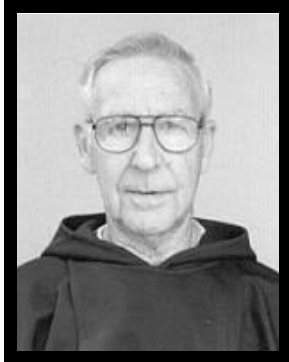


Neerology

Charles Ermin Bantle 1922 - 2003



Charles Ermin Bantle was born on the March 29, 1922 in La Cross, Wisconsin. He was the first child of Ambrose L. Bantle and Emma L. Miller. Seeking to enter minor seminary, he came to St. Lawrence, Mt. Calvary WI. 1935. There, he met Capuchins. He had no thought of entering the order until his fourth year at St. Lawrence, when Roman, Wilfred and Henry left for Nicaragua. Then he started to think that maybe the Capuchins were the place God wanted him. So, he entered to have a chance to serve the God, the church and the order in the missions.

His investiture was on the August 26, 1940 at St. Felix Monastery, Huntington IN. His simple profession was on the September 1, 1941 at the same monastery. His solemn profession was on the June 2, 1944 at St. Anthony Monastery, Marathon WI. Completing his clerical studies, he was ordained to the priesthood by John F. Tracy on the June 2, 1948 at St. Mary Church, Marathon WI. He hoped to go to Nicaragua mission, but considering his health-condition (persistent high blood pressure), Edmund, then provincial minister, decided to send him to Guam via Rome where he had to study more canon and mission law at the Pontifical Scientific Missionary Institute for 2 years. When he finished in 1950, someone fortunately forgot about Guam. He himself mentioned that in his autobiographical information form. We could see that Providence sent this capable missionary, decorated with JCL degree for the Ryukyu Islands, newly established apostolic administrator by the Holy See. Charlie had one problem (high blood pressure) which was his constant concern until he visited Lourdes in 1950 on his return home from Rome. He asked the Blessed Mother to take care of things in any way her son wished. It was in a sense a total submission to God's will. From that time he stopped worrying about it.

Charles Ermin Bantle, as a missionary, came to Okinawa, main Island of the Ryukyu Islands (Southern most Islands of Japan) on the Sept. 21, 1950. Felix Ley, Alban Bartholdus and other Capuchins warmly welcomed him to their humble mission station in Naha, the capital city of Okinawa. His first service was to teach sociology at the Ryukyu University with the help of a native translator, newly opened in Shuri, nearby city. But many pastoral and office-workers were also waiting for him. Ever since 1952, he as a pastor, a chancellor and a vicar general later served very faithfully the three ordinaries (Felix Ley, Peter Baptist Ishigami, Benard Oshikawa) of this mission until his own death for over a half century. Beside consecutive pastorships of Shuri, Kainan, and Asato Parishes in Naha, he supervised all office-workers of the three legal persons (religion, school, and social welfare) in the chancery day after day, month after month, year after year. Meanwhile, he as a regular superior also served the Capuchin

missionaries on Ryukyu Islands from 1953 – 1959. Moreover, he was a director of the Catholic Relief Services in Okinawa from 1959 – 1972. In cooperation with the Church World Services and the local government, an average of 30,000,000 pounds of food was annually imported for a school lunch programs which greatly improved the health of school children all over Ryukyu Islands. He was also a chaplain delegate and episcopal vicar of the U.S. military ordinary from 1960 2003. He got public rewards for those long years of service. Regular meetings with the military chaplains every Sunday evening seemed to be the only one favorite time of his relaxation. As anybody else, he had some shortcomings, but his willingness to help others for anything was easy enough to overcome any misunderstanding. After all, the hard works of the Capuchin missionaries on the Okinawa Mission were really wonderful. They had to start from nothing: i.e. almost no Catholics, no land and no buildings shortly after the World War II, and to be part of the development of this territory into a diocese in 1973, one of 16 dioceses of the Catholic Church in Japan. Of course, we never forget very generous support of the personnel and the finance from the St. Joseph Province in the early years and of the St. Mary Province later. No one doubts that Charlie was always one of main figures among all those mission pioneers. Okinawan Catholics and many friends loved Charlie so much that they filled the Asato church for his funeral masses of 5 days after his very peaceful death at the bishop's house, Asato, Naha on June 27,2003.

Be joyful always, pray at all times, be thankful in all circumstances. (I Thess. 5: 16 18)
This phrase is found on the tombstone of Charles Ermin Bantle which is located beside the tombs of Felix Ley and Valentine Thibedeau in a corner of the Immaculate Heart of St. Mary Franciscan Sisters convent-yard, Yonabaru, Okinawa.

Charles Bantle tried his best to live up to that scripture always through his 53 years life as a Capuchin missionary on Okinawa. May God abundantly reward him in the Eternal Kingdom.

— Br.Peter Baptist Ishigami