religious teachings

## 50 Book Reviews

[lit. heathenish abomination] of the Tamil people [lit. Malabarians], their deities, their false teachings and all of their customs.” (36) In his preface he states, “It is to be remembered that we reluctantly spend our time examining the heathen foolishness because it contains many immodest and offensive histories... it means to be a service to many people in Europe; otherwise, we would regard such a work more as a punishment and nuisance than as a delight. Wise people should not misuse our work as hay and stubble and letting themselves be misled for their own peril. Rather they should use it to realize how much grace God has bestowed upon them in spiritual matters, much more than on the South Indians. They should be moved to have compassion on the South Indians. When an opportunity arises, they should try with advice and practical help to bring them out of the confusion of their deities and their idolatry.” (40) At the *Genealogy*'s end, Ziegenbalg returns to the evangelical theme and his book's hoped-for benefit to his German-reading audience: “Hence, it is hoped that those who read this book would get to know the wearisome worship of images of the South Indians, be convinced of their lethargy [lit. sleepiness] in their own [Christian] faith and begin to serve the living God more earnestly than the South Indians serve their dead images. May the God who wishes that no one should be lost, but everyone should repent, show mercy to the [spiritual] blindness of these South Indians and open their [spiritual] eyes so that they be converted from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, and receive forgiveness of sins and the heritage [of eternal life] with those who are made holy through their faith in JESUS CHRIST.” (193) Like many of his Jesuit counterparts — such as Roberto de Nobili and Jacobo Fenicio a century before him, his contemporary J. V. Bouchet, and G. D. Coeurdoux a generation or so later — Ziegenbalg seemed intensely interested in South India and Hindu religious culture, but also at pains to reassure his readers — and possibly himself — that his research was all for the sake of unexceptionable Christian

values and in service of conversion.

For centuries the *Genealogy* suffered from the lack of an authoritative manuscript tradition or reliable published edition and translation, and so has not been as widely known and used as it deserves. The 1867 edition by W. Germann, translated in English and enlarged by G. J. Metzger in 1869 and published in Madras (Higginbotham's), is defective in details and by way of condensations and omissions, and also amplified with confusing appendices to Parts II, III, and IV that amplify and dilute Ziegenbalg's work. Metzger unashamedly replaces Ziegenbalg's introduction to Part I with his own, and makes his attitude clear: “In the Original there is a short introduction by Ziegenbalg, but as it contains nothing that is not also said in the sequel, the Translator has substituted for it an introduction of his own, which is more especially intended for educated Natives.” (Germann/Metzger, 9) It would be interesting to hear what learned Hindus might have thought of the work.

Daniel Jeyaraj, now Judson-Freitas Professor of World Christianity at the Andover Newton Theological School, has restored the *Genealogy*, and thus made it available as a scholarly resource. By meticulous archival research he discovered in the Royal Library in Copenhagen a correct, complete version of the *Genealogy*, based on which this annotated translation is based. Pages 39-209 offer an annotated translation of the *Genealogy* based on the best manuscript, while the rest of the 368 pages sort out the manuscript traditions, traces the influences on the composition of the treatise, and comments more briefly on its enduring significance. After an introduction, and surrounding the actual translation (c. 3), Jeyaraj offers considerations of Ziegenbalg and Halle Pietism (c. 1), Ziegenbalg's Sources (c. 4), a comparison of the Manuscripts (c. 5), and a comparison of the Printed Versions (c. 6) The volume is thus largely a history and assessment of the text's rediscovery, and issues related to the manuscript and print editions; only more modestly does Jeyaraj

offer an overview and the beginnings of a fresh interpretation of Ziegenbalg.

The beginnings of a substantive evaluation lie in Chapter 2, "Ziegenbalg and the Residual Image of God," from these perspectives: "language study," "letter correspondence," and "producing a Christian literature in Tamil," "establishing a Tamil church," "founding Tamil schools," "developing a particular [though implicit] theology of mission." According to Jeyaraj, "Ziegenbalg viewed the different kinds of religious similarities as preparatory steps necessary to effectively communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ, and having established the presence and function of the residual image of God in the South Indians, Ziegenbalg addressed the various forces that shaped their beliefs, values and customs. He recognized the need for preserving their dignity, identity and continuity of all that was good and acceptable in the light of the Word of God. Thus he set himself to explore with the South Indians suitable means for an alternative way of life that would be more fulfilling." (20-21) Perhaps so, but it strikes this reviewer that this synthesis is based perhaps on Ziegenbalg's letters and on Jeyaraj's own theological views, and less so on what we read in the *Genealogy*, a text that is both well-informed and seemingly unsympathetic. The preacher of the Gospel is in combat with the devil, and the search for a "more fulfilling" way of life is not what is at stake. As Ziegenbalg says in his introduction, a strong correction must take place: "[We also wanted to show] how some of their teaching agree with the creed [of the Christians] and how they were [later] distorted and spoiled by the craftiness of the devil and their poets." (39)

The concluding Chapter 7 (particularly pp. 238-245) show how the retrieval of the Leipzig version makes it possible for us to read Ziegenbalg in the "purest" form yet available. "Continuing

Relevance of the *Genealogy*," argues for the importance of the *Genealogy* as relevant to the study of Ziegenbalg's missionary writings, for studying South Indian literary culture and religions, and for intercultural learning. Yet here, too, it is puzzling that Jeyaraj can conclude without qualification, "Ziegenbalg's *Genealogy* makes a valuable contribution to the break down of the daunting barriers of ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism, prejudices, fear and ignorance of his European readers. In this regard, Ziegenbalg was far ahead of his time. His manifold contribution to promote intercultural learning and transfer of knowledge between India and Europe remains exemplary." (260) Ziegenbalg was surely ahead of his time, and we must admire his zeal and erudition, but there is still manifest in his work a deep lack of respect for the religions he encountered, at least in terms of how we use the word "respect."

This (formidably expensive) edition of the *Genealogy* will be of most value to specialists, while other readers will need a more ample overview and chronology of Ziegenbalg's life and work, including an account of his other writings. For these, one must look to Jeyaraj's *Inkulturation in Tranquebar* (1996, reviewed here in 1999), D. Dennis Hudson's *Protestant Origins in India* (2000, reviewed here in 2001), and Brijraj Singh's *The First Protestant Missionary to India* (1999). Welcome, too, would be simple improvements such as a Table of Contents for the *Genealogy* and an Index for the whole volume. But it is clear that Jeyaraj's book is a wonderful scholarly contribution that informs us about India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and places the study of Protestant missionary scholarship in India on a solid textual basis.

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