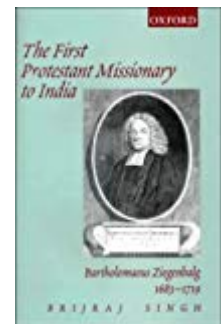
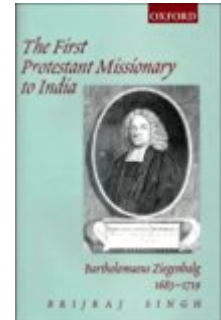


Susan Billington Harper. *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: Bishop V.S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000. xxi + 462 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8028-3874-2.

Brijraj Singh. *The First Protestant Missionary in India: Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg (1687-1719).* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. vi + 195 pp. \$27.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-564912-3.



Reviewed by Roger Beck

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For many readers these two biographies will represent their first introduction to the lives of Ziegenbalg and Azariah. Those readers more familiar with missionary activity in India will find a wealth of previously unpublished information that will challenge accepted wisdom. These two biographies complement each other in several ways. They both focus on Christian missionaries who challenged prevailing doctrines and the hegemonic powers of their day. Both men blazed new trails of Christian mission activity in India: Ziegenbalg as the first Protestant missionary in India and Azariah as the first Indian to become an ordained Bishop of an Anglican diocese. Ziegenbalg and Azariah were both, in their own ways, on the outside of established authority, not accept-

ed by other European missionaries, some colonial authorities, and in Azariah's case, by many Indians, including Mohandas K. Gandhi.

Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, originally from Saxony and a student at the University of Halle, was a member of the Pietistic movement in the Lutheran Church. He went to India in September 1706 as a Royal Missionary chartered by the King of Denmark. He and Heinrich Pluetschau were the first Protestant missionaries to India, establishing themselves at Tranquebar, a Danish colony under the control of the Danish East India Company on India's southeast coast. Within the first year they had baptized their first converts, but they met increasing opposition from the local Hindu religious leaders and from the local Danish authorities,

particularly the Danish chaplains who opposed their Pietistic views. Ziegenbalg was popular, however, with many common Tamils because he was very sympathetic to them and because he stood up to the Danish governor, Hassius, who was widely unpopular due to his iron-fisted rule (p. 23).

Brijraj Singh, professor of English at Hostos Community College, City University of New York, has written a useful and informative biography of Ziegenbalg, that places Ziegenbalg's life in the wider context of European colonial expansion and describes the role of missionaries in that expansion. His work therefore offers "something of interest to others who are concerned with culture contact, especially in the eighteenth century, with language learning, the history of the Christian church, inter-faith dialogue, rescuing the voice of the Other, education, and colonialism" (p. 1).

After a brief introduction in chapter I that reviews previous studies of Ziegenbalg and the missionary presence in southeastern India, and the nature of the debates about Ziegenbalg and his times, Singh provides a brief overview of Ziegenbalg's life in chapter II. He then turns to the three areas of Ziegenbalg's early years in India that received the most attention: language learning, educational work, and getting to know the Indians. He discusses these areas in depth in chapters IV, V, and VI. According to Singh, Ziegenbalg can be credited with many important accomplishments during his years in India. After quickly learning Tamil himself, he brought in a printing press and published religious materials, studies of the Tamil language, and various essays on religion and culture in India. He translated the New Testament into Tamil in 1715, and completed a translation of the Old Testament from Genesis through Ruth. Both his translations and the church building he constructed are still in use today. He also established a seminary to train native clergy.

Singh's analysis of Ziegenbalg's attitudes toward Hinduism and interactions with Hindus in

chapter VII is particularly interesting, as is his study in chapter VIII of Ziegenbalg's attempts to establish an inter-faith dialogue among all the various religious groups: Jains, Parsis, Muslims, Hindus, and Christians. In chapter IX Singh considers the question of whether Ziegenbalg was simply a missionary or whether he also played a critical role in European expansion as a colonist. Singh arrives at a more nuanced conclusion than a simple either/or. He recognizes that Ziegenbalg wanted Christianity to replace Hinduism and would therefore have supported British rule in India, but Singh also notes that Ziegenbalg harbored a great fondness for the Indian people and their culture. Singh believes that in the end Ziegenbalg would have been appalled by British rule in India, particularly as it failed to make India into a Christian nation.

Singh's book will be particularly useful to scholars studying various aspects of early European activity in India, including missions, education, translation, and colonial administration. Although Oxford has produced an otherwise attractive volume it is a great pity that at least one or two maps were not included showing the places and regions in which Ziegenbalg worked.

Susan Billington Harper is currently program officer for religious scholarship at the Pew Charitable Trusts in Philadelphia. (Her Ph.D. is from Oxford.) She acknowledges that the late bishop and historian, Stephen Charles Neill "challenged me shortly before he died in 1984 to fulfill his own dream of producing a critical scholarly biography of Bishop Azariah" (p. xv). Bishop Neill would have been quite pleased with Harper's heavily documented, massive biography of the relatively unknown Bishop V.S. Azariah and his times. Harper gathered primary source material, including diocesan records and vernacular oral histories, from various archival collections in India, Great Britain, and the United States, much of which had never before been studied. She also had access, through the Bishop's family, to Azari-

ah's correspondence and other documents. She cites in her bibliography more than eighty oral interviews, including one with Azariah's only surviving daughter and with many others who knew the bishop personally. She also lists ninety different people with whom she carried on correspondence, including some of Azariah's family members. This is the only critical study of V.S. Azariah's public life and legacy, and will likely remain the definitive biography for some time to come.

In her introduction Harper is concerned to justify her study, both in terms of the importance of Azariah to Indian and British history, and to the role of religion in his life and times. She sharply criticizes "modern historians" who she says "neglect Indian history and are innately hostile to religion in general and to Christian missionary activity in particular" (p. 2). Azariah lived and died, she writes, "working largely at the local level, and with the poor -- those ordinary people in whose name contemporary historians like to speak but whose actual beliefs they often choose to discount" (p. 3). Harper even takes on the entire "university-media complex" when she argues that "[s]ince Azariah was neither a defender of the old nor an apostle of the new political order, his extraordinarily consistent leadership of locally based religious transformations is simply off the radar screen of the modern university-media complex. If one must talk about either India or spirituality, it seems that Gandhi will cover the subject" (p. 2). Therefore, she writes, "I have found that the only way to legitimize the study, let alone any public discussion of Azariah in the university context is by stressing his relationship with Gandhi" (p. 4). There is some truth of course to what she says, but many readers might assume from these introductory remarks that this study will be another of the hagiographic exaltations about missionaries, missions, and religious figures that were so prevalent prior to the 1970s. Often written by missionaries, ministers, and priests, with little or no objectivity or supporting evidence, such writings were themselves some-

what responsible for the dismissal of religious writing by the scholarly community. Particularly since the 1970s, however, there has been an explosion of well-written, well-researched studies of religious topics, most produced by the academic community, and many sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts and published by Harper's own publisher, Eerdmans. Thus, although Harper appears to have something of a personal ax to grind, she confines such observations to the introduction. The body of her work is academically solid. Her path breaking study has placed Azariah on the radar screen and scholars can no longer ignore Azariah and his role in British colonial and Indian history.

As with all good biographies, Harper places her subject in the much wider context of the world in which he lived. She believes that "Azariah's life seems to embody, contain, and sum up many of the difficult tensions of his age between conflicting religious, cultural, and political ideals" (p. 6). Thus, "to understand the life of this neglected figure is to understand a new dimension of the complex period of transition between imperial and national rule in South Asia" (p. 5). Her work "is therefore a less a conventional narrative biography of Azariah's personal life than an analysis of his public life as it reflected the changes and controversies of Indian Christianity in the late Raj" (p. 6).

Harper has organized her work into four parts: the "Rise", the "Reign", the "Resolutions", and the "Rift". In the "Rise", the author lays out the context of Azariah's early life, particularly focusing on the various religious, ethnic, and political forces at work in South India. Following his graduation from college, Azariah served for fourteen years in the YMCA movement that was part of the pan-Asian and worldwide Christian youth movement of the time. Although Azariah traveled throughout Asia and met many important Christian leaders, his interests returned increasingly back toward India and the need for Indian Chris-

tians to convert fellow Indians. This reflected both the growing nationalist sentiment in India and the stated objective of European missionaries to establish self-governing, self-propagating churches in foreign lands. To further this evangelical effort, Azariah founded both the Indian Missionary Society (1903) and the National Missionary Society (1905).

In part two, the "Reign", the largest of her four parts, Harper focuses on Azariah's elevation to the bishopric as the first Indian Anglican bishop, the controversies surrounding his elevation to the bishopric, and his work and accomplishments in that office. His rise in the Anglican church began as a result of Azariah's desire to involve himself directly in the Indian mission field, rather than simply encourage others to go out. He became superintending missionary for Dornakal in April 1909. By the end of that year, Azariah had been ordained as an Anglican priest by Henry Whitehead, Bishop of Madras, who seems to have already identified Azariah for the bishopric by this early date. Harper discusses in turn, the tenuous position of an Indian bishop under the Raj, English and Indian perspectives on Azariah's consecration, the issue of race in the Indian church, and the subsequent failure of the Anglican church to appoint another Indian bishop until 1945, after Azariah's death. The last chapter in part two describes Azariah's activities as Bishop of Dornakal, and contains a rich discussion of a host of important issues including individual and group conversions, building an indigenous church and diocese, and the training of teachers and pastors that resulted in the founding of the Dornakal Divinity School.

In part three, the "Resolutions", Harper looks at Azariah's role as a church leader, within the Anglican church, within India, and as part of the worldwide Christian movement. Maintaining the ecumenical outlook developed in his youth, Azariah "helped to lead the Anglican church into its first union with non-episcopal churches since the

Reformation" (p. 221). His primary concern, however, was always with his local community, so that he "brilliantly adapted Christianity to the local culture of Dornakal -- providing a classic model for the Third World of how to mix Christian essentials with the particularities of indigenous culture" (p. 221). In Harper's opinion, "Azariah's achievements in these areas earned him a worldwide reputation as one of the most successful modern Christian leaders ever to emerge from the extra-European world" (p. 221).

The heading for part four, the "Rift", refers to the split between Azariah, the neglected Bishop of Dornakal, and the giant of Indian nationalism, Gandhi. This meticulously researched study presents for the first time the divisions between these two compassionate Indian leaders whose lives almost exactly paralleled each other and who both found their ground of being among India's poor and outcaste peoples. It is therefore sadly ironic that Gandhi, according to the publisher of his collected works, considered Azariah as his "Enemy Number One" (p. 291). Although Gandhi professed to consider all religions equal, he viewed Christianity in India as a component of British imperial rule.

On the other hand, Gandhi looked to Hinduism as the cultural force that could unite all India against British rule. Azariah saw in Hinduism, especially its caste system, a negative force in Indian life and, although he supported many of Gandhi's secular nationalist positions, he did not entirely dismiss all aspects of western culture or the British presence. Although they met a few times to discuss their differences, and even united in their opposition to separate electorates, their religious and political disagreements kept them apart, and eventually led to open conflict over religious freedom. In the end, as Harper notes, Gandhi continued to view Azariah as his enemy, and Azariah "was never able to escape his powerful critic's negative campaigns against both his life's work of Christian evangelism and British

rule" (p. 7). In the end "Azariah was on the losing side of the great movement of twentieth-century South Asia: secular nationalism.... There is no trace of Azariah and his accomplishments in the voluminous literature on Indian nationalism, and he has been relegated to a mere footnote in the history of the modern Indian state" (pp. 6-7). Harper's scholarly and heavily documented study has convincingly shown that future scholars must revise that voluminous literature and place Azariah back in the main body of the text where he belongs.

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