

we have to be disentangled from all particular goods, and to reach that state of disentanglement we have to be really deprived of them. Thus, it is only through a continual self-contradiction and a long series of all kinds of mortifications, trials and strippings that one can be established in the state of pure love. We have to arrive at the point at which the whole created universe no longer exists, and God is everything.'



**BL. ANTHONY NEYROT, O.P., MARTYR**  
(10 April 1460)

WALTER GUMBLEY, O.P.

**T**HE story of Bl. Anthony's capture by pirates, of his apostasy, recantation and glorious death, comes to us from two very trustworthy witnesses who both knew the saint. One was his fellow-captive and an eye-witness of his martyrdom, the other was the Dominican provincial in Sicily, from where Anthony had sailed to imprisonment and death. The first of these was a Jeronymite hermit, Fr Constantius of Capri, who had been carried captive to Tunis some considerable time before the arrival of Anthony. Shortly after the latter's martyrdom on 10 April 1460 he wrote a long account of all that had happened to him, and sent it to the Dominicans in Sicily, whose provincial, Fr Peter Ranzano, had welcomed Anthony to the island three years before. Fr Ranzano embodied this account in a letter he wrote to Pope Pius II, and added details of his own which he had evidently learned from the Genoese traders in Tunis on their visits to Sicily. Later writers have embellished the story of Anthony without adding to its dramatic value or historical accuracy, and we can safely neglect them.<sup>1</sup>

From Fr Ranzano's statement that Anthony was a man of about thirty-five, as far as he could judge, when he left Sicily in 1458, we can place his birth somewhere about the year 1423-

<sup>1</sup> One of them, perhaps, deserves mention. This was John Lopez, O.P.; born in 1524, he was made a bishop at the age of 71, resigned when he was 84, and spent the next twenty-four years writing a history of the Order in four volumes. He died in 1632, at the age of 108.

His birthplace was Rivoli in Piedmont, but he was invariably described as a Lombard, as were most Northern Italians in the fifteenth century. Some time between 1439 and 1444 he was clothed with the habit of the Dominican order in the Florentine convent of San Marco by St Antoninus, who was prior between those two dates. According to some later writers, he wished to travel to Sicily and other distant places in order to exercise his powers as a preacher, and this despite the warnings St Antoninus gave him of the grave perils to both body and soul that he would encounter on such an enterprise.

At any rate he arrived in Sicily in 1457, and giving Fr Ranzano the provincial convincing reasons for his journey, was well received by him and allowed to remain in the island. He lived there as a reasonably good religious for a year, and then another fit of wander-lust seized him and he begged leave to go to Naples, and on from there to Rome. He said he hoped the Master General would assign him some quiet retreat in which he could end his days, declaring in an exaggerated fashion that he had travelled far and wide both East and West, and was now worn out. This at thirty-five! The provincial, himself only thirty-one, had already summed up Anthony as a lazy and dissatisfied man. But he let him have his way, and off Anthony set for Naples, only to fall on his third day at sea, 2 August 1458, into the hands of a noted corsair, a renegade Christian called Nardo Anequino. This man brought his living cargo to Tunis, and landed them there on 9 August. Fastening ropes round their necks, he paraded them through the city according to custom, and then consigned them all to prison.

Here Anthony was sought out and assisted by the good-hearted Jeronymite priest, who heard his confession and tried to cheer him up. But although, as this same Fr Constantius assures us, prison life was not too oppressive, and responsible prisoners were often allowed out on *parole*, Anthony made little show of bearing his cross, and complained so bitterly of his sufferings that his benefactor grew not a little shocked at his impatience and continual querulousness. Anthony wrote several letters to the Genoese consul, Clemente Cicero, begging him to get him released, but in so importunate and unreasonable a tone that the official refused to have anything to do with him. Fr John Novaro, however, a Dominican who was chaplain to the Genoese mer-

chants in Tunis, succeeded in getting him to change his mind and promise to help the miserable prisoner. Cicero was as good as his word, defraying the prison dues out of his own pocket, and obtaining Anthony's conditional release on the plea that he was a Genoese and as such illegally captured and detained, since Genoa and Tunis were politically friendly. The term Genoese was loosely employed by the consul to include Lombards, and, as we have said, Anthony was reckoned as such. His discharge was not made absolute until Cicero's government should have confirmed the claim he had made, and meanwhile Anthony was hospitably received by Fr Novaro in his little house in the Genoese quarter. Here was situated the colony's chapel, dedicated to St Lawrence, in which Anthony could celebrate mass.

In these circumstances the future martyr lived for five months, but in the same depressed condition of mind, continually bewailing his hard lot. Then to the horror and dismay of Fr Constantius and all the Christians in the city he openly embraced the Moslem religion, and publicly denied Christ and all his teachings. What led him to this atrocious crime we cannot say. Fr Constantius set it down to diabolic suggestion consequent on his loss of faith, but Fr Ranzano tells us that he had been slandered by a priest who went round accusing him of various misdemeanours. After bearing with this petty persecution for a time, Anthony in sheer temper and malice abjured his faith. He became an inveterate enemy of the truth, and Constantius informs us that he set himself to spread his new creed by translating the Koran into Italian. But as he proceeded with this work he was stricken with remorse, and his eyes were suddenly opened to the dreadfulness of his crime. This account is endorsed by Fr Ranzano, but a later tradition held that St Antoninus, who had died about six months before, on 2 May 1459, appeared to the unfortunate man and urged him to repent. This story is mentioned in the process of canonization of St Antoninus by a witness called Fr Michael Christophorus, who testified in 1516, when he was eighty-three, that he had received the story from one Fr Baptista who had been clothed by the saint at the same time as Bl. Anthony.

Anthony made his recantation publicly before the king of Tunis, but not until he had spent more than six months in secret penance. The first thing he did was to dismiss the wife he had been forced to take by law. Then as far as he could, he led a

severe life of penance, but privately so as not to arouse suspicion among the Moslems. His reason for this secrecy was that he wanted to make his recantation as public as his apostasy had been, and the king would be absent from Tunis until the beginning of April 1460. On his return Anthony appeared before him wearing a scapular lent him by Fr Novaro over his civil dress. It was Palm Sunday, 6 April 1460, and denouncing the Moslem faith as impious, he urged the king to accept the faith of Christ. The king, not surprisingly, was very angry, and sent him back to prison, to be brought the next day before the *cadi* or judge and condemned as an apostate Moslem to be publicly stoned to death. The sentence was carried out on Maundy Thursday, 10 April, with great brutality; but before the executioners stripped him of his clothes, he begged a bystander of his charity to carry back his scapular to Fr Novaro. Then he willingly offered himself to death. A vain attempt was made to burn his body, which was eventually thrown into a sewer. It was retrieved by the Genoese, and as money talked as eloquently in the fifteenth century as it does today, they were allowed to bury it in the colony's chapel. It was translated nine years later to his shrine at Ripoli. His cult was confirmed in 1767 by Clement XIII.



## THE APOCRYPHAL LETTER OF KING ABGAR OF EDESSA TO JESUS

Translated by JOSEPH BOURKE, O.P.

*A legend, once extremely widespread and influential both in the Eastern and Western Churches, relates that Abgar V, king of Edessa (4 B.C. to 58 A.D.) once exchanged messages with our Lord. Two main versions of Abgar's letter and our Lord's reply have been preserved: the first in Eusebius' History of the Church, the second in the fourth-century Syriac document known as the Doctrine of Addai. It is from the latter that my translation is taken. Addai, so the legend goes, was the disciple sent to King Abgar at Edessa after the Ascension, in fulfilment of our Lord's promise. Edessa was from a very early date the centre of Syriac-speaking Christianity, and it was thither that St*